PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

SIXTH SERIES—VOLUME 68

HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

SECOND SESSION OF THE FORTY-NINTH PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
THIRTY-THIRD YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 1984-85

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IN THE SECOND SESSION OF THE FORTY-NINTH PARLIAMENT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND

THIRTY-THIRD YEAR OF THE REIGN OF HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 68**

SECOND VOLUME OF SESSION 1984-85

House of Commons

Monday 19 November 1984

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

TRADE

Resolved,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, That she will be graciously pleased to give directions that there be laid before this House a Return of Statistics relating to Overseas Trade of the United Kingdom for the year 1985 and for each month during 1985.—*[Mr. Durant.]*

Oral Answers to Questions

WALES

Elderly Population Migration

1. **Mr. Wigley** asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will take steps to ensure that there is adequate recognition in deciding on the allocation of finance to area health authorities in Wales of sparsity of population, the impact of tourism and costs associated with elderly population migration.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Wyn Roberts): My right hon. Friend already takes these factors into account.

Mr. Wigley: Does the Minister appreciate that the Gwynedd area health authority does not accept that sufficient account is taken of these factors? The sparsity of clinics leads to high travelling costs and a high-cost ambulance service, for example, especially at a time when there is emphasis on bringing services into the community. No account is taken of the additional tourist population that moves into Gwynedd during the summer months. A consequence of the Government's policy is that the elderly are moving into old-age homes in Gwynedd. Private homes are being established as a result of Government policy, but no additional funds are being given to the health authority or local authorities to deal with the extra costs. Will the Minister think again?

Mr. Roberts: I do not know what Gwynedd has to complain about. Gwynedd has seen more financial growth than any other Welsh authority since 1974. During the period 1974 to 1983 the Gwynedd health authority's recurrent revenue allocation has grown by 32·8 per cent. after making allowances for pay and price changes. This year it has already had further growth of 5·5 per cent. and another 2·6 per cent. is available. I have already told the hon. Gentleman that the revenue formula is weighted to take account of the age and sex structure of the populations served and of the relative costs of providing an ambulance service in rural areas. There is a special allowance for tourism.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Does my hon. Friend appreciate that the special problems—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Members representing English constituencies have a right to ask questions when the House is dealing with Welsh questions, provided that they do not relate to Grantham.

Mr. Hogg: Will my hon. Friend note that the special problems that arise in widely and sparsely populated areas are not confined to Welsh area health authorities? Similar problems arise in English counties, and those who represent English counties, such as Lincolnshire, would like to see the rate support grant take account of that fact.

Mr. Speaker: The Secretary of State for Wales cannot answer for English counties.

National Museum of Wales (Purchasing Policy)

2. **Mrs. Clwyd** asked the Secretary of State for Wales whether he is satisfied that the procedures adopted by the National Museum of Wales for purchasing major works of art, such as the Rubens' cartoons, are satisfactory.

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Nicholas Edwards): Decisions regarding the acquisition of works of art or any other purchases are matters entirely for the museum authorities.

Mrs. Clwyd: Is the Secretary of State satisfied that £1·2 million of public money should be spent on the say-so of one expert? There are several questions which the right hon. Gentleman should answer. First, where were the cartoons for over 400 years? Secondly, why were they offered to the National Museum of Wales when the strength of the museum is in post-impressionist and impressionist painters? Thirdly, how can the right hon. Gentleman not urge that their authenticity be established one way or the other when he knows that there has been doubt about them for five years?

Mr. Edwards: I cannot help the hon. Lady on the 400-year issue, as I think that the cartoons were probably painted just over 350 years ago. The strength of the collections of the National Museum of Wales is with impressionist painters, and that is why the museum has sought to strengthen its collections in other areas. The art committee and the museum authorities take considerable care and much advice over the difficult decisions involved in art purchasing. I am satisfied that under the royal charter it is for the museum authorities, not Ministers, to take those decisions.

Mid-Wales Development

3. **Mr. Alex Carlile** asked the Secretary of State for Wales whether he has any proposals for increasing the funds available to mid-Wales development for the purpose of industrial development in mid-Wales; and if he will make a statement.

The Minister of State, Welsh Office (Mr. John Stradling Thomas): No decisions have yet been made on the board's financial allocation for 1985-86.

Mr. Carlile: When is the Development Board for Rural Wales to know the funds that it is to have? Does the Minister recognise that, with the decline in dairy farming in mid-Wales, the board's role in providing the wherewithal for jobs in the future is needed more than ever?

Mr. Stradling Thomas: I cannot give a firm date for when that decision will be made. As the hon. and learned Gentleman is aware, the board's basic role has been to develop the industrial infrastructure of its area, for precisely the reasons that he stated.

Mr. Hooson: Does my hon. Friend believe that the opening up of the mid-Wales development factories for service industries, which I welcomed when the change was made, is having a beneficial effect on the utilisation of those factories?

Mr. Stradling Thomas: My answer is brief: yes, it is an advantage.

Mr. D. E. Thomas: I am sure that the Minister and the whole House will not think it appropriate for me to ask a question about mid-Wales without referring to my late predecessor, Lord Maelor, and putting on record the appreciation of his constituents for his long and devoted service to Merioneth.

When does the Minister expect to make a firm statement about the board's allocation? Does he accept that it is essential to the board's long-term planning that it has a regular allocation, which is increased in terms of the needs of mid-Wales?

Mr. Stradling Thomas: I am sorry that I cannot go much further than I did a few moments ago, but we hope to be able to announce a decision soon. I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's last point. Conservative Members would like to add their tribute to those paid to the former Member for Merioneth.

Mr. Harvey: Is my hon. Friend aware of the extreme worry felt in Glen Dhu at the possibility of its losing intermediate area status? Will he guarantee that its status will not change?

Mr. Stradling Thomas: No, I cannot anticipate any decision that will be taken on this matter. I am aware that people are looking forward to the decision in the not-too-distant future.

Mr. Barry Jones: Why did the Government deschedule the new town area several years ago?

Mr. Stradling Thomas: I have noted that point, but, as the House knows, other arrangements have been of great benefit to mid-Wales.

British Steel Corporation

4. **Mr. Roy Hughes** asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he has had any recent discussions with the chairman of the British Steel Corporation about the corporation's activities in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: I met the chairman of the British Steel Corporation last week. We had a wide-ranging discussion about the corporation's operations.

Mr. Hughes: Should not the Secretary of State be discussing with the chairman of BSC the 5,000 new jobs that were to be created following the slimline operation? Bearing in mind that 8,000 jobs overall have been lost in Newport alone, is it any wonder that the Newport borough council has lost all confidence in the Secretary of State? Why will the right hon. Gentleman not allocate the resources to provide those new jobs, which he promised originally?

Mr. Edwards: The fact is that Llanwern has been doing spectacularly well and showing itself to be a competitive steelworks. I am sorry that the current coal dispute is holding up decisions about future investment there. If the hon. Gentleman is worried about new jobs, may I ask whether he supports the action of the Newport, East Labour party which passed a resolution urging Gwent county council that lorries supplying Llanwern should be blacked after the strike? Is such action helpful in providing jobs?

Sir Raymond Gower: Is not one of the most inspiring things that has happened in the Principality the splendid effort of the management and employees at all levels to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of steel production at Llanwern and Port Talbot? Will my right

hon. Friend emphasise that aspect to the British Steel Corporation and his colleagues in the Cabinet at all times when the future of the United Kingdom's steel industry is considered?

Mr. Edwards: I assure my hon. Friend that that point does not have to be emphasised to the British Steel Corporation, which is very much aware of it. I discussed those matters last week with the chairman. He shares my pleasure that Llanwern has put up such a magnificent performance despite the grave difficulties of the coal miners' dispute. I think that the fact that Llanwern can remain competitive in such conditions provides the best guarantee for its future.

Mr. Coleman: In view of what my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) said about employment losses in the industry, and what the Secretary of State has said about the profitability of the industry, can the right hon. Gentleman assure the House that the British Steel Corporation in Wales will not be saddled with the costs of the coal miners' strike?

Mr. Edwards: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that one of the major costs of the steel industry is energy, which is one of the central issues in the coal miners' strike. I remind the hon. Gentleman that the Government are making a massive capital investment at Port Talbot at present and that there has been a substantial investment at Shotton, which is now the largest strip steel coating centre in Britain.

Decisions about future investment at Llanwern cannot be taken while uncertainties about the coal strike continue.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: As coal is vital to Llanwern, I imagine that my right hon. Friend will welcome the sight of coal trains running again in south Wales. Does he agree that we must all look forward to a return to coal production in south Wales as the miners continue to vote with their feet?

Mr. Edwards: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. The numbers returning to the coal industry this week continue to rise. Therefore, we must hope that a full return to work will not be long delayed.

Labour Statistics

5. **Mr. Barry Jones** asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many unemployed people there are in Wales compared with 1979 as a total and as a percentage of the total; and how many are long-term unemployed.

21. **Mr. Ray Powell** asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many people are unemployed in Wales at present compared with the 1979 figures; and how many of these are long-term unemployed.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: On 11 October 1984 unemployment claimants totalled 178,561, compared with 78,739 in October 1979, an increase of 99,822 or 126·8 per cent. Of the October 1984 total, 71,902 had been unemployed for over a year. Comparable figures for 1979 are not available.

Mr. Jones: Following that set of figures, the autumn statement was a crushing disappointment to the unemployed in Wales. Will the Secretary of State take an urgent initiative and chair an all-Wales conference aimed at creating new jobs by means of a programme of additional public works? Will he invite, for example, the Wales TUC, the CBI, county and district authorities and Members of the Houses of Parliament to such a conference? May I remind the right hon. Gentleman that, under his regime, since 1979 Wales has lost 100,000 manufacturing jobs and suffered more than 145,000 redundancies? The people of Wales need hope and a change of policy.

Mr. Edwards: I do not believe that hope and a change of policy would necessarily be the results of the kind of talking shop which the hon. Gentleman wishes to establish. I am glad to say that the numbers in employment have begun to rise and that this year, in the period from January to October, there were 11,000 new jobs associated with projects for which selective financial assistance applications had been accepted, compared with 8,800 in the whole of 1983. That is one of the many signs that substantial investment in new projects is taking place in Wales, and that, of course, offers the best hope for new jobs.

Mr. Powell: Why did the Secretary of State want to juggle the unemployment figures once again? Was it for the primary purpose of trying to allow constituency Members of Parliament to have accurate figures of the unemployment position? If so, I should like to draw his attention to the fact that for a number of months I have complained about 8,000 people being out of work in Ogmore and there being only 100 jobs at the jobcentre. I have analysed the new figures that have been presented, and I should like to know why there are now 4,907 people out of work in the Ogmore constituency and only eight jobs at the jobcentre. Surely that alone shows that the information continually being given at Welsh Question Time is misleading or completely misrepresenting the facts that are presented to us week after week and month after month.

Mr. Edwards: I have given the facts for which the hon. Gentleman asked. I am aware that Bridgend is one of the areas that have been most successful in attracting new projects. I am glad to say that that continues to be the position and that it is providing a substantial number of additional jobs.

Mr. Best: In the interests of jobs in Wales, will my right hon. Friend continue to urge south Wales miners to follow their colleagues in Yorkshire and elsewhere rather than the headstrong, self-willed and political ambition of one man who clearly has no interest in the future of the coal industry in south Wales?

Mr. Edwards: I agree. I understand that the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) attended the disgraceful conference at Aberavon, during which the general secretary of the TUC was shouted down. Furthermore, I understand that the hon. Gentleman spoke during the conference. I hope that he, like the general secretary, condemned the violence and urged that a ballot be held, particularly as in his part of Wales many miners have voted with their feet and returned to work.

Sir Anthony Meyer: Can my right hon. Friend estimate the number of jobs in Wales that have been lost permanently, not temporarily, as a result of the loss of markets caused by Mr. Scargill's politically motivated strike?

Mr. Edwards: Undoubtedly, that must be one of the most worrying features. The losers will be principally the miners and the mining industry, because it is more difficult to recover lost markets than to hold on to existing markets. I am afraid that the strike will cause great long-term damage.

Mr. Foot: With regard to the appalling figures which the Secretary of State has announced, when the new regional policy is announced, will the areas in Wales most hard hit by mass unemployment have an increase in assistance and regional aid in real terms?

With regard to the strike, my right hon. Friends the Members for Salford, East (Mr. Orme) and for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock), have been seeking throughout to get an honourable, decent negotiated settlement. Has the right hon. Gentleman done anything from the beginning of the strike to try to secure such a result?

Mr. Edwards: I am glad to hear that Opposition Members are trying to end the dispute. I hope that they will speak out loud and clear for a ballot and condemn the violence, and the disgraceful scenes that we saw at Aberavon, as clearly as the general secretary of the TUC has done.

Mr. Abse: Will the Secretary of State explain his continuing disinterest in the whole of the coal industry in Wales, which has been exemplified by his failure even to attend pit premises during the whole period that he has been Secretary of State? Does he not think it right that, when we have this anguished situation, instead of corroborating the confrontist and provocative attitude of our turbulent Prime Minister, he should pay a tribute to the sense of community, solidarity and loyalty that are among our values in south Wales? Irrespective of the judgment that one makes, as was said by a former Conservative Prime Minister in the House, such values need to be sustained, not condemned, by a Secretary of State if this nation is to survive.

Mr. Edwards: If we are to talk about moral stands, I agree with Mr. Alan Watkins, who wrote in *The Observer* that

"the scenes at Aberavon last week were a disgrace to the Labour movement."

If Mr. Watkins expresses surprise that those scenes were not condemned by the right hon. and learned Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris) and the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies), I must express equal surprise that they were not condemned by the hon. Gentleman.

Public Transport Development

6. **Mr. Rogers** asked the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with local authorities regarding public transport developments.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: My right hon. Friend and I have agreed to meet the standing conference on regional policy in south Wales to discuss its response to our consultation paper "Local Choice in Public Transport".

Mr. Rogers: As the Welsh Counties Committee, the Association of District Councils and everybody else in Wales, except a few potential cowboy operators, oppose the deregulation of buses, will the Minister examine the possibility of a franchise system instead?

Mr. Stradling Thomas: I cannot speak for cowboy operators. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman can. The Welsh Office document is a genuine consultation paper. We shall consider all aspects of the matter in a genuine spirit of consultation, but I hold out no hope for the semi-monopoly franchise system proposed by some Labour Members.

Mr. Raffan: Will my hon. Friend assure the House that after deregulation safety standards will not just be maintained, as the consultation paper promises, but will be considerably tightened? Is he aware that even private operators realise that the existing total of 42 examiners to monitor 10,000 public service vehicles in the north-western traffic area is grossly inadequate?

Mr. Stradling Thomas: The Government have absolutely no intention of allowing safety standards to be eroded in any way.

Mr. Alex Carlile: Does the Minister agree that the effect of the Government's proposals so far will be to denude much of rural Wales of bus services, unless public money is put into public transport in those areas? Will he ensure that there is no reduction whatever in the provision of bus services in Powys as a result of Government policy?

Mr. Stradling Thomas: The difficulty about the hon. and learned Gentleman's question is that all the complaints are to the effect that the services have already declined, whereas he makes it sound as though flourishing services were about to disappear. Our proposals will provide an opportunity for more flexible systems to be developed for the benefit of rural users.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: In view of the welcome given to the consultative document by the Welsh Consumer Council, when my hon. Friend meets the local authorities will he urge them to start thinking positively about the opportunities presented there for cheaper bus fares, and even for new railway services?

Mr. Stradling Thomas: There will be discussion on both those points. We genuinely believe that competition will not only improve matters generally but will achieve better value for money and cheaper fares.

Mr. D. E. Thomas: What is the Minister's response to the view of the Transport Users Consultative Committee for Wales, which clearly stated that there would be a net loss of public transport throughout Wales as a result of the proposals in the consultative document?

Mr. Stradling Thomas: That is assertion and speculation without any backing whatever.

Mr. Barry Jones: Even at this late stage, will the Minister take steps to exclude Wales from the privatisation measures, which we believe will involve job losses, a decline in road safety and in reliability of services and the prospect of higher fares? Does he not realise that the likely result of these measures will be the denudation of rural Wales in terms of public transport services?

Mr. Stradling Thomas: No, Sir.

Textbooks (Expenditure)

8. **Mr. Gareth Wardell** asked the Secretary of State for Wales what was the expenditure on books per pupil in *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools in West Glamorgan, Mid-Glamorgan and South Glamorgan in 1983-84; and what is the proposed expenditure for 1984-85.

Mr. Stradling Thomas: As the answer is a long one I shall, with permission, circulate the details in the *Official Report*.

Mr. Wardell: As the figures supplied to me by the Welsh counties show that two of the three for which I requested figures will spend less on books per primary school pupil this year than last year, and as two of the Welsh counties are at the bottom of the spending league in this respect out of all 47 non-metropolitan counties, will the Minister set a level of expenditure on books so that education standards can be guaranteed for the children of Wales in the future? Will the Minister give that undertaking today rather than the usual pat answer that it is for the local authority to decide, thus making scapegoats of the Welsh counties yet again?

Mr. Stradling Thomas: The hon. Gentleman has indeed answered his own question, because, as he well knows, with his considerable experience in education, expenditure on school books is determined by the local education authorities. However, when allowance has been made for the effects of pay and price increases, the local authorities' current expenditure on education has remained at a virtually constant level for a number of years, while the number of pupils in schools has declined markedly. Those facts are not consistent with allegations of heavy cuts.

Mr. Hubbard-Miles: Does my hon. Friend agree that while books are an important element in the education of children, the standard and quality of teaching is even more important? In the three Glamorgan authorities, have not standards of teaching been irrepairably damaged by the notorious system of appointments and promotions in which a teacher's qualities are far less important than his relationship to the local Labour party?

Mr. Stradling Thomas: I should like to reinforce the point that the number of pupils—[*Interruption.*] I am answering my hon. Friend's question, which relates to expenditure by LEAs, including expenditure on books. The number of pupils has dropped by nearly 12 per cent., but the number of teachers by only about 3 per cent. That being so, it is for the local education authorities to re-examine carefully their management and expenditure policies.

Following are the details:

Expenditure figures for 1983-84 which are available are calculated in terms of books and equipment taken together

	Primary Schools £	*Secondary Schools* £
West Glamorgan	23·3	42·6
Mid-Glamorgan	19·6	33·9
South Glamorgan*	18·8	33·6

* Provisional outturn figures.

The education authorities' estimated figures for 1984-85 for books and equipment have been published by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy as follows:

	Primary Schools £	*Secondary Schools* £
West Glamorgan	22·0	35·0
Mid-Glamorgan	17·0	31·0
South Glamorgan	19·0	37·0

Mid-Glamorgan (Employment and Training)

9. **Mr. Ron Davies** asked the Secretary of State for Wales what is the number of people covered by the Government's special employment and training measures in Mid-Glamorgan.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: The total for the county is 7,112, excluding the enterprise allowance scheme, for which there is no separate figure for Mid-Glamorgan.

Mr. Davies: Is the Minister aware that officials of the Manpower Services Commission are now directly involving themselves in the administration of the youth training scheme in Mid-Glamorgan? Does he approve of the practice increasingly adopted by those officials of giving the Mid-Glamorgan county council directions about which schemes to reduce, which mode B places to remove and which members of staff to sack? Can the Minister say whether this practice is based on a statement of policy or whether the MSC officials in Wales are conducting their affairs as they see fit?

Mr. Stradling Thomas: I would hope that the Mid-Glamorgan authority and the MSC officials would act in close co-operation to achieve the best results obtainable.

Mr. Rowlands: Given the increasing importance of the MSC, should not responsibility for both the programme and the budget of the MSC in Wales be given to the Secretary of State for Wales, so that if there were underspends or differences of emphasis he could adjust the budget and the programme to suit the needs of Wales? At the moment it appears to be the Department of Employment, on a national level, which is in control.

Mr. Stradling Thomas: We work in the closest co-operation with the Department of Employment. We have our own MSC committee for Wales with direct access, through Ministers, to the Department of Employment and to the MSC in Sheffield.

Stage Carriage Bus Services

10. **Dr. Marek** asked the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the quality of stage carriage bus services in Wales if Her Majesty's Government's plans for deregulation are implemented.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport has already explained to the hon. Member and to the House that the recent White Paper on buses sets out the Government's reasons for removing the present system of road service licensing and their assessment of the beneficial effects of the proposals. Reference to the Government's proposals for the bus industry is made in paragraphs 14 and 15 of the consultation paper "Local Choice in Public Transport", a copy of which was sent to the hon. Gentleman.

Dr. Marek: Can the Minister give us a guarantee that, if the proposals are implemented, stage carriage bus services will not further decline?

Mr. Stradling Thomas: I do not think that anyone could give such a guarantee. We want greater flexibility and more local choice. I should have thought that that would be welcome, especially in the context of what I said earlier about genuine consultation on these matters.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: What assessment has been made of the concept of cross-subsidy, when it usually comes from passengers who are resident in the least well-off areas and benefits areas with a high car-owning population?

Mr. Stradling Thomas: That illustrates why we want to get the maximum flexibility to achieve the fairest and most efficient transport provision in rural and urban areas.

Mr. Anderson: Is the Minister aware that British Leyland assumes that there will be a substantial reduction in purchases of its vehicles if deregulation comes about? Is the Minister making way for cowboys in clapped-out vehicles, or will there be more inspection of vehicles?

Mr. Stradling Thomas: Far from there being cowboys in clapped-out vehicles, current experience is of safety standards being increased because more modern vehicles are being used. Moreover, British Leyland, like the rest of British industry, must learn to adapt to the needs of the new system.

Sir Raymond Gower: Is it possible for there to be greater consultation between bus operators, potential bus operators and those who control other services such as the distribution of mail, foods and other commodities, as obtains in some parts of France?

Mr. Stradling Thomas: That would be very welcome. The greater flexibility that has been suggested in the consultation document could well lead to such a happy result.

Mr. Wigley: Bearing in mind the fact that the Government plan to introduce private companies, which will come in only to take profits out of money available for buses, will the hon. Gentleman guarantee that local authorities will have that much more money to maintain services in rural areas which would otherwise be disadvantaged by the loss of cross-subsidy?

Mr. Stradling Thomas: The financial provisions are broadly neutral with regard to local authorities. I find it surprising that a company that runs a profitable route should be criticised. We want profitable services, which will provide an efficient service, rather than loss-making services that can never succeed and will ultimately be withdrawn. We have already seen that pattern of decline.

Mr. Roy Hughes: Will the Minister take into consideration the fact that the transport committee of the Association of District Councils does not accept that radical changes are necessary for the road passenger transport industry? Indeed, it has expressed doubts about the knowledge of the people who have drawn up the proposals. In view of the general disquiet about the proposals, does the Minister agree that it would be wise for the Government to turn the White Paper into a Green Paper?

Mr. Stradling Thomas: I see. I note what the hon. Gentleman says, but there are two separate papers for Wales and there is obvious confusion about them. The Green Paper issued by the Welsh Office is a Green Paper — *[Interruption.]* It is clear from much of what has been said that even hon. Members have completely confused the Green Paper and the White Paper. It is also clear from what has been said upstairs in Committee that the two have been confused. It is therefore right that the matter should be clarified.

Health Authorities (Laundry and Catering Services)

11. **Mr. Grist** asked the Secretary of State for Wales in which health authorities in Wales laundry and catering services have been put out to open tender.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: As yet no authority has invited tenders for catering services, but the Pembrokeshire health authority has done so with regard to laundry services and has placed a contract. Decisions after tender on domestic services have also been reached by the Pembrokeshire and Powys health authorities and by the Welsh Health Technical Services Organisation.

Mr. Grist: What steps has my hon. Friend taken to encourage and, if necessary, force authorities to open their markets to the private sector?

Mr. Roberts: Privatisation is its own reward. Total savings in excess of £250,000 annually are likely to accrue to the National Health Service as a result of the four tendering exercises so far conducted in Wales. I am generally satisfied with progress, but the Department is about to write to authorities commenting on the programmes which they submitted to me earlier this year.

New Factory Units

12. **Mr. Knox** asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many new factory units and how many square feet of factory space have been built by the Welsh Development Agency since its inception.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: Between January 1976 and October 1984 inclusive, the Welsh Development Agency completed 1,201 advance factory units, 14 bespoke factory units and 82 factory extensions, totalling just over 9 million sq ft.

Mr. Knox: Will my right hon. Friend say what proportion of the factory units are unoccupied, and whether any have been unoccupied for as long as five years?

Mr. Edwards: About 13·5 per cent. of the Welsh Development Agency total factory stock is now vacant and available for letting. The letting rate this year is extremely good. About 1·6 million sq ft of Government factory space has been let, which is an increase on last year's record figure.

Home Improvement Grants

13. **Mr. Best** asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give the amount in constant prices spent on home improvement grants during *(a)* the last year for which figures are available and *(b)* 1978-79.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Spending by district councils in Wales on all forms of house renovation grant in 1978-79 amounted to £18·1 million. The provisional total for 1983-84 is £114·5 million. Both sums have been revalued to 1984-85 prices.

Mr. Best: Does my hon. Friend agree that the best way to deal with the poor housing stock in Wales is through improvement grants, so long as those grants are given to those most in need? Does he accept that the almost tenfold increase in expenditure by the Government over that of the Labour Government in their last year of office

demonstrates the Government's commitment to doing precisely that, and that any criticism from the Labour party is pure humbug?

Mr. Roberts: I agree with my hon. Friend's last remark, and with the fact that the Government have spent considerably more than the Labour Government did on the improvement of houses in Wales. There is no doubt that our housing stock must be improved. We are likely to spend about £81 million on grants this year.

Mr. Coleman: Does the Minister not understand that although the suggestion of his hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Best) will improve the quality of housing, it will do nothing for those who do not have homes? What about investment in new housing?

Mr. Roberts: The proportion of the total money allocated to be spent on improvement grants, new build and improving their own houses is entirely a matter for the local authorities. As well as the £81 million spent on grants, the local authorities in Wales will this year spend £34 million on new building and £44 million on improving their own council houses.

THE CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Beneficed Clergy

25. **Mr. Greenway** asked the hon. Member for Wokingham, as representing the Church Commissioners, what is the value of current pay and emoluments of beneficed clergy in the Church of England.

The Second Church Estates Commissioner, Representing Church Commissioners (Sir William van Straubenzee): For the year from 1 April 1984 the Church Commissioners, as Central Stipends Authority, have recommended a national minimum stipend for incumbents of £6,500 per annum. In addition to the stipend, an incumbent is provided with a house, free of rent, rates, repairs and insurance.

Mr. Greenway: I congratulate my hon. Friend on the improvement that those figures represent. Do the clergy work within spiritual and political guidelines and, if so, what are they?

Sir William van Straubenzee: No guidelines of either kind are laid down by those whom I represent this afternoon.

Mr. Ryman: Cannot the hon. Gentleman recommend to the Church Commissioners a realistic increase in the stipend of the clergy because, in addition to their arduous duties, they must now endure the intellectually sterile and sanctimonious utterances of a mediocre nonentity — namely, the chairman of the Tory party?

Sir William van Straubenzee: I remind the hon. Gentleman, who follows these matters carefully, that the average stipend in the current year represents an increase over the previous one of 6·8 per cent. during a period when inflation was 4·5 per cent. Both clergy and laity are greatly stimulated by all the utterances of my hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer).

Redundant Churches

26. **Dr. Mawhinney** asked the hon. Member for Wokingham, as representing the Church Commissioners, how many redundant churches there are in the diocese of Durham.

Sir William van Straubenzee: Nineteen churches in Durham diocese have been declared redundant since the Pastoral Measure 1968 came into operation.

Dr. Mawhinney: Does my hon. Friend accept that the number of redundant churches there is likely to rise if the clergy reflect their bishop's view of the resurrection and talk about a conjuring trick with bones? That phrase is grossly offensive to millions of bible-believing Christians. Does my hon. Friend also accept that the bishop's view about society, the economy and allegedly shoeless families are as eccentric and ill-founded as his theological views?

Sir William van Straubenzee: I should incur your wrath, Mr. Speaker, if I attempted to answer matters for which I am not answerable. I hope that my hon. Friend read the text of what was said—I expect that he has. I take the point about the actual formulation used. The Lord Bishop of Durham is now well able to answer for himself in another place, which is a great relief to me.

Mr. Mark Hughes: May I record that it is a great relief to the diocese of Durham that its bishop can answer in the other place, rather than have the hon. Gentleman answering for him? Does the hon. Gentleman accept that many people in the diocese of Durham welcome the bishop's forthright views on the pressures invoked on families consequent upon the current strike?

Sir William van Straubenzee: I hope that the hon. Gentleman recognises that, not only today but previously, I have attempted to understand both sides. Perhaps he and I—he is much more qualified than I am in this matter—understand the difference between a quip or a phrase used round an academic table and instruction or guidance given by the bishop of a diocese.

Mr. St. John-Stevas: As my hon. Friend is the nearest thing, with the possible exception of myself, to an English pope, will he tell us how many redundant bishops there are in the diocese of Durham?

Sir William van Straubenzee: None, yet, Sir.

Mr. Madden: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that churches in Durham and in many other places would be fuller, and the views of priests listened to with more respect, if more clergymen spoke with the clarity, conviction, courage and facts with which the Bishop of Durham recently addressed the nation?

Sir William van Straubenzee: Many members of the clergy attempt to do that faithfully in all the Christian churches.

Mr. Cormack: Will my hon. Friend ensure that in future redundant churches are vested in the fund so that they can remain quiet places where orthodox believers can contemplate the fate of heretics?

Sir William van Straubenzee: My hon. Friend generally approves of the Church Commissioners' policy, which is, wherever possible, to find alternative living uses for those buildings.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Will not the social and enlightened message of the Bishop of Durham serve only to swell congregations throughout that county and, indeed, the entire northern region, where there is high unemployment? Will the hon. Gentleman have a word with the chairman of the Conservative party and tell him to stop bullying the bishops? They do not like it.

Sir William van Straubenzee: One could say many things about the 43 diocesan bishops of the Church of England, but one cannot say that they are capable of being bullied by my hon. Friend or by anyone else.

27. **Mr. Peter Bruinvels** asked the hon. Member for Wokingham, as representing the Church Commissioners, how many redundant churches there are in the diocese of Leicester.

Sir William van Straubenzee: Nine churches in Leicester diocese have been declared redundant since the Pastoral Measure 1968 came into operation.

Mr. Bruinvels: While thanking my hon. Friend for that answer, may I say that there may be many more redundant churches if women are admitted to the priesthood? Will he encourage the Church Commissioners to ensure that no churches are demolished after they are declared redundant, but are instead used for other purposes such as for the ethnic communities?

Sir William van Straubenzee: I have studied carefully the list of churches in Leicester. My hon. Friend will know of the great care that has been taken to find alternative living uses where that is possible. As to the first part of his question, I do not believe that this afternoon, after what has happened, I should touch women.

THE ARTS

English National Opera

28. **Mr. Tony Banks** asked the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State answering in respect of the Arts how many times the Minister for the Arts met the chairman of the English National Opera prior to the commencement of the company's North American tour to discuss financial arrangements; what indications were given of likely financial support for the tour from the Government; and if he is considering providing additional funds to assist the English National Opera to meet the £700,000 tour deficit.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. William Waldegrave): My right hon. and noble Friend met the chairman of the ENO informally on four occasions before the tour; no indication of Government financial support was given. The deficit on the tour is a matter for the Arts Council and the company.

Mr. Banks: Is the Minister aware that according to the minutes of the ENO board the Minister for the Arts "emphasised the Government's desire for the tour to go ahead" and that the Minister also gave a heavy hint of additional Government financing for the tour? The tour then proceeded. In view of those two statements, should not the Minister for the Arts now come forward with the money for the ENO, or resign?

Mr. Waldegrave: The first part of the hon. Gentleman's remarks is correct. The Minister hoped that the tour would take place. Indeed, it was a triumphant success. The records show that the Minister did not offer Government support in advance of the tour. When the money-raising went wrong, and as on other occasions and with other companies, he offered his good offices to raise private money to help, but that is a very different matter.

Mr. St. John-Stevas: Does my hon. Friend agree that the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) has rendered a service to the Minister for the Arts by leaking those minutes to the press, because after reading them no reasonable person could conclude that any pledge of Government finance had been given? Having said that, in view of the phenomenal success of the ENO tour in the United States, and given that the company was let down by certain Amercian sponsors, will my hon. Friend ask his right hon. and noble Friend to launch an appeal, publicly and privately funded, to meet this deficit and to save this company, which has made such great contributions to our cultural life?

Mr. Waldegrave: My right hon. Friend's initial remarks are entirely right. I again confirm that the tour was a tremendous success. My right hon. and noble Friend has already taken some steps to help find private money, and I shall report to him the idea that my right hon. Friend has put forward.

Mr. Buchan: It is not good enough for the Minister to give the answer that he has. Like others, I have seen the minutes, and there is no doubt whatever that the tour went ahead with the encouragement of the Minister. Therefore, as a matter of honour, the Minister for the Arts has a moral duty to help the company. It would not have undertaken the tour without his prior imprimatur. The Minister's honour is now at stake. It is insufficient to leave this to private funds. The Government must come clean and meet the deficit.

Mr. Waldegrave: That is not fair. My right hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Mr. St. John-Stevas) more accurately described what happened. The ENO knew perfectly well that Arts Council funds cannot be used for foreign touring. My right hon. and noble Friend wanted the tour to go ahead, as we all did. Now that the ENO has been let down by some of the American backers who promised it money, my right hon. and noble Friend and a number of others are seeing what can be done to help.

Museums and Galleries (Entrance Charges)

29. **Mr. Nicholas Baker** asked the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State answering in respect of the Arts if he will encourage individual museums and galleries which wish to make entrance charges.

Mr. Waldegrave: The Government's policy is to leave to the trustees' discretion whether to introduce general admission charges for the main collections at the national museums and galleries. My right hon. and noble Friend will encourage suitable programmes of self-help, which could include admission charges, if the trustees wish to propose these.

Mr. Baker: Does my hon. Friend agree that charging can enable museums and galleries to become more exciting places to visit, particularly for families? If charging can enable museums and galleries to maintain their treasures and to replenish their store by buying

others, is there any good reason why those in work who are prepared to pay, and tourists, should not pay entrance charges to museums?

Mr. Waldegrave: There have been charges for many of the most successful special exhibitions in recent years, but it is the Government's policy to leave the initiative in such matters to the museum trustees.

Mr. Faulds: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that last time round, even before charges were introduced, attendances at the National Gallery fell markedly, simply on the supposition that they had been introduced? Does he accept that I know many people who will not be able to afford to pay for entry to museums and art galleries? Does he not know such people too?

Mr. Waldegrave: The position is different for different types of museums. For example, the National Maritime museum seems to be making a great success of its scheme. It is right to leave the matter to the trustees of individual museums.

Mr. David Atkinson: Does my hon. Friend agree that those museums in Britain which do not charge are put at a disadvantage compared with those museums in Europe, the Soviet Union and the United States which do charge and which can, as a result, enhance their collections, particularly when, knowing that, visitors are quite prepared to pay for admission?

Mr. Waldegrave: That is the sort of consideration that may carry weight with some of the trustees concerned.

Mr. Buchan: Is not the only disadvantage to which museums and galleries in Britain are put compared with those in other countries that Governments of other countries are a great deal more generous to their museums than are this Government? Is it not the case that, far from the Minister leaving it to the trustees to decide, he has used every possible occasion, including the recent opening of the library at Ealing, to encourage them to charge? He says that people appreciate what they pay for, but is that not the philosophy of the harlot?

Mr. Waldegrave: I did not say that, but I am sure that the hon. Gentleman thought up his joke before he listened to me. Some foreign countries can be more generous because they are now richer than Britain, and that is largely the result of the economic policies followed by the Labour party over a number of years.

Arts Council (Funding)

30. **Mr. Best** asked the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State answering in respect of the Arts if he will give the level of funding for the Arts Council in Wales for each of the last six years.

Mr. Waldegrave: I will, with permission Mr. Speaker, make the complete list of figures available in the *Official Report*. The funding has risen from £3·94 million in 1978-79 to £6·54 million in 1983-84.

Mr. Best: Will my hon. Friend acknowledge the importance of the arts in Wales, particularly for those visitors to the Principality who suffer the deprivation of not being able to enjoy the arts in Wales every day of their lives? Will he comment on my perception of those figures, which is that broadly, in real terms, the level of funding has remained about the same, even though that has been at a time of supposed financial restraint?

Mr. Waldegrave: I confirm the importance which the Government attach to the arts in Wales. My hon. Friend is right to say that on the latest figures, up to 1984-85, spending on the arts in Wales has been just about within 1 per cent. protected against inflation.

Following are the figures:

Arts Council's grant-in-aid to the Welsh Arts Council

Year	*£ million*
1978-79	3·94
1979-80	4·58
1980-81	5·06
1981-82	5·61
1982-83	6·70
1983-84	6·54

Source: WAC annual Income and Expenditure Accounts.
The Arts Council's allocation to the WAC in the current year is £6·92 million.

Hayward Gallery

31. **Mr. Jessel** asked the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State answering in respect of the Arts if, following legislation on local government in Greater London, the Government still intend that the Hayward gallery shall be managed under the auspices of the Arts Council.

Mr. Waldegrave: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Jessel: Does my hon. Friend agree that the GLC's attempt to expel the Arts Council of Great Britain — which has to prepare important art exhibitions two or three years ahead — from the Hayward gallery at a few months' notice is an act of uncivilised vandalism, which shows that the GLC is wholly unfit to run any serious art gallery, or anything else?

Mr. Waldegrave: The GLC group concerned has made rather a fool of itself over this issue. The matter is subject to litigation. The Arts Council may be serving writs the other way. Such reputation as the GLC has in this area has been severely damaged by its behaviour over the Hayward gallery.

Mr. Tony Banks: Is the Minister aware that some 18 months ago the Arts Council, in the form of its chair, said that it wanted to get out of both the Hayward and the Serpentine galleries? Is he also aware that the GLC has said that all contractual obligations to the Arts Council will be honoured? I do not see how that fits in with the question.

Mr. Waldegrave: I am aware that the GLC's lawyers have now told the GLC something about the law of contract, which has influenced its position somewhat. I think that the position of the Arts Council is related to the proposals put forward by the GLC and is not an abstract one.

Private Sponsorship

32. **Mr. Murphy** asked the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State answering in respect of the Arts what is the current level of private sponsorship of the arts; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: The Association for Business Sponsorship of the Arts estimated sponsorship at £13·5 million in 1983, excluding charitable donations by

companies and private individuals. No later figures are currently available, but the new incentive scheme of my right hon. and noble Friend has given sponsorship a new impetus. He will be announcing the initial 12 award winners tomorrow.

Mr. Murphy: I welcome the results of private sponsorship of the arts. Are the Government to give extra publicity to that?

Mr. Waldegrave: I shall certainly take up that matter with my right hon. and noble Friend and write to my hon. Friend on that point.

Confectionery (Poisoning)

3.30 pm

Mr. Peter Bruinvels (Leicester, East) *(by private notice)* asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the poisoning of confectionery by members of the Animal Liberation Front.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Mellor): I have been asked to reply.

I have today received the following information from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis. At 3.10 pm on Saturday, 17 November, the press bureau at New Scotland Yard received a telephone call from the deputy news editor of the *Sunday Mirror* informing the police that he had just received a telephone call from the Animal Liberation Front stating that Mars bars throughout the country had been injected with rat poison. That telephone call was followed by the receipt at the *Sunday Mirror* of a Mars bar and a letter from the ALF, in which the ALF claimed to have adulterated Mars bars in London, Leeds, York, Southampton and Coventry. The Mars bar and letter were handed to the Metropolitan police.

At about 3.45 pm the same day the BBC offices at Portland place were handed a Mars bar which was claimed to have come from the ALF and to be contaminated, as were others throughout the country.

The Mars bars that were handed to the *Sunday Mirror* and the BBC have been submitted to the Metropolitan police laboratory for examination, and a result of the analysis is expected tomorrow. In the light of recent ALF activities, the police and the manufacturers have, very properly, taken these claims seriously.

I understand that a number of other police forces have been handed Mars bars which are either marked with a large cross or contain a copy of the ALF letter. Tests to determine whether or not they have been contaminated continue, but thus far I am glad to say that there is no evidence that any member of the public has purchased or eaten a contaminated product.

Police inquiries are continuing.

I am sure that the whole House will join me in deploring the Animal Liberation Front's outrageous and irresponsible behaviour.

Mr. Bruinvels: I thank my hon. Friend for that helpful answer. Is this not yet another example of an irresponsible campaign that is corrupted by violence and terror tactics? Are not defenceless children very much in danger, and is there not a risk that they could be very ill indeed from eating contaminated Mars bars? I think that my hon. Friend will agree that the ALF appears to care more about animals than humans, which is a disgrace.

Will my hon. Friend let us know whether any warnings were given? What steps is the Home Office taking to monitor the ALF's activities? Is my hon. Friend aware that the RSPCA has condemned outright the ALF's action as being totally irresponsible and very corrupt? Is he further aware that these animals——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think that the hon. Gentleman has asked at least three questions and, in fairness to other hon. Members, that is enough.

Mr. Mellor: I agree with my hon. Friend's concern. It comes a little hard to be lectured about animal rights by a group that is plainly contemptuous of human rights. The problem with the incident that has been reported is that it is just one of a series of incidents which has been escalating in seriousness in recent months. Those incidents have involved personal violence against people involved in research work in laboratories. Three weeks ago, three people were put into hospital. Dangerous wild animals have also been let loose.

The problem facing civilised people in this country is that such behaviour threatens us all. It is utterly irresponsible, and we must all stand firm against it by assisting the police to resolve the matter as speedily as possible.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sunderland): Is the Minister aware that people such as the spokesman for the RSPCA—who yesterday on television described such monstrous criminal behaviour as understandable—are doing the cause of those concerned about animal welfare no good at all? What steps are being taken by the police to trace the perpetrators of these offences?

Mr. Mellor: In reply to the hon. Gentleman's helpful question, I can tell him that every effort is being made by the police to trace those responsible, and inquiries are continuing.

Many of us are concerned about animal welfare, which is why Britain has the most rigorous animal welfare laws in the world. It is why the Government are currently negotiating with a wide range of interested groups to reform the 1876 Act and to introduce controls that will be even more rigorous.

We appreciate that some animal experiments — indeed, quite a large number—will be absolutely crucial for the foreseeable future if we are to have product safety and if we are to conquer diseases for which currently there is no cure. That is something that the extremists find it impossible to understand.

None of us can have any truck with such conduct, which must be stamped out in the interests of us all.

Mr. Charles Morrison (Devizes): Is my hon. Friend aware that the vast majority of people are becoming increasingly fed up with the arrogant and irresponsible antics of the members of the Animal Liberation Front masquerading as do-gooders and presuming to know better than the law or this House about what the law does or should allow?

Does my hon. Friend agree that the Mars affair is only the latest in a series of episodes in which the freedom of people in Britain to go about their lawful business has been interfered with? When I say people, I mean butchers, pet food shopkeepers and many other traders.

Mr. Mellor: It is the appallingly wide range of activities condemned by the extremists that make them so frightening. For example, when a football manager is a fisherman, that is a licence for the extremists to damage the ground and pitch of a team that the manager's team is playing against. Because they are against angling, apparently youths must be free to throw stones at anglers. Because they do not agree with people eating hamburgers, at least a dozen McDonald's restaurants have been damaged in recent months. Because they do not agree with mink farming, some of my hon. Friend's constituents have had mink released into the countryside. That is an act of grotesque irresponsibility for both mink and other wildlife in the countryside. They even released a wolf last week.

[Mr. Mellor]

These things are going too far. The community as a whole must repudiate such action if we are to have the civilised debate about animal welfare that we all want.

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): Will the Minister confirm that, by legitimate and orthodox means over the years, the RSPCA has had signal successes with the Home Office to prevent cruelty to animals? Do not such incidents as what occurred during the weekend, even if they turn out to be a hoax, add nothing to the cause of animal lovers throughout Britain who sympathise with the movement against cruelty to animals?

Mr. Mellor: Not for the first time, the hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. At the end of the last Parliament, an Act was passed, supported by the RSPCA, to prevent the sale of pets from open street markets. That dealt with the scandal of Club row. I was happy to support that on behalf of the Government.

A dialogue is continuing with a whole range of groups concerned with animal welfare, including the Fund for the Replacement of Animals in Medical Experiments — which I know many hon. Members support—to update our laws on animal experiments.

We do not need the activities of extremists to persuade us that our animal welfare laws need to be the best possible. They only hinder the process of reform; they do not advance it.

Mr. Roger Gale (Thanet, North): Will my hon. Friend accept the assurances of hon. Members on both sides of the House who belong to the all-party parliamentary group for the Fund for the Replacement of Animals in Medical Experiments—which I have the privilege to chair—that we are wholly opposed to the practices carried out by people such as this, who claim to believe in animal welfare?

Will my hon. Friend accept our assurance that we believe that the only proper way forward is to fund research into alternatives, so that animals are no longer required for experiments?

We would welcome a statement from the Minister in the near future on our submissions on the White Paper.

Mr. Mellor: My hon. Friend knows that the Government, for the first time, have made available a substantial sum for research into alternatives. He knows that the number of animal experiments has fallen from about 5·6 million in 1976 to about 3·6 million last year. He is aware that, while we must strive to bring into play as many alternatives as possible, for the foreseeable future many animal experiments will be needed if we are to have any chance of conquering those diseases that still remain without a remedy.

The House will know that several surgical procedures that are now commonplace, such as coronary bypasses, were introduced 20 years ago only after the most rigorous experimentation on animals, without which such life-saving operations would not have been possible.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Does the Minister recollect that, following my active participation in the Committee stage of the Protection of Animals (Scientific Purposes) Bill, introduced in 1979 by the hon. Member for Wellingborough (Mr. Fry), there were suggestions that Governments of the day should make it clear that to accept the demands of animal liberation supporters would lead naturally to infringements of the various Medicines Acts? In those circumstances, would it not be useful for Governments to indulge in the making of some tear-jerking statements—many of which would have a basis of fact—about precisely what would happen if the aims of the ALF were to be achieved? If they were, all sorts of work relating to human disasters would be gravely affected.

Has anything been learnt from the recent Japanese experience in regard to the poisoning of foods?

Mr. Mellor: The hon. Gentleman has made some valuable points, and it is up to all of us in public life to stress them. I have done my best to do so, and as a consequence I have suffered somewhat at the hands of the extremists. It needs to be clearly understood that the vaccines that save children's lives all have to be tested on animals. Unless every batch is tested, there will be more vaccine-damaged children, and we cannot countenance that.

We must not think that it is only animal experiments — or so-called unnecessary animal experiments — that the extremists are against. They are against commonplace pursuits such as fishing, they are against the eating of animals, and I have seen letters from the Animal Liberation Front denouncing the keeping of pets. There is no way in which any civilised Government can bow to their demands.

Mr. Michael Latham (Rutland and Melton): Can my hon. Friend assure the House that the tests on the allegedly poisoned Mars bars will be carried out as quickly as possible? On today's 1 o'clock radio news a man purporting to speak for the Animal Liberation Front said that none of the Mars bars had been poisoned. Those of us who know the Mars corporation know it to be an exceptionally responsible and worthwhile company.

Mr. Mellor: I agree with my hon. Friend that it is important that the results of the analysis should be known as quickly as possible. The reason why the analysis is taking a good deal of time is that everything, including the wrappers, is being subjected to minute examination, not merely to determine whether Mars bars have been contaminated but to get evidence as to who might have been responsible. Whether or not the bars have been contaminated, criminal offences have been committed. The incident is deplorable, whether or not Mars bars containing rat poison have been put on shelves.

It is most unfair that Mars should be pilloried and held in contempt for supporting important medical research at one of the most significant medical establishments. If that is a matter for which people are to be held in contempt, things have come to a pretty pass.

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): In rightly and forthrightly condemning the interference with Mars bars, is the Minister aware that many responsible campaigners felt a great deal of frustration that there was no legislation on animal welfare proposed in the Queen's Speech? Will the Minister take steps to ensure that firm proposals are made public as soon as possible to minimise the damage done by wild and irresponsible groups such as the ALF?

Mr. Mellor: The trouble is that we are breeding a large number of single-interest groups which become extremely frustrated when people who have to deal with many other

matters are not prepared to give total priority to their point of view. They seem to think that they can resort to any kind of law breaking to bring about their aims. We must all, regardless of our party political position, condemn that sort of activity. I know that the hon. and learned Gentleman would not want his words to be interpreted as condoning that frustration. We are the first Government for a long time to take the matter seriously enough to introduce a carefully considered proposal to reform the 1876 Act.

Further deliberations are taking place in the light of detailed submissions received from animal welfare groups and others. It is in the best interests of the legislation that it remains under consideration. The Government are committed to take action, and action will be taken. However, that will not satisfy the extremists. They are opposed to all experiments and "all experiments" would not be stopped by a responsible Government.

Mr. Derek Spencer (Leicester, South): Does my hon. Friend agree that the activities of the Animal Liberation Front go much further than irresponsibility? Its members claim deliberately to promote their activities by serious crime. They have claimed responsibility for acts of criminal damage involving between £70,000 and £80,000. They inflict terror upon those who work in laboratories and their activities are to be condemned by everyone who supports the cause of animal welfare.

Mr. Mellor: Several recent incidents have involved attacks by several dozen people armed with slegehammers and crowbars. In a recent incident, three people were put into hospital. During the year the claims that have been made by the group and the threats that it has uttered have become ever more ferocious, including breaking into the homes of scientists and smashing their hands to pulp in front of their families. Last week ALF representatives threatened to use firearms. My worry is that these people are feeding their own psychotic tendencies to such a degree that we can no longer assume that they do not mean what they say, and that sooner or later, as is evidenced by the fact that violence is already escalating, they will not do something truly dreadful. That is why I say that the community must disclose any information that it has about these groups so that members of them can be stopped, as much in their own interests as in those of the rest of us.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. In view of the importance of this subject, I shall call those hon. Members who have been rising in their places. However, this is a private notice question and we must move on when those hon. Members have been called.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): The Minister says that he wishes to stamp out this irresponsibility. Perhaps one way of doing so would be for the Minister to show a little more flexibility. He has developed over these last years a reputation among those people who take an interest in these matters as not being flexible. [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] That is the reputation that this Minister has acquired for himself. It may well not be grounded on fact, but it happens to be the truth. If that is the case, then surely it is for the Minister himself to ensure that a campaign is organised to make the Government's position quite clear to those interest groups. That is the way to defuse the difficulty that we have today.

Mr. Mellor: The hon. Gentleman is an instant expert on everything that comes before the House, and I suppose that I must take his strictures as stolidly as those of my colleagues who have them visited upon them regularly. The proposals in the White Paper have been considered by groups such as both the veterinary bodies, the Fund for the Replacement of Animals in Medical Experiments, and other reputable bodies such as the Royal Society, and have been found to be entirely in keeping with the best traditions of British concern for animals. If the hon. Gentleman means by flexibility that in the interests of pandering to extremists I should stop medical research, cancer tests, research into safe vaccine for children and protection for those who deal with hazardous chemicals, let him have the backbone to say so rather than using coded expressions that suggest that we should pander to extremism, which is something that he is good at doing.

Mr. Tim Brinton (Gravesham): Is my hon. Friend aware that, apart from radio interviews, Independent Television News showed on our screens at lunchtime a gentleman who proudly admitted that the exercise had been a hoax? If it be a lunatic hoax, should not the Government be thinking fairly carefully whether those who may be associated with crimes should be allowed such platforms?

Mr. Mellor: As I have said, I am not in a position to say whether it has been a hoax. Irrespective of whether it is a hoax, it is profoundly irresponsible. I shall not comment on what the gentleman said on ITN, as I gather that the police are interested in the observations he made.

Mr. Albert McQuarrie (Banff and Buchan): My hon. Friend will be aware that millions of Mars bars have been withdrawn from the shelves of shops and that the production of the bars has been stopped. This will create unemployment in a factory and town where we are looking for employment. Members of the ALF should take that into consideration before they set out on their dangerous expeditions.

Mr. Mellor: I agree with my hon. Friend.

Mr. Richard Hickmet (Glanford and Scunthorpe): Does my hon. Friend accept the fact that many hon. Members on both sides of the House are well aware of the pressure and attacks on him and entirely reject the ludicrous statements by the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours)?

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Did you listen to what I said? If not, read it tomorrow.

Mr. Hickmet: Will my hon. Friend help the House by saying what assistance he and the police have received from the Mars company? Is my hon. Friend satisfied with that assistance in tracing the so-called poisoned bars?

Mr. Mellor: I am happy to say that the Mars company has behaved with the utmost responsibility in all this. I stress that there is no reason why people should lack any confidence in Mars products or why Mars should feel that it has been anything other than the victim of an outrageous, unnecessary and unjustified attack. In supporting research, the Mars company has acted inestimably. Companies such as Mars would be criticised not if they supported such research but if they did not do so.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Grantham): Does my hon. Friend agree that Mars bars contaminated with rat poison would

[Mr. Douglas Hogg]

cause death or serious injury? Does my hon. Friend agree that charges that reflect those consequences should follow? If, however, this is a hoax, does my hon. Friend agree that the Mars company and the retailers should be able to pursue an action for damages?

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): He will represent either side.

Mr. Mellor: It would be dangerous for me to seek to advise either the Mars company or the police on what charges should follow. I remain of the view, as I have said, that this is a serious incident, whether or not rat poison was put into those Mars bars. It is worth bearing in mind that, the last time these people threatened to contaminate products, they put bleach into shampoo, which could have blinded people. No one should treat this as a joke; the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) seems to treat most things as a joke.

Mr. Skinner: It is not a joke: he will take the brief.

Mr. Mellor: This is one of a series of incidents in recent months that will trouble every responsible hon. Member.

Mr. Alfred Dubs (Battersea): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that many people who are seriously worried about the welfare of animals will be appalled that a small minority are using threats to the well-being and health of children as a way of getting publicity? They will be even more worried because that publicity prevents and obscures the serious public debate that is taking place and should take place on how we in Britain treat animals? Will the Under-Secretary of State comment on the obvious vulnerability of food manufacturers to such threats? Is the Japanese experience helpful in this respect?

Mr. Mellor: These are worldwide phenomena. The experience in Japan and America will be studied. Producers of goods that are widely distributed and sold all over the country are especially vulnerable to this threat. That is why the only answer to the problem is to stamp out those extremists. It is important that we should have a debate about animal welfare and that our animal laws should be the best possible legislation. It is important also that we should have an environment in which there is not only good animal welfare but a good climate for scientists to do important work of fundamental research. Striking the balance between the two is something that all responsible people want to do.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Mr. Speaker: With the leave of the House, I shall put together the Questions on the eight motions relating to statutory instruments.

Ordered,

That the Food Labelling Regulations 1984 (S.I., 1984, No. 1305) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the Agricultural Holdings (Forms of Notice to Pay Rent or to Remedy) Regulations 1984 (S.I., 1984, No. 1308) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the Agriculture (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 (Units of Production) Order 1984 (S.I., 1984, No. 1309) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the Agricultural Land Tribunals (Succession to Agricultural Tenancies) Order 1984 (S.I., 1984, No. 1301) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the Registered Homes Tribunals Rules 1984 (S.I., 1984, No. 1346) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the Residential Care Homes Regulations 1984 (S.I., 1984, No. 1345) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the Social Security (Severe Disablement Allowance) Regulations 1984 (S.I., 1984, No. 1303) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the Social Security (General Benefit) Amendment Regulations 1984 (S.I., 1984, No. 1259) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c. — *[Mr. Durant.]*

Films Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

3.53 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry (Mr. Norman Lamont): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

It is now four months to the day since my right hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker) appeared at the Dispatch Box to announce the Government's review of the film industry. The review's conclusions were set out in the White Paper on film policy published on that day. The Bill before the House is essentially concerned with providing the legislative framework to implement the decisions that were announced then.

It is important to remember the impressive strength of the British film industry. I have noticed that there has been a campaign to suggest otherwise by certain groups interested in obtaining tax concessions and more money. However, in the past few years the industry has seen a surge of activity. Production has increased. Studios are full. We have been able to attract some internationally mobile productions. That is largely because of the wealth of talents and skills that are found in this country.

In addition, we have also become a centre of expertise in certain technical areas and that has led to highly successful major international productions such as the "Star Wars" films and, more recently, "Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom". More technicians are in work now than for many years and last year 34 full-length British feature films were made here, and there were some notable successes—"Local Hero", "Educating Rita" and "The Dresser". [AN HON. MEMBER: "Have you seen them?"] I have seen them. If that list is not impressive enough by itself I know that some people have sought to argue that the number of films does not necessarily show a great deal—the budget for the film and television activity here in 1983 was some £210 million, of which one third was funded from United Kingdom sources. That £210 million compares with £160 million in the previous year. There are two encouraging things about that—first, the United Kingdom percentage has been growing and, secondly, the growth has been not just among the major pictures but at all budget levels.

We have also seen some notable examples of fund-raising by companies for investment in films. Thorn EMI, one of our major production companies, is investing up to £25 million in new films this year. Goldcrest has recently been able to raise more than £20 million for investment in films. There are newcomers also. Virgin Records, diversifying into films as well as air travel, has produced some exciting new films. There was the impressive production of Orwell's "1984", although I have not yet had the benefit of seeing it.

The growth of the independent television sector, substantially stimulated by the work for Channel 4, has also given a boost to low-budget feature films. Channel 4 alone has invested some £8 million this year in independently made feature films. Estimates put the additional jobs in the London area alone at 4,000. Again, there is growing public interest in the British film industry because of the industry's own efforts to launch British Film Year next year, to which the Government are subscribing £250,000.

I know that people have been anxious about the tax changes that have been made, but I believe that there is evidence of a high level of activity. There have been some notable successes and with the market opening up there are increasing opportunities.

It would be wrong not to mention other sections of the industry. The number of commercial advertising films, for example, is about 3,000 a year, and an entirely new segment of the industry—pop videos—has shown strong growth and was worth about £10 million last year.

Another feature that has been much commented upon is the high quality of British films. Many commentators remarked on the outstanding quality of British films at Cannes this year, which enhanced our reputation in world markets. Other European countries may make more films, and although many of their films are doubtless of great merit, they have not all had the same international appeal or been on the same scale.

Overall, in our view, the industry is in a healthy enough state to take advantage of the increased opportunities that are becoming available through video, cable and DBS. These are massive changes, and they are not all so far away. DBS is due to start in 1987. These changes, which will open up the market for films, pose the problem as to whether we can create enough films, and cause me to refuse to believe that the future is bleak.

I believe that there are tremendous new opportunities. I do not think that with these growing sectors it is an appropriate response to say, "Levy everywhere. Take a growing and successful sector and impose a levy on it, to recycle money to an industry which will face growing markets and growing opportunities for its products."

For that reason, we started with the presumption that the time had come to sweep away the archaic legislative framework of the industry, under which my Department still registers every film for public exhibition and licences every distributor and every exhibitor showing registered films at a cinema. In my view, the modern industry will be better off without those tiresome bureaucratic restraints.

Another major consideration—I think that it is recognised by both sides of the House—has been the state of the cinema industry itself. In contrast to the general buoyancy of the production sector, cinemas have been in decline. For 30 years, there has been an almost unbroken decline in cinema admissions as social habits have changed and different forms of visual entertainment have entered the market—first television, then the video. In that period, annual admissions to cinemas have fallen from over 1·25 billion to about 66 million, and I regret that the figures for the first four months of 1984 show that admissions are down by 25 per cent. on the same period last year.

These are undoubtedly hard times for cinema proprietors, and cinemas continue to close at the rate of three or four a month. I think that it is widely accepted that that is a reason why we must take action to help the cinema industry. It is still important to the film industry. It is often in cinemas that a film makes its reputation. I very much hope that cinema is an industry that can thrive and survive, because the decline of cinema in this country has been very much greater than in other countries. Seeing films on the large screen is different from seeing them on the small screen. One wants that experience to continue. One motive for wanting to get rid of the levy is to help the cinema industry itself.

[Mr. Norman Lamont]

The levy has declined in importance as cinema has declined. Therefore, one should not exaggerate the importance of the levy to film producers. I am afraid to say, extrapolating forward from where we are, with cinema attendances where they are now and the further decline that is likely, that the significance of the levy to producers is not all that great.

It was against that background that we came to the conclusions announced in the White Paper. Our first and most important decision was that the Eady levy on cinema receipts must be ended. Introduced in the heyday of cinema, it was designed as a means of recycling money from a prosperous sector into the weaker British film production industry. Now the position has reversed: the levy has become a penalty for cinema owners. For too many of them, it represents the difference between survival and extinction. So the levy must go. It has always had an uncertain future. It has always been subject to renewal every five years. Now, in our view, it should go entirely.

As a consequence of getting rid of the levy, it is necessary to consider the future of the various bodies that depend to a greater or lesser extent on the proceeds of the levy. I am sure that Opposition Members will ask why we should interfere with institutions such as the National Film Finance Corporation. Once we had taken the step of deciding to get rid of the levy, the first body that we had to consider was the NFFC, because it has been dependent on the levy, which has been becoming dramatically less valuable. As the White Paper explained, we were impressed by those who argued that the work of the NFFC should be allowed to continue. I believe and genuinely hope that the arrangements now being discussed with the private sector will make that possible. I shall return to that point.

The other bodies that receive a share of the Eady levy are the National Film and Television School and the British Film Institute production board. The school is a highly respected institution that produces a steady stream of talented young people, well trained and skilled to fill professional places straight away, whether as technicians, directors or producers. The Government have negotiated agreements for the school to receive £600,000 a year for five years from a mixture of sources within both the film and television industries. This will be the first time that the British Broadcasting Corporation and the independent television companies have made a major contribution to that body, from which they receive such significant benefit. The new funding is limited to five years, but I hope that in due course further arrangements can be made.

Mr. Mark Fisher (Stoke-on-Trent, Central): Having secured a temporary financial future for the National Film and Television School, has the Minister also been able to secure the school's educational policy independence? Will he give the House an assurance that it will not become a television school in which the needs of the funding bodies predominate over the educational needs of the industry?

Mr. Lamont: I hope that that is so.

Mr. Fisher: Really?

Mr. Lamont: I shall address that point further. The hon. Gentleman and the House will understand if I say frankly that I have been looking after the industry for a mere six weeks, during which time, with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State being away, I have had many problems to occupy my mind. The film industry has been a significant problem.

The issue raised by the hon. Gentleman is important. It is the same as the issue raised by some people in relation to the NFFC, with its private shareholders. I think that we have found a way of getting the assurances that the hon. Gentleman wants, but I shall consider the matter and see whether there are ways in which we can tighten the arrangements to secure that independence.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith (Wealden): My hon. Friend mentioned the NFFC and the arrangements that are being made to help finance the new organisation that is to take its place. In the White Paper a sum is mentioned, but there is no mention of any sum in the Bill. Will my hon. Friend give an assurance that we can expect the new private organisation that is to be formed to be funded at least to the tune of £1·5 million?

Mr. Lamont: I shall deal with that point in some detail.

I should like to revert to the subject mentioned by the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher). I said that we had secured the funding for five years, which is a relatively long time. As I observed, in the past the Eady levy was limited to a lifetime of only five years at a time. I am glad to be able to tell the House that the Government intend to contribute up to £250,000 next year to improve the facilities of the school—that is, over and above the other sums of money that I mentioned.

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): With regard to the National Film and Television School, I welcome the agreement that the Government have been able to secure, as the school is in my constituency. It recognises the value of the work done at the school. However, I wonder whether there should be some reference to the agreement in the Bill. Will the future of the school be secure just on the basis of the White Paper, with no reference in the Bill?

Mr. Lamont: The agreement does not need to be covered by the Bill. The school has been the beneficiary of the proceeds of the levy but I think that I am right in saying that it is not specifically mentioned. However, I do not think that my hon. Friend needs to have any fears that the arrangements are other than secure—I believe that they are.

Mr. Bryan Gould (Dagenham): I was interested in what the Minister said about the film school. As he rightly says, other institutions are in the same position. Did I understand him to say that the Bill would be amended to take account of their position?

Mr. Lamont: No, I did not say that.

Mr. Gould: Is the school being closed down?

Mr. Lamont: The school is not being closed down; it is being secured with large sums of money, as the hon. Gentleman will know. I shall return to those points in a moment.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): I am grateful to the Minister for giving way, as he has been interrupted a great deal, but this is a vital point. He is doing away with the only guaranteed form of support for production in this country and is making no effort to

provide any alternative guarantee for exhibitors or producers, or indeed for the National Film and Television School. Where does the Bill state that funds will continue to be provided for those institutions?

Mr. Lamont: I have made it perfectly clear that the Bill does not provide any such guarantee.

The British Film Institute production board has also benefited from a small payment out of the Eady levy. We intend to make a normal grant of £125,000 to it from the Eady levy in the levy year 1984-85 and a special final supplement of £250,000.

The termination of the Eady levy will pave the way for the winding up of the public body which distributes the proceeds of the levy—the British Film Fund Agency. In addition, the way becomes clear to abolish the statutory advisory body — the Cinematograph Films Council — whose function in recent years has largely been to advise on regulatory matters.

Mrs. Dunwoody: What is to replace it?

Mr. Lamont: As the hon. Lady will recall, another body is to be set up, based on the interim action committee but on a wider basis. I was not party to the consultations, but I understand that there was a feeling that the Cinematograph Films Council was too circumscribed by statutory obligations and that a different more broadly based body was needed. We are in the process of considering that new body and I shall, of course, pay close attention to representations made by Members, by the industry and by other interested parties as to what its basis should be.

I wish to set out the main provisions of the Bill before dealing with the question raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson Smith).

Clause 1 repeals the Films Acts 1960 to 1980—six statutes in all. The first effect of this is the abolition of the quota system, which required cinemas to show a certain minimum proportion of British films. This protectionist measure was a feature of the original films legislation of 1927 and, like most measures of that kind, was never, in our view, a satisfactory means of ensuring the long-term health of the domestic industry. Because the system was both ineffective and irrelevant, the quota was suspended from January 1983.

Secondly, the repeal of the Films Acts brings to an end the requirement to register films for public exhibition and to have a licence for the distribution or exhibition of films. These provisions were originally designed to underpin the quota and to make it possible to police the scheme. I hasten to add that they had and have nothing to do with the moral or artistic values of the films in question. Since the 1950s, the registration system has also provided the basis for distributing the Eady levy to British film makers. More recently, it has also provided a means of identifying those films which qualify for tax purposes.

The third effect of repealing the Films Acts is to remove the restrictions on blind and advance booking. These were a prominent feature of the original Cinematograph Films Act 1927 and were designed to protect exhibitors from distributors who might otherwise oblige them to contract to take a film more than six months in advance or to take a film that had not been trade shown. Today these provisions seem paternalistic and outmoded in a world of international film festivals and trade fairs where cinema exhibitors are vying with the new video and cable markets to acquire saleable products. We have received virtually no representations for the retention of those restrictions, although I shall, of course, be interested to hear the views of the House and of other interested parties.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): Does the Minister agree that this is very much a re-run of the argument that we heard on the Cable and Broadcasting Bill? In taking away all protection from the British cinema industry in terms of distribution one opens the way for the American industry, with its vast resources, to flood and dominate the British distribution industry, to the great detriment of the British film industry.

Mr. Lamont: I recognise the hon. Gentleman's point, but I believe that the whole structure of the industry is changing. The duopoly of the market is changing and there are now new opportunities. I shall, of course, listen to what people have to say about this, but I have told the House what my views now are and what we have heard from the industry. One would have expected the film production industry to make that point if it felt that there was a serious threat, but I believe that it too feels that the market is changing.

Clause 2 is concerned with the Eady levy. Under the existing law the levy is due to terminate on 12 October next year. This clause makes it possible to terminate the levy earlier, but at the same time it provides a mechanism for ensuring that the National Film Finance Corporation is properly funded for the remainder of its existence and is thus able to continue its work. Power to dissolve the British Film Fund Agency already exists in the Film Levy Finance Act 1981 and it is our intention to do that as soon as the agency has completed its work.

Clause 3 deals with the NFFC. First, it enables the Secretary of State, with the approval of the Treasury, to dissolve the NFFC at any time after the Eady levy is terminated. Secondly, it provides that upon dissolution any of the corporation's property or rights may be vested in the Secretary of State, who may deal with them in such manner as he thinks fit for any purpose connected with the British film industry. I shall go on to describe more precisely the arrangements that we have in mind for the disposal of those assets, as that is an important aspect.

Mr. Clement Freud (Cambridgeshire, North-East): Is it any part of the Government's plan to persuade cinema owners to lower the price of seats once they no longer have to pay the Eady levy?

Mr. Lamont: That is clearly a matter for the cinema owners, and I should not anticipate what they are likely to do. The economics of their business is pretty difficult already and many cinemas need refurbishment and further investment. It is not for me to say, but I certainly do not predict that abolition of the levy will lead to a fall in seat prices. If the levy were not abolished, however, I believe that more cinemas would disappear even more quickly in view of the current difficult situation.

With regard to NFFC assets, the White Paper makes it clear that one of the assets—the NFFC's portfolio of rights and interests in films—will be made available to the son of NFFC, the successor body, but on the important condition that the company uses its best endeavours to encourage the production of British films.

Finally, clause 3 empowers the Secretary of State by order to repeal the National Film Finance Corporation Act 1981 when the NFFC has been dissolved.

[Mr. Lamont]

Clause 4 is particularly important. It contains the Secretary of State's new powers to give the industry direct financial assistance. This will take two forms. First, there is the provision of £1·5 million per year to the private successor to the NFFC for the purposes of co-financing film production. Secondly, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has said before, £500,000 per year will be set aside for project development work.

As the White Paper shows, we have been given assurances by three leading companies in the industry that they are prepared to contribute jointly £850,000 a year for three years to finance feature film production. The organisations concerned are Channel 4, Rank and Thorn-EMI. In addition, several member companies in the video sector, represented by the British Videogram Association, have shown interest in the new venture. The association expects that £250,000, possibly more, will be raised from an aggregate of smaller individual investments for at least three years and possibly for longer.

What is envisaged is that the three companies and the association's participating members will jointly invest in a new company. Details have yet to be settled, but I can say that neither those four organisations nor the Government wish the new company to be a closed shop. We all hope that other companies will be prepared to join in, and swell the volume of investment in British films.

I have heard concern expressed in some quarters that the new company will be dominated excessively by the interests of its principal shareholders, to the detriment, it is alleged, of the NFFC's traditional role. I take that anxiety seriously, and in Committee I will seriously consider whatever is said on that point.

Mr. John Gorst (Hendon, North): To those of us whose memories of the activities of the British film industry stretch back 20 years to the problems of British Lion, the scale of three years, to which my hon. Friend has referred, is a very short one in the history of the film industry. Is it not possible that assurances which appear to be binding may be of very little value if they are to last for only three years? Does my hon. Friend intend to introduce another films Bill in three years' time, perhaps, or his successor in six or seven years' time, as that appears to be the average length of time between Bills?

Mr. Lamont: The company will be a Companies Act company, and the three companies which are to invest in it will be shareholders in it. Having talked to those companies, I believe that they are serious about their long-term intentions. I believe that they want to continue the traditions of the National Film Finance Corporation and the work that it has done.

Mrs. Dunwoody: It is not clear why major companies should allow their money to be used to support independent productions, or offer seed money for new productions as the NFFC used to do. Surely they will have a vested interest in making sure that their own cash goes towards their own productions? Does the Minister intend to defend the position of the independent producers?

Mr. Lamont: I fear that I am giving way too often. I mentioned that I knew that the point was causing anxiety, but, before I could answer it, I courteously gave way. I take seriously the point about the independence of the NFFC. One thing that the companies will wish to do is to foster talent. It is in their interests to help people and to encourage young producers. They recognise that the NFFC has done a good job, and they want that tradition to be continued.

As concern has been expressed about whether the organisation will be over-commercial, I shall outline the arrangements to be made.

It is envisaged that the company will be run by a chief executive, who will be responsible for making investment decisions within broad guidelines laid down by the board. It is expected that the person to be appointed to the post of managing director of the NFFC will become the chief executive of the new company so that there will be some continuity and a smooth transition when the NFFC is dissolved. The Government have also made it clear that we wish to approve the appointment of the new company's chairman, and to appoint a Government nominee to the board.

None of these safeguards appears in the Bill, but the key provision is in clauses 3 and 4. It enables the Secretary of State to attach conditions both to the grant of money and to the loan of the NFFC's portfolio. The proposal to grant £7·5 million over five years is the Government's response to the industry's representations that the NFFC performs an essential role in encouraging new and relatively untried talent. Neither the Government nor the four private organisations wish to undermine that role. However, we think that by being rooted in the private sector the new company will bring a commercial edge to its operations.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Lamont: How could I refuse?

Mr. Faulds: Would the matter not be enormously simplified if the Government had had the sense to listen to representations made in all parts of the House that supervision of the film industry should be taken away from the Minister's Department, where it is a nuisance to everyone concerned, and given to a new cultural ministry? That suggestion was made by the Select Committee and by a number of other bodies, including myself. The film industry could be more responsibly run under a body analogous to the Arts Council. It could be dealt with at arm's length and given proper funding, and the appalling commercial risks involved in the hon. Gentleman's suggestions would not arise.

Mr. Lamont: With great respect, I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman. We are not talking about the art house sector of the industry. The appropriate part of the industry is already under the guidance of the Minister for the Arts. If the other part of the industry is to be successful, it must appeal to the market. There must be a commercial organisation, and that is nothing to be ashamed of. We want the industry to be commercially successful. That has been the aim of the Department of Trade and Industry for a long time.

There has also been criticism that, despite the Government's contribution, the funds available to the new company are inadequate to carry out its role of investing in low and medium-budget feature films—the riskiest end of a risky business. We hope that in due course the company will attract other sources of finance and that participants may extend their own commitment.

Mrs. Dunwoody *rose*——

Mr. Lamont: I have been generous in giving way. If the hon. Lady will listen, she may learn something that will enlighten her.

Mrs. Dunwoody: I am waiting.

Mr. Lamont: The hon. Lady must wait a little longer. She is not always easy to please, but what I have to say may please her.

We also propose to transfer to the new company the NFFC's portfolio of rights and interests in about 800 films made since the late 1940s. In the White Paper the portfolio of film rights was stated to have an income-generating capacity of upwards of £200,000 a year. That represents net profits. However, we have now decided that, in addition, repayments of principal and interest should also be made to the new company. These are estimated to bring the total value of the portfolio—at least for the crucial first two or three years—to some £600,000 a year. That will bring the total amount initially available to the new company for investment in film production to nearly £3·25 million a year. That is over twice the amount of money that used to be available.

However, that is not all. Leaving aside the portfolio, the NFFC's principal asset is a bank balance currently standing at about £5 million. Of that sum, only about £3·3 million is presently committed to future film production, and in due course film producers will claim against these forward commitments. Our intention is that when the NFFC's assets become vested in the Secretary of State after dissolution of the NFFC, we will transfer to the private company the liability to meet the NFFC's outstanding commitments, together with a sufficient sum to cover them.

The uncommitted remainder of the NFFC's assets is the industry's money, and by and large it will represent the unspent income from the annual Eady levy subventions.

I believe—I am sure that the House will agree—that the logical disposal of that sum is back to the British Film Fund Agency for distribution to British film-makers. That is likely to be a substantial boost to the final distribution.

The White Paper stated that we received many representations that the work of the national film development fund should be allowed to continue. Our response has been a new project development scheme of £500,000 a year for five years. The scheme will be operated as a specialised type of industry support scheme by my Department—with the assistance taking the form of loans repayable in certain circumstances. We intend to sub-contract the operation of the scheme as far as possible on an agency basis. This may be an activity that the successor to the NFFC will want to take on, or there might be other candidates.

I do not think that I need detain the House for long on the remaining provisions of the Bill. Clause 5 and schedule 1—

Mr. Jack Dormand (Easington): Will the Minister give way on a point concerning clause 4?

Mr. Lamont: I have dealt with clause 4. Clause 5 and schedule 1 are consequential upon the repeal of the existing films legislation. The schedule contains a mass of detail but it is largely a consolidation of existing provisions. However, it provides a definition of British films, which I know is a matter to which the industry attaches importance.

Clauses 6 and 7 deal with repeals, transitional provisions, and the short title, commencement and extent. The Bill is drafted to have immediate effect in respect of the power to end the Eady levy, and in respect of the regulatory provisions for licensing and registration. I know that the Bill falls short of the demands of some groups in the industry who advocate a return to the tax regimes of the past, or even direct subsidies, but we are concerned here with a commercial industry. We are not dealing with a sector that is deliberately targeted on minority interests. Like other branches of the arts, art films will no doubt continue to require special support, but the commercial film industry, like any other industry, is in the business of making products that will succeed or not according to whether there is a market for them.

I recognise that this is a high risk industry. Conventional wisdom is that of every 10 films made, seven make a loss, two break even and one makes a profit, but other industries involve high levels of risk and in films the rewards of success can be remarkable. If, as we believe, the British film industry is on the threshold of a strong commercial future, then—as *The Times* expressed it last week—the industry

"should certainly be thinking in terms of moving with the grain of the Government's policies to encourage enterprise and stimulate small businesses, instead of subconsciously pigeonholing itself as an art that needs support from the public purse".

In the long run, the film industry will be healthy and prosperous only if it is able to attract private investment on its own merits and if it is prepared to subject itself, like other industries, to the pressures of the market place.

I recognise that anxieties have been aroused by the changes and by the loss of capital allowances. I know that we shall hear about that from the Opposition today. However, I should take their attitude more seriously if they had permitted the Inland Revenue to allow the industry capital allowances when they were in office. I recognise the anxieties but, in the light of the concessions that the Treasury has made, I believe that they are unfounded. Opportunities are opening up and there are new and vastly growing demands for films. The problem will be whether we can generate enough films for the massive and numerous new markets.

Despite what we might hear from the Opposition, the Bill is not a tax Bill. It concerns arrangements for the levy and for the NFFC. Before the Opposition rush in to condemn it, I invite them to consider three things. First, the levy has been killing the cinema. We need to do something about that. Secondly, because the levy has fallen, cinema attendances have fallen. That has not done a great deal for film producers. Thirdly, with the levy gone, we have had to consider the future and status of the NFFC. I believe that the arrangements that we have come up with give twice as much money as before. That should be welcomed, as it will mean that there is more money to help with new films, new producers and smaller budget films.

We have recognised the special position of the NFFC. We have negotiated a means of continuing its work and are injecting Government money alongside private capital to get it off to a good start. If we include the film project development scheme, the new company will have nearly £3·75 million a year—far more than twice the income of the NFFC. In addition we are giving £250,000 to the National Film and Television School for new equipment. We are giving some money towards the industry's own

[Mr. Lamont]

initiative—British Film Year—and there are possibilities of further funding for that project's overseas dimension. The Bill is sweeping away, without delay, outdated restrictions, removing the burden of the Eady levy, and letting the film industry get on with its business. I therefore commend the Bill to the House.

4.35 pm

Mr. Bryan Gould (Dagenham): It is unusual, even for this Government, to introduce a measure that has received such a hostile reception from those whose interests it is meant to advance. Many of the most famous names in British cinema, including some of those whose achievements the Government seem most anxious to share vicariously, are mounting a campaign against the Bill because they are convinced that the very survival of their industry is at stake.

It is a sad commentary on the Government's reputation of intransigence that there is little realistic hope of Ministers listening to the virtually unanimous view of the industry. It is not so much that there is opposition to the Bill, although there is plenty to oppose in it. Rather there is anger, disappointment and frustration at what is not in it and at what is widely regarded as a missed opportunity.

In their White Paper, the Government began promisingly enough. They recounted the industry's achievements, the employment it provides and its overseas earnings. They also recognised that it has an important influence in our national life and internationally which is out of all proportion to its size. There is nothing wrong with the rhetoric, although it is somewhat muted. There is not the recognition of the cultural significance of film such as might be found in a French Government publication on the same subject, but it is the Minister's analysis, which he repeated today, rather than the rhetoric, that is defective.

The Government claim, and take as their starting point, the assertion that the industry is in good shape and that there are grounds for considerable optimism. That is not how it seems from within the industry. The number of British films made last year, which the Minister cited as evidence of recovery and strength, was slightly above the disastrous and record low of 27 in 1982. However, at only 34, it is still less than half the post-war average. It remains an indication of weakness rather than strength.

As the Minister conceded, cinema attendances have resumed their sharp decline this year. Moreover, the British market, including the much-touted opportunities in cable, video and direct broadcasting by satellite remain largely at the mercy of the American industry. All of this is blithely ignored by the Government who, as is so often the case, show a remarkable and insensitive talent for ignoring and disclaiming responsibility for bad news while trying to claim credit for the stray bits of good news. There are a couple of British Oscar-winning films and the Minister seizes on them as evidence that all is well but, faced with the reality of an industry whose lifeblood is slipping away, the Government turn a blind eye. At best, the only remedy they suggest is further blood-letting.

A more sober assessment of the state of the industry and therefore of the extent to which the Government must act to put things right must begin with the succession of blows that the industry has had to endure in the past year. First in importance was the loss of capital allowances as announced in this year's Budget. I think that the Minister recognises that. The loss was imposed despite a clear ministerial assurance that the allowances would be maintained for another five years. That is a breach of faith that will not incline the industry to place much value on ministerial assurances in future. The loss of those capital allowances leaves the British film industry, virtually uniquely in the western world, without any form of tax incentive for investment in it. Some people object to that form of incentive because it leads to films being made for tax avoidance reasons rather than for artistic reasons. That is true, but it is true of any fiscal regime designed to encourage any form of economic activity. Even the Opposition would prefer to see some form of investment incentive to ensure that money is forthcoming and that the film industry prospers rather than that the British film industry should wither away.

The loss of that powerful aid is hardly compensated for by the niggardly provision of public money, about which the Minister seems so proud. The Government propose to contribute only £10 million over five years. That is a pitiful sum, compared with that available to other art forms, such as the theatre, ballet, music and opera, and with what other countries feel able to provide. The Bill does not mention the Government's commitment on that point. Although the White Paper and the Minister's statement are welcome so far as they go, there will unfortunately be cynicism and scepticism because of what happened to past ministerial assurances. The House should remember that the £1·5 million which the Government propose to make available to the National Film Finance Corporation is enough to finance only one low-budget film a year.

The industry has finally lost the protection of the quota system, which at least guaranteed to the British industry a proportion of the British market and some protection against the flood of American imports. There is to be no limit on imports. It is true that the Bill still provides, faithfully enough, a definition of a British film. I do not know why anyone should believe that that matters because, with the abolition of the Eady levy and the loss of capital allowances, there is little point even in attempting to define a British film.

The Bill delivers yet another blow. It arises not from the abolition of the Eady levy — all hon. Members accept that that is inevitable—but from the failure to provide an effective mechanism with which to replace it. A mechanism to redistribute the resources produced by the film industry as a whole, so that a proportion of its enormous earnings is fed back to the film-makers, remains of desperate urgency and need.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The hon. Gentleman will not wish to exaggerate his case. A definition of a British film is necessary for tax purposes because there are concessions on British films.

Mr. Gould: Unfortunately, by the time British investors take advantage of those alleged incentives, they will be of little interest or use to them. No one in the industry believes that what remains will be of any value.

No one disputes that the principle of a redistribution of resources remains of great importance. During its declining days the Eady levy was inadequate to fulfil that purpose, but the principle of redistribution remains valid and is recognised in the practices of many foreign

countries, especially those in western Europe. True to form, the Government have thrown out the redistribution baby with the levy bath water.

If cinema audiences are no longer large enough to provide the necessary revenue, it becomes of cardinal importance that some recourse should be had to the modern equivalent of those once vast cinema audiences. We must now look to those billions of occasions when people watch films on a small screen—on television or on a video recorder.

The Select Committee and the industry recommended that an attempt to tap that huge audience was the remedy. Yet the Government do not mention it. They appear to reject it out of hand. The Opposition, however, believe that there is much to be said for some such mechanism. We do not commit ourselves to the technical or mechanical detail of a precise proposal—for example, the charge made on television companies or the levy on blank cassettes or pre-recorded videos — but there are possibilities worth considering. We believe that some means can and should be found to require television companies and video firms, who depend heavily on the output of the film industry and who pay such a small price for what they obtain, to pay a real return to the film-makers. The industry as a whole will be profoundly disappointed by the Government's cavalier dismissal of those ideas.

Mr. Roger Gale (Thanet, North): Will the hon. Gentleman consider the possibility that if the craft unions in the television industry were to lift their restrictive practices and control their in-house production, the greatest possible stimulus to independent production would be for the big television companies and the British Broadcasting Corporation to invest in small independent productions?

Mr. Gould: The hon. Gentleman will undoubtedly develop that argument when he speaks to the House later, as I hope he will. We are considering the responsibilities of the Government, who claim to guarantee the future of the film industry through the Bill. However, in failing to provide a buoyant recycled form of revenue to the industry, they are condemning it to penury and to withering away.

I now follow the point made by the hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Freud). It is to be hoped —I am sorry that the Minister did not mention this— that cinema proprietors will not be permitted simply to swallow the advantage that they gain from the abolition of the Eady levy, and that the money saved will be spent on improving cinemas. An enormous amount can be done in that area. The beneficial consequences for the industry are equally large, as the French experience graphically shows.

The final blow to the industry, which must be added to the loss of capital allowances, the loss of the protection offered by the quota system, the inadequacy of public money being provided and the failure to provide replacement for the Eady levy, is the abolition of the National Film Finance Corporation. That, in the view of the industry and the Opposition, is final evidence that the Government are prepared to wash their hands of the industry. The Government recognise that the NFFC has done valuable work. But in their anxiety to share in the glory of Oscars for "Chariots of Fire" and "Gandhi", Ministers overlooked both David Puttnam's and Richard Attenborough's publicly expressed debt of gratitude to the NFFC and their statements that they could not have made progress without its help. The Government's verbal tributes to it in the White Paper are not enough.

Despite the NFFC's handicap of admittedly inadequate resources, it has met over the years met a particular need in providing seedcorn finance for low to middle-budget films. In sweeping it away, the Government have left a gaping hole in the ability of the British industry to raise finance crucially needed if the industry is to survive. The Minister may say that the Government have made all kinds of complex arrangements to take care of that, but what the Minister described today falls short of being adequate.

It is astonishing that the Government will donate the NFFC's assets to a private company. Those assets were financed by the Eady levy, and belong to the industry, yet the income from them is to be handed over to a private company. The recipient of that munificence by the Government, the private company, will be committed only to its own short-term commercial and financial involvement. Most worrying, it will operate commercially and serve its own immediate interests. It will be suspected, unless the independence of its decision-making is guaranteed by statute or in some other way, that its decisions will reflect its own commercial interests. If, after three years, those interests should suggest a termination of its involvement in film finance, even the reudimentary and unsatisfactory mechanism provided by the Government will, one assumes, disappear.

Mr. Gorst: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would allow me to underline his point by reminding the House that when, 20 years ago, the Government withdrew from British Lion, a special share was created to protect the Government's investment. However, when the company fell on hard times and was sold through the market, the special shareholding, or special condition, was withdrawn because the Government of the day regarded it as impractical to implement. That experience must endorse the hon. Gentleman's point that one cannot have much faith in what happened previously not happening again.

Mr. Gould: The hon. Gentleman has reinforced my point with the benefit of his experience of such matters. He also reinforces the urgent need for hon. Members on both sides of the House to scrutinise carefully the provisions proposed by the Government. In Committee, we shall certainly examine the Bill with great interest to see what mechanisms the Government will introduce to deal with the problem the hon. Gentleman mentioned.

The sorry picture of the withdrawal of Government interest, support and commitment from a major industry —perhaps not so much major in the economic sense, but certainly in the wider cultural sense— is in sharp contrast to the experience of many other countries. No one who studies the range of Government aids made available in many countries, not just those with film industries but those which aspire to have film industries, can fail to be impressed by their efforts and the importance which they attach to their film industries. It makes a sorry contrast with the parsimony of our Government.

To take just a handful of examples—one could cite dozens—in Australia, apart from the tax incentives that are found in almost every film-making country but that are signally lacking here, the federal Government contribute by way of grants and loans the equivalent of £50 million

[Mr. Gould]

a year. The Brazilian Government — one does not automatically think of Brazil as a film-making country —provide much protection to their film industry through import quotas and restrictions. France, following a pattern established throughout western Europe, manages through incentives, grants, subsidies and levies to give about £35 million worth of help to its film industry. From Pakistan to the Philippines, and from New Zealand to Norway, Governments are involved in promoting their film industries. Even in private enterprise America, the federal Government make available a generous tax incentive scheme and the state Governments provide equally generous incentives.

The industry and the Opposition are forced to ask whether it is possible that all those countries have got it wrong. Or is Britain alone in believing that it is desirable and practicable to expect a film industry to flourish with almost no Government help?

Mr. Faulds: My hon. Friend has cited, rightly, the fact that many other countries more sensibly and properly fund their film industries. But do not all of the examples that he mentioned have the additional defence that they do not share a language with the United States of America?

Mr. Gould: My hon. Friend is right. That is the usually unstated but fundamental factor that makes our position more precarious and difficult than that of almost any film-making country.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The hon. Gentleman must recognise that that factor gives us great opportunities and advantages. There is demand for 150 English language films a year, so we have more outlets and more opportunities. Many British films have been internationally successful because they are in English. It is extraordinary that, at a time when the media are opening up, when Channel 4 provides £8·8 million a year for new films, with DBS to arrive in 1987, and with the liberalisation of the American market—with the result that many British films have been successful there—the hon. Gentleman's instinctive solution is to levy films and transfer the money back. Why cannot British film-makers produce films for that market, as they have done successfully in many instances?

Mr. Gould: I am glad to offer the hon. Gentleman the opportunity to remedy the deficiencies in his opening speech. The fact remains that when we ask whether we are right and everyone else is wrong—that is the issue when we compare our practice with that of our foreign competitors—I have no hesitation in answering that the Government have got it wrong. They got it wrong for a familiar reason: as with so many other issues, they have succumbed to their own propaganda. They believe that by privatising the industry they will release market forces that will enable it to prosper. That is the real answer to the Minister's point. The problem with his naive view is that nothing even remotely resembling a free market exists for the British film industry. That was the overwhelming conclusion of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission when it examined the industry. The commission discovered that three distributor companies dominated film distribution; that two major concerns enjoyed almost a duopoly of outlets; and that there was almost a duopoly in television.

The overwhelming consensus of those who know, understand and fear for the future of the British film industry is that, under the influence of those monopolistic pressures, and despite the optimistic and facile noises made by the Minister, the market is rigged in such a way as to be almost impossible to resist. It is rigged in favour of the major American film-makers, who alone have the resources, distribution and exhibition arrangements, and consequently the guaranteed market opportunities, to be able to survive in what everyone accepts is a highly speculative industry. I warn the Minister that to leave matters to the market, as he and the Government intend, is simply to abandon the British film industry and to surrender the British film market to the American industry.

Despite their protestations, the Government know this to be true in their heart of hearts. If they truly believed——

Mr. Bermingham: Does my hon. Friend agree that the proof of the pudding is already in the eating in that, in 1983, Britain made 34 major feature films, the Germans made 131 and the French made about 70? If the Government remove their support, what chance is there for competition in the future?

Mr. Gould: My hon. Friend is right. I accept that quantity is not everything and that quality counts, but it helps a little if an industry can make 70 or 100 films a year rather than about 10 films a year on a declining trend.

The Government know that, in the end, market forces will not save the British film industry. If they believed that, why are they still legislating for the industry? They know that if they said, "No more Government involvement, no more help, no recycling—let those who wish to make films commercially do so," that would be the end of the British film industry. We are left with a damaging compromise between the Government's commitment to an ideological position and what at heart they are compelled to accept is needed in practice.

The Government and the industry must make a determined and concerted effort if the industry is to have a future. It cannot survive on the strength of the odd one-off success. It needs a proper fiscal climate, a long-term guarantee of public funding and a buoyant source of recirculating revenue if investors are to take the risk of trying to match their commercial judgment to artistic imaginations and to popular fashions.

The Bill comes from a Government who manifestly know little of the film industry and who care even less. It is understandable and only to be expected that those who claim to be a business man's Government should undervalue creative achievement and misjudge the importance of the film industry to our cultural life and to the image of Britain abroad. It is also understandable that a Government who have seen so much of British industry decimated should apparently be content to envisage a future for the British film industry as a sort of minor provider of services to a dominant American industry. Even that future depends on the continuing strength of the dollar.

It is understandable that a business man's Government urge us to reconcile ourselves to a cultural and commercial surrender to the Americans, but it is less to be expected that as business men Ministers should so hopelessly have misjudged the commercial conditions needed to guarantee survival, let alone success.

These failures of commercial judgment and cultural awareness, which vitiate the Bill, demand that we, in common with most people in the industry, will oppose the measure this evening.

5 pm

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith (Wealden): As we would expect, the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) made a powerful speech which reflected the criticisms of those who live and work in the industry, but in my judgment he exaggerated — no doubt for his own purposes — the Government's position. His criticism would be substantiated if one were able to say, "The Government are handing over completely the future of the British film industry to the forces of the market place dominated by the United States." From what he said, one would not gather that the financial support forthcoming from public funds in the next few years is considerably larger than that of the past few years, when from rock bottom the industry seems to have improved its fortunes at almost every level.

The problems of the film industry must be looked at in two contexts—that of our tax structure and that of the change in the structure of the market place for films. I shall not weary the House by regurgitating the Chancellor's arguments for believing that the phasing out of capital allowances and reducing corporation tax is favourable for all British industry. I believe that his strategy is absolutely right, and we run into tremendous dangers if we accept that somehow the film industry is so unusual that it must be given a totally privileged position.

That is particularly so in view of the track record of this industry, whereby tax allowances of different kinds have been exploited by overseas interests, principally from the United States. In no way will there be stability if the British film industry is subjected to the whims of American finance because we have provided a tax structure which makes it possible for people to come in and out of the industry who have not the slightest interest in British or any other form of film making.

Mr. Freud: If the hon. Gentleman feels that the abolition of capital allowances is absolutely right, will he condemn the Financial Secretary for announcing an extension of capital allowances for the film industry and then going back on his word?

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: I do not condemn that. We all know the history of this matter and are aware that the phasing out will take place in 1986 rather than 1987. The Minister has suggested that other things should replace capital allowances, but I do not want to go into the detail of those. The hon. Gentleman may consider that these are inadequate, but they are an attempt to meet the concerns of the industry. Included in these new arrangements is the business expansion scheme, which will be opened up to the small and medium sized film-makers who feel particularly aggrieved. Incidentally, no one in the movie industry had anything to do with the business expansion scheme, because the industry was not included. I wonder how many producers and directors know how the scheme works. Have they tried it? However, both the Bill and the Treasury ask them to consider a new climate.

Mr. Gorst: My hon. Friend was somewhat scathing about American-financed British films, but the second paragraph of the White Paper on which the Bill is based pays enormous tribute to the success of "Gandhi" and "Chariots of Fire". "Chariots of Fire" was financed from the United States and "Gandhi" received a third of its finance from Indian sources and a third from American sources. However, all the kudos was taken by the Government.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his intervention. I do not wish to denigrate those who have helped to provide finance, be it from the United States, India or elsewhere. I accept that in terms of talent as well as money, various people in the United States have made a tremendous contribution to what we sometimes regard as the British film industry. I do not always accept that anything made here is wholly British, because an increasing number of people believe that film production can reflect a national culture without the necessity of a film being made only by people of that particular nationality. My hon. Friend will recognise that the opportunity to exploit tax shelters as a result of previous legislation was taken by people from the United States. That was rightly stopped.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: I do not want to do so because many other hon. Members wish to speak, and no doubt the hon. Lady will catch the eye of the Chair. I am making the obvious point that the tax structure regime had to be changed.

That is not to say that the Bill is perfect. We must ensure that money invested in British industry is used satisfactorily. As some of the money for the new company which is to replace the NFFC will continue to be financed from the Eady levy, it is not unreasonable that those who help to create the revenue should have some say in how it should be spent.

There is a suspicion that the organisations concerned with the successor to the NFFC will not act impartially but will have regard to their own interests rather than the interests of the small or medium sized producer. The British Film and Television Producers Association has suggested that it should be consulted from time to time on how the money should be spent. That would be courteous, if nothing else.

The Minister must be aware of the concern expressed about future moneys for the industry. We recognise that the Government have agreed to make subventions which are an improvement on the past. I welcome that. There is, however, an anxiety about what happens after the commitment runs out. Will the British film industry survive? Can it survive when we know that in one way or another other countries have some form of public funding? If the lessons of the past are to be learnt, both here and elsewhere, in the not too distant future the Government will have to make it clear that they are willing to have a discussion on funding to replace the loss of funds from the Eady levy.

It may be that revenue could come from a levy on blank video or audio tapes. I do not want to nail my flag to the mast by saying that that is the only way it can be done. That idea has plenty of advocates and some critics. I should declare an interest as a non-executive director of London Weekend Television, but I shall not advocate that the excessive burden should be borne by television

[Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith]

companies. They already have problems of increased competition and the prospect of deciding whether to form part of the development of direct broadcasting by satellite.

The Government expect such things to be financed privately, but direct broadcasting by satellite requires substantial investment and it will be many years before a return is seen on that money. Any television company that is asked to consider direct broadcasting by satellite and at the same time to finance generously the British film industry will have to reflect carefully. It is not for me to suggest that they would be ungenerous if they were cautious.

There is a problem about future finance once Government commitments begin to run out. It is completely unfair that so many other interests which benefit from the British film industry should not be asked to consider some way of financing it. That is one of the main points that have been made so far.

I recognise that we are dealing with the commercial market today. It is right to help restructure the industry in the way that has been advocated by the Government. It is also right to take a much more robust approach. But I recognise that there are those in the production of films who are not in the business just for art but who straddle the borderline between minority interests and art. They can, if given a fair wind, and good judgment, make a profit, but they may not. It is in that area that so often we find the film reflecting some of the more cultural aspects of the film-making world.

I want to make a small suggestion, but one which could be of value. Nothing is more difficult for someone in the film industry, who is inexperienced about how such things are managed despite being good at film making, than to set up a project. Nothing is more valuable than that the national film development fund should be better secured. I may be speaking on behalf of a vested interest as a governor of the British Film Institute and therefore my advice cannot be regarded as being as impartial as it should be. The British film industry believes that the future of the film development fund might be better secured if it were attached to a body that is already engaged in project evaluation and development—the British Film Institute's production board. That was the source of such notable achievements and cheap budget films as "The Draughtsman's Contract" and the recent Berlin prize-winner "Ascendancy". The board is not in the film business to make films that will be seen by a few without caring whether any money is made. It hopes that costs will be covered and that the films will find a commercial audience.

My hon. Friend the Minister will be aware that the film development fund has just the sort of activities which recognise the problem to which I have drawn his attention this afternoon. It is to provide finance for the earliest stages in the creation of a film—the preparation of the screenplay, the assembly of the nucleus of a production team, and other such detailed matters. Rather than create another quango, why not pass that responsibility over to an organisation which is highly respected on all sides of the film industry?

I agree with my hon. Friend the Minister on the prospects for the British film industry. One of the problems that beset those who work in the industry—or some of them—is that they like the crutches, however meagre, that they have had. They fear that they are going to lose them altogether, rather than, as I have said, that in the short term they will receive greater support.

However, there is natural anxiety about the longer term. I suspect that the industry is wanting more help than is desirable for its own health and independence.

Films are still made in a remarkably old-fashioned way. Why does not the industry look more to its own house and see how far it can reflect the changes that I have mentioned? For example, too many productions are still treated as new projects. Individuals get together, form a company, get the talent and make a film. That company is then dissolved or put on a back burner. Then along comes another idea and a new company is formed. There is no continuity.

Mr. Tim Brinton (Gravesham) *rose*——

Sir Geoffrey Johnson-Smith: I would rather not give way if my hon. Friend does not mind.

The market has changed. The gap between television and film production has narrowed enormously. For those who want to get into film production, there is a market not just in the prestige cinemas or the small cinemas in the country and the smaller towns; there is also the video tape market and the terrestrial television market, followed soon by the DBS and cable markets. With those multiple outlets, not just because of Channel 4, there has surely never been a better opportunity for the small budget film. Surely the blockbuster film also provides a great opportunity, assuming that it provides value for money and is not just wasteful because of restrictive practices or the overblown ideas of some egocentric movie mogul.

If the industry will consider such opportunities and put its house in order, providing the Government respond in the longer term and give the assurance that something will replace the Eady levy, I am sure that the film industry will thrive.

5.17 pm

Mr. Clement Freud (Cambridgeshire, North-East): I begin by complimenting the Minister on presenting what is a pretty unreasonable Bill in a reasonable manner. We all appreciate the stress under which his Department has been placed with the absence through illness of the Secretary of State. I think I speak for all hon. Members when I say that we wish the right hon. Gentleman well and we hope for his early return.

If one were pushed to find the most blatant illogicality in the Minister's argument it was when he said that the Eady money was of little consequence to the film industry and then prided himself on basing his aid on the Eady contribution. Essentially, my argument is that the Government are introducing a half-baked measure which fails to pursue the logic of their argument and thus contains potentially fatal misunderstandings of the structure of the film industry in both organisational and financial terms.

The prediction of health is based on one or two signs announcing the all-clear and the prosperity of the film industry. They are the success of "Gandhi" and the use of British expertise and studios by American film-makers. That is a completely incorrect diagnosis. Both the phenomena are specific to one point in time. It is generally acknowledged that "Gandhi"—we take it as epitomising the Goldcrest phenomenon—was the product of a short period of capital allowances that came to an end with the

1984 Budget. On the other hand, the presence of the United States is largely, if not wholly, a product of the exchange rate now prevailing.

An analogy can be drawn with the deregulation of buses. The Government are using the experience of the coach service following its privatisation to make a claim about the advantages of deregulation per se. As in the case of the bus industry, the experiences are specific. It is wrong to base a whole policy—if "policy" is the right word for what the Government are doing — on that model. Many film people now attest to the fact that Goldcrest will be all right under the new system but accept that it would have found starting out difficult, if not impossible, and that other film-makers do not have its track record and thus will be unable to attract the same financial backing. The Government are trying to create a summer out of one miserable, underfed swallow.

The film industry has also suffered from financial uncertainty. As I have said, the capital allowances were extended only to film stocks in 1979. The industry thought that they would remain until 1987. It should not be forgotten that half the money for "Chariots of Fire" came from City investors. Between 25 and 33 per cent. of the total Goldcrest money came from tax advantages that no longer exist. To speak of the prosperity of the film industry when the Government have taken away the infrastructure is plumb wrong. The Chancellor of the Exchequer has removed the source of finance. The British Film and Television Producers Association says:

"The Association was deeply shocked by the 1984 budget proposals for the abolition of Capital Allowances in the face of pledges made for their continuation."

The White Paper claims great generosity in the Finance Act 1984, which allows for expenditure to be written off on a "cost recovery" basis, yet according to BFTPA that is really only the status quo ante.

There are also problems with relying on the business expansion scheme. We welcome that scheme, but I understand that it is for continuing trade and not for one-off investments. Under the previous allowance scheme, it was much easier to find one company to put up a substantial sum of money than it is to find money under the business expansion scheme, which has a ceiling of £40,000. The National Film Finance Corporation Act dates only from 1981 and the Film Levy Finance Act also dates from that year. Under those two Acts, which ended Government funding to the NFFC, the first subvention on the Eady money was a constant £1·5 million.

It could be argued that the Bill will only stave off the next bout of uncertainty, since its condition for contributing to the reconstituted NFFC is a five-year commitment. There is one additional point to be made about uncertainty. It has been suggested that tax allowances should be held back until the Budget. However, that is another example of taking things in isolation, to which I shall refer later.

The new body will receive funds from private and public sources, which will amount to about £3 million, or twice the amount currently available to it. That means that the Government are funding at twice the pathetic level while at the same time claiming a great future. But doubling an inadequate sum does not make it adequate. It is widely known that the Eady levy has fallen to less and less. Can it really herald the new dawn of the film industry if we wait until the amount is totally inadequate, double it and then say that we have solved the problem?

In 1984, the cost of one low-budget film is about £1·5 million. The Association of Independent Producers wants the new body to be able to produce 10 to 12 features and six short films per year. Yesterday, I returned from a Commonwealth Parliamentary Association visit to Australia specifically so that I could speak in this debate. The Australian Film Commission has certified 28 films to start production during 1984 and 19 of them will be completed by next May.

The hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) gave us a world tour of film production. However, he did not mention Ecuador. Even there, about 12 producers can make short films each year with state help. In the debate on the White Paper, I described the new body as a pigmy that had been established to replace a dwarf. I do not take that back. With the abolition of capital allowances in the 1984 Budget, Britain has become the only major country not to give tax concessions to those who invest in the domestic film industry. Even countries such as Ecuador have a finance system for short films. Cinemas pay a 27 per cent. municipal tax but claim back 22 per cent. of it as a rebate. Even that would be better than the Minister's inadequate suggestions. The money paid goes to either the House of Culture or the Association of Journalists. Other countries not only provide the cash but do so with a range of imagination that should be an object lesson to the Department of Trade and Industry.

In France, total Government support was worth £21·43 million in 1983, which represented 3·8 per cent. of the cultural budget and 0·03 per cent. of the total budget. Short films are eligible for a "quality" label and features that are shown with such shorts receive an extra 8 per cent. entitlement to an interest-free advance. Thus there is cross-fertilisation between support policies. Those quality shorts can compete for the title "quality premium", which means that the director then receives 10 per cent. of the prize money.

In Canada, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation is pledged to ensure that over a five-year period 50 per cent. of its network programmes, excluding sport, news and current affairs, comes from independent producers. Indeed, 80 per cent. of peak-hour national network material is Canadian in content. In Italy, the film industry has some problems, but an "umbrella" Bill has just been introduced by the umbrella Minister for entertainment. This year there will be a 180 billion lire contribution. I realise I am speaking in multi-telephone numbers, so I should point out that that is $95 million. Again, that is a very substantial contribution.

It used to be said that the difference between Australia and yogurt was that one contained a living culture. But that joke is no longer true. Australia has, perhaps, the most comprehensive and effective system of tax incentives. The Australian Film Commission was created out of earlier bodies in 1975. Its remit was to establish a viable film and television industry. In my view, the two are indivisible. In 1983-84, a budget of $14 million could be given to "qualifying Australian films"—films in which most of the action is by Australians in the form of cash, loans or investment and could constitute up to 50 per cent. of the film's budget. In addition, taxpayers can claim up to 133 per cent. of the sum invested as a concession on their personal incomes.

We should like to see something like that in Britain. There is no doubt that capital allowances or tax concessions encourage film production. As the Minister

[Mr. Clement Freud]

said, Richard Branson has gone from the record business into the aircraft business and now into the film industry, and he said that the abolition of capital allowances would probably drive him to make his films with foreign associates in countries with depreciation allowances. That is what the Bill is likely to do to the industry.

The new British film industry, as outlined by the Minister, will not be competing on equal terms. All the Government talk of the value of competition appears ironic when they effectively penalise our runners and give their competitors a start in the race. To sum up the financial brunt of my argument, we need new sources of finance and a concessionary tax structure.

The Government are wrong to view film production in virtual isolation as regards administration and organisation. Effectively, they are saying that they do not understand the structure of the media or the shape of the leisure industry. There is a lack of integration. They have a muddled view of the subject for legislation—in which context they are unlikely in theory, as the Bill shows in practice, to get things right. Cinema films must be seen as a corporate entity with television, cable, video and DBS as part of the same structure.

The reason for that is that the place where people see films has changed. It used to be in the cinema, but it is now in the home. The market for films has not disappeared, although that is why the Eady levy has been decimated. According to the British Videogram Association, by the end of 1983 26 per cent. of all homes had a video recorder —that is more than 5 million machines. By the end of 1984, the figure will be almost 6 million. A total of 70 per cent. of the material recorded from television are feature films. There is an appetite which is being satisfied at home.

Film viewing has dominated much of television, so there is a market for film production. The next step is to connect the production to the exhibition.

The White Paper acknowledges that, in the past, British films and televison have tended to operate in isolation, especially compared with the United States. That is now changing. The report by Christopher Price states:

"In comparing our film and television industries with experience elsewhere in the world, it is noticeable how the two arms of the moving image business have not directly collaborated in providing domestic television services in this country . . . There are signs that the gap between film and television is being closed . . . it may well be that this interface of films and television is where the key to much of the film production industry's future is to be found."

I do not believe that the Bill operates within that framework.

Film, as we saw, provides the most popular material on video. Its supply will falter once the big films take a larger proportion of a smaller ammount of production money. It has been suggested that the abolition of capital allowances will hit the medium budget films hardest—films like "Another Country" and "Cal". Big epics will still receive backing; it is the small and experimental films, for which we are so renowned and which we have produced with such success, that will fall.

The secondary market of the TV screen could be the stimulus to a flourishing and indigenous film industry—as, indeed, it could be said largely to explain the demise of the cinema industry in the 1950s and 1960s. Showing a new film in a smart cinema could be the promotion for the sale of that film for television and video. David Puttnam drew an analogy with the rock music business where it was the pattern to subsidise live performances to stimulate sales of the album. I believe that the cinema will promote the film and the costs will be recouped in other ways.

As we saw in other countries, there is scope for imaginative integration. The hon. Member for Dagenham was quite right to ask the Minister why, if all those other countries subsidise their film industries, we cannot do so when we have such expertise.

We must remember that British television is so much better than United States television. Therefore, it does not seem wholly impossible that we should have the sort of linkage that I have described. The Government recognise the relationship. They will tell us that Channel 4 is putting up £8 million to commission films and that the television companies have contributed about half of the money for the new NFFC. But their logic stops there, and they do not appear to understand the implications.

We need an organisation with one ministerial responsibility, a levy on video tapes and, perhaps, some new form of film authority or corporation to oversee the finance of film making. The proposed replacement for the NFFC is, in this context, only half of what is needed.

I wish to elaborate on those three suggestions. We must have one ministerial authority. Currently, responsibility is split between the Department of Education and Science, the Department of Industry, the Treasury, the Home Office and the Minister responsible for the Arts. Liberal party policy, and the recommendation of the Select Committee dealing with the public and private funding of the arts is that there should be an umbrella ministry that could co-ordinate activity and push the arts into political prominence. The Liberal party suggested that it should be called the Ministry of Culture. It is not an attractive name, but the concept is absolutely right. In the present circumstances, it is hardly surprising that film policy and film-makers seem confused and appear to receive contradictory signals from different sources.

There should be a levy on video tapes, either blank or both blank and pre-recorded. I was deeply opposed to that suggestion for a long time. Having looked at the Performing Right Society, I realised what an astonishingly large sum of money was spent in administration and policing. A tax on blank video tapes of 40p a tape, which would go straight to the new authority, would raise about £14 million or £15 million, and is an appropriate way to proceed. The alternative is that a tax should be paid by those who watch films on television. I am not sure that we could find a reasonable way to implement that. The Committee's recommendation was based on how much is lost to the industry as a result of home taping and on considerations of money. I am sure that we shall discuss that at great length in Committee.

A new film authority was envisaged not by the Select Committee but by the interim acting committee chaired by Lord Wilson. The Association of Independent Producers, among others, wants that. It would have much clearer powers than the proposed new NFFC and, with a levy, would have real financial clout. Indeed, it would be rather similar to the Arts Council.

It is unusual for such a Bill to have no support from anyone remotely connected with the film industry. I hope that the Minister will bear in mind that the industry is almost wholly united against the Bill, with the exception

of one executive from EMI who said that he had not read it properly but did not think that there was much wrong with it.

I want to quote from Mr. James G. Lee, speaking to the Education, Science and Arts Committee. He said:

"The British are actually rather good at making good films and good television. Furthermore the country has a natural competitive advantage. It is an unfortunate fact of life that few other sectors of the economy have such natural resources and natural advantages. It is a tragedy that the potential of this industry has not been fully recognised by those in a position to promote the changes that are required."

5.40 pm

Mr. John Gorst (Hendon, North): As I have shown in one or two interventions, I have been following the fortunes—if that is the way to describe it—of the film industry for a good many years. However, having attended many funerals of the British film industry, this is the first occasion on which I have attended its re-birth. At least, that would be my interpretation of the optimistic picture that was painted by my hon. Friend the Minister of State in his opening speech.

As I listened to the speeches of the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould), my hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson Smith) and the hon. Member for Ely (Mr. Freud), it seemed to me that, if we exclude the Government, we are almost conducting an all-party debate. I cannot speak for all my hon. Friends because they have not declared their position, but it seems that there is an enormous measure of agreement in all parts of the House.

I would include my hon. Friend the Minister when I say that I think we are all completely at one about the ends that we want to achieve. I think that we are all in agreement about the diagnosis of what is necessary, but we are less close in prescribing from the diagnosis and deciding what needs to be done.

Before offering my suggestions, I should like to make one general observation about the important difference between industry in general and what is called "the film industry" in particular. Industry develops a product with research and development. It makes pre-production models. It does market research. Perhaps, as a result of that, it modifies the product. Then it does trial runs. Finally, it manufactures, advertises and sells the product. That is what we understand as manufacturing.

The film industry is quite different. It has an idea. Then it lavishes waves of creative talent on that idea. It embellishes it with the reputations of countless other talents — some celebrated and others perhaps entirely unknown. After a process combining cajolery, flattery, persuasion and exhortation, it raises funds of a size and enormity that would make Chancellors of the Exchequer and Secretaries of State blanch.

A product is ultimately launched upon an astonished, delighted and — if the industry is lucky — spendthrift public. For a few halcyon weeks or months, the film makers are in business and then, like Shakespeare's "poor player", they are heard no more. That is not the typical process that we understand as industry. In short, the film industry creates and sells a prototype—a one-off. Every production — even when there are imitations of successful films—is one-off; it is unique.

The film industry—if I can call it an industry—not only defies the norms of orthodox accountancy; it defies the nostrums of orthodox monetarism. I should like the Minister to take particular note of that. We are not dealing with an industry in the typical and generally accepted sense of that word. It is necessary to establish those essential differences between industry and the film industry before we even attempt to extrapolate the largely irrelevant lessons of monetarism, political dogma, or the latest received wisdom of economic theory. The achievement of the ends that Governments, film industry and film audiences all desire lies outside that narrow thinking and interpretation of the film industry's needs.

Before considering the correct solution, I think it is sensible to consider for a moment — as other hon. Members have done—what happens in other countries. Do other countries perceive their film industries to be different in kind from other industrial activities?

I have a list—other hon. Members may well have received it — of over 30 film-making countries. It excludes the United States and all the iron curtain countries. All the countries on that list, from Venezuela to Jamaica, from France to India, from Malaysia to Mexico, support the making of large or short films from Government-financed sources. All those countries understand that "the film" explains, promotes and enhances their culture and their way of life. Therefore, it also improves their economic prospects in a world that is inexorably becoming more and more uniform. That is why they put Government money into the film industry.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Will the hon. Member agree that one of the reasons for the strange discrepancy between our film industry and those abroad is that we still seem to regard the film industry as essentially producing entertainment, making no great cultural contribution?

Mr. Gorst: I concede that that is a factor and I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for pointing it out.

I have also noticed from the list to which I referred that, apart from Israel, which has merely discontinued the awarding of a small annual prize, every other country except the United Kingdom is maintaining, although perhaps modifying, the support that it gives to its film industry. In the words of the White Paper of last July,

"The British commercial film industry . . . has an importance and influence . . . out of all proportion to its size".

The world, the Government and I are therefore in step. We agree with one another; we agree that films matter. They can make money, they can influence people and they can entertain them. So where is the snag? Where is the difference between the world, the Government and myself on the one hand, and the Government Front Bench on the other?

The position, alas, is that a clever doctor can make an accurate diagnosis, just as a clever White Paper author can marshal facts into a coherent picture of today's British film industry. But those clever men are only as good and as valuable as the prescriptions they offer—the one to save the life of his patient and the other to save the life of the British film industry. Alas, again, we have better results from our doctors than we have from the authors of the White Paper. The White Paper is strong on analysis but weak in many of its prescriptions. I should like to be more precise about that weakness.

There is an abundance of talent in Britain. We have producers, directors, writers, cameramen, technicians and actors who are as good as or better than any to be found anywhere else in the world. We have hungry, gawping

[Mr. Gorst]

audiences who will spend not hours but weeks of their lives watching the products of the film industry. There is an annual audience of about 4 billion for films on television and 66 million for films on cinema screens. The Government want films to be made and so do ITV stations. BBC moguls want to buy films and worldwide audiences want to watch films. The snag, as every contributor to the debate has said, is finance. Where is the finance to come from? The Government will not pay the price of even one full-length feature film of any notability. What is the point —I change the analogy—of deciding that we want an army but deciding at the same time that although tanks are needed we shall have only one? We cannot run an army on one tank and we cannot have a film industry with only one film, and that a pretty cheap one.

BBC and ITV companies say that they want films and their audiencies want films but they cannot pay a proper price even for the old ones. I believe that audiences would and could pay for films but even they, the public, are wayward and fickle in choosing where to watch their films. Film finance is a difficult, chancy and wayward business, because viewing fashions are changing constantly.

I believe that there is a solution. A levy on the viewing of films shown on television, which according to the estimates I have seen is not, as is stated in the White Paper, an uneconomic proposition because of the effect that it would have on licensing, would be at the rate of about 25p per viewer, which is equal to a 30p increase in the cost of the licence fee. To recycle some of the funds collected and absorbed by the greatest exhibitors of the British film industry's products, ITV and BBC, would seem to be the most sensible option open to us. It is, of course, the one that will raise the greatest contribution to film making. The Government reject this view, in my opinion rather unconvincingly.

It is necessary that we return to this matter again and again. In equity and in practice, a levy on the viewing of films shown on television would seem to be the solution in financing full-length British commercial films. For acceptance of this proposition it is necessary to disabuse our minds of the specious arguments about licence fees increasing by leaps and bounds. It is necessary also to ignore the siren voices of the copper-bottomed television moguls and magnates. It is equally necessary for the Government to get away from the idea that we can apply the rules, theories and dogmas of monetarism and free markets to an industry which is one in name but not in reality.

It is suggested in the White Paper that there is a glorious future opening up with the advent of cable television and direct broadcasting by satellite. It is said in Aesop's fable of the fox and the cat that one safe way is better than 100 on which we cannot reckon. We cannot reckon on the unknown effects of these new forms of distribution. Therefore, we should go to the one upon which we can reckon, which is a levy on those who watch films on television.

5.54 pm

Mr. Jack Dormand (Easington): I count myself as one of those persons who has no specialist knowledge of the film industry nor any connection with it. I understand that some Conservative Members have such connections and perhaps we shall hear from them during the debate. I am proud of the contribution that the British film industry has made to the cinema. There is a British ingredient, and that has been evident in recent years when British films have been among the best in the world. I pay tribute to film-makers who could have lived abroad and earned considerable sums but who have chosen to spend a large part, of all, or their working lives in the United Kingdom.

Despite the decline in the number of cinema-goers, there will always be a demand for cinemas. Next year will be British Film Year and its slogan will be "Cinema: the best place to see a film." There is a fundamental difference between watching a film in a cinema, with everything that that means, and watching the same film on a small screen. British Film Year has chosen an excellent catch-phrase and it happens to be true. I have no doubt that the wheel will turn full circle and that it may not be too long before we have the crammed cinemas that some of us used to see in our youth not too long ago. We must remember that the cinema is especially important to what might loosely be called working-class people.

Theatres have never been so readily available as cinemas to ordinary people in the United Kingdom and I pay tribute to the efforts of my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) to increase their availability. Working people in the north-east do not have so many opportunities of going to the theatre but my hon. Friend and his colleagues in London have made cinemas and theatres much more available to working-class people. Tribute must be paid to the work that they have done and are continuing to do. However, there is not that opportunity in most parts of Britain and so it is important that we have well constructed modern cinemas in which to show quality films. Ideally, good plays and good movies should be equally available, but unfortunately that has not been the position in most areas.

The Government are once again demonstrating in the Bill their theory that market forces are the most effective way of producing what is best for the people. We see it time and time again from the Government. That is their theme and theory and it will be presented to us later this week in some of the proposed legislation that will come before us. It is said that public money will still be involved but I have some doubts, which I shall express later. It does not need a film enthusiast to recognise the fundamental difference between what is being proposed and the work that is being done by the National Film Finance Corporation, which has established an international reputation for itself. On most occasions it has secured what my right hon. and hon. Friends see as a balance between good entertainment—there is nothing wrong if a film has entertainment value—and quality film-making. I pay tribute to the dedicated work that has been undertaken by the director of the corporation, Mr. Mamoun Hassan. I doubt whether anyone in Britain knows more about the problems and merits of the film industry than Mr. Hassan. If people like him are to be lost to the British film industry because of this measure it would be little short of a scandal.

Before the Bill was introduced, and since, we have not heard one valid reason for the abolition of the corporation. Having heard the Minister's so-called case, I am sure that I can say on behalf of my right hon. and hon. Friends that we have even greater doubts about the proposals set out in the Bill. I repeat: the legislation is all part of the doctrinaire attitude that governs virtually everything that

the Government touch. My hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) said that there is grave doubt and distrust in all parts of the film industry about the alternative proposed in the Bill. People who share the Government's political philosophy and doctrinaire beliefs feel that such a change is not only unnecessary but a retrograde step.

We are entitled to ask for more details about the long-term effects of such important financial changes on the Children's Film Foundation and the National Film and Television School. The Children's Film Foundation is unique. It does a first-class job, and, without any question, its films are the best of their kind. The dedication and enthusiasm of the foundation can be seen also in the National Film and Television School. The school has made a tremendous contribution to the quality of British films, I refer to the whole range of technicians, budding directors and producers—everyone concerned with the school.

The information that we received from the Minister about the financing of the Children's Film Foundation and the television school made me suspicious. The amount is insufficient. It is simply not good enough to say that £250,000 will be spent on replenishing the place. It will take more than £250,000 to bring the National Film and Television School, which I have had the pleasure of visiting twice, up to the standard that we would like. Even more importantly, we must find out for how long the £600,000 contribution will last. When the Minister was questioned further about that amount, we did not receive a satisfactory answer, and that matter must be pursued.

In studying the Bill, I had one main thought in mind: will its provisions enhance the structure of the indigenous British film industry — an industry fit to make films reflecting our way of life, our thinking, difficulties, strengths and weaknesses? I am certain that the Bill does not provide such opportunities. The bias towards the market place—I keep returning to this point, because it is the fundamental issue in this measure — inherent in the Bill inhibits our achievement of that objective. I hope that I am not being doctrinaire. I admit that I have no doubt that some excellent movies will result from the structure on the financing that is presented to us in this legislation. That will happen simply because we have available the full range of talent to make excellent pictures, as the hon. Member for Hendon, North (Mr. Gorst) said. My argument is that there will not be sufficient finances, having regard to our resources of talent.

The British film industry may simply become, as my hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham said, increasingly part of the United States film industry. The Americans will, as they do now to some extent, hire our studios, technical people and other experts, make more "Star Wars" and "Superman" pictures and hie the films back to the States, making a lot of money in the process. Is that the kind of arrangement that we want? Do we want something that will make no contribution to British film culture? I am afraid that, under this Bill, that is what will happen, in spite of our David Puttnams, Bill Forsyths and Richard Attenboroughs.

Finance is crucial in avoiding those pitfalls. Equally important is the need to have some type of British film authority. My party's policy is to have such an authority. We make no detailed recommendations, but we believe that there should be such a body with expertise available from all sections of the industry. That means experts and laymen who can intervene at appropriate levels — in training, co-operating with television and, not least, working with the unions. My party believes that the unions would have representatives on the authority. In this Bill, as always, there is not even a hint of this type of body.

All these matters add up to one point: how seriously do the Government take the British film industry? That question must be asked, and the answer is clear in the Bill and in the Minister's speech: not very seriously. My hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham properly compared the British film industry with the film industry in other countries. I shall compare our industry with those of two of our partners in the European Economic Community. Recently, I read an article by Anthony Smith who, I think we all agree, is the distinguished director of the British Film Institute. He said:

> "Re-deploying the Eady fund and supplementing it with television and video money would be an enormous boost and would cost the government nothing. But it would have to be administered not under the 'automatic' formulae of trade officials but in the light of deliberate artistic choices. That is what is done in Germany which has re-built its film industry into one of the most admired in the world during the past 10 years."

I think we would all concur with that view of Germany's film industry.

The French set up a high-powered commission which produced the Bredin report, the most important commentary in 50 years on any country's film industry. Some of that report's recommendations were expensive—in contrast to what we heard from the Government—but they have been implemented and, I understand, are already paying for themselves both financially and in artistic merit.

The Government do not even begin to think in such terms. In spite of having such an array of talent, we may be thought of only as a country that produces the "Carry On" films——

Mr. Tony Banks: Very good.

Mr. Dormand: I agree. They are enjoyed by some people. I hope that the Minister agrees that our reputation should not depend on those films. It is a startling fact that a country's reputation depends, to some extent — I would not exaggerate it — on films. Those of us interested in films applaud that fact. This country, with its well-known films—I shall not repeat them—made in the past four or five years, demonstrates that. The National Film Finance Corporation has assisted in the production of more than just the usual films that are well known. The House must be reminded that an array of magnificent films —"Babylon" and "The Europeans" come to mind—has been made, and such films would not have seen the light of day had it not been for the NFFC's support.

The British Film and Television Producers Association appears to be enthusiastic about the Bill; I hope that I am not misrepresenting it. But even it says that the new body, which it calls the new FFC — that may be a Freudian slip, for we are, are we not, talking about a company— must be paid to retain independence so that it is not dominated entirely by the commercial interests involved. I could hardly expect it from this of all Governments, but I believe that, having regard to the nature of the British film industry, provision should have been made in this Bill for a nationalised sector of the industry. If the Government accept—they can hardly deny it—that publicly financed films have had some outstanding successes, they could demonstrate their faith by making finance and other resources available for a nationalised sector.

[Mr. Dormand]

The Government profess to believe in competition—we hear that every day in the House—but I suspect that they are afraid of the talent that would jump at the chance to work in a publicly financed film sector. I am not talking about a vast sum of money. I am talking about a few million pounds. I believe that we have been given incorrect figures. One of my hon. Friends spoke of £1·5 million, but that is for a second-level film, if I can still describe it that way. I am pleased to see two Conservative Members nodding in agreement, but that is the measure of financial assistance that we request.

With the increasing tendency—I am talking about the public sector—towards cartels, monopolies, semi-cartels and duopolies in the economic terms that have been described today, some of us believe strongly that to have an independent nationalised sector is more important than ever. I hope that even this Government will not dismiss that suggestion completely.

When talking about independence, I genuinely seek some information. I was surprised that the Minister refused to give way on this point. The point involves clause 4(3) which states:

"The Secretary of State may appoint a person to make recommendations and provide other services in connection with the discharge by the Secretary of State of his functions under subsection (1)*(b)*."

Why does it refer only to subsection (1)*(b)*? If the Secretary of State is to appoint a person to make recommendations and provide other services, which is what the subsection provides, why does it not also apply to subsection (1)*(a)*, or have I misunderstood something? Under the Bill financial assistance will be granted to any British company or person, but if I understand clause 4(3) correctly the person who may be appointed will deal only with subsection (1)*(b)*. I find that puzzling, and if the Minister could deal with the point when he replies I should be grateful.

Whatever failings the present financing and structure of the British film industry has, it cannot be denied that there have been some outstanding successes. In my view, and that of my hon. Friends, that success could be extended by an increase in public financing and public accountability. By "success" I mean producing films of artistic merit which can also pay for themselves. I sometimes believe that Conservative Members think that the Opposition regard profit as a dirty word. We do not. We believe in a mixed economy. There is no reason why films should not make money. If that does nothing else, it provides investment for better films in the future. We have had proof of that in the past two or three years. The fact that artistic films can also make money has been proved many times in recent years.

We should, as a nation, be proud of the British talent for film making. We are second to none. Indeed, our people in the industry are presently setting the pace internationally. That talent needs to be nurtured and encouraged. Instead of that, today we are being presented with a Bill that is unimaginative, negative and lacking in justifiable pride. If it becomes law in its present form, I fear for the future of what should be a great industry.

6.14 pm

Mr. Tim Brinton (Gravesham): I have listened carefully to the hon. Member for Easington (Mr. Dormand). I sympathise with much of his diagnosis, although the cures that he offered would not be my cures. A few minutes ago I held my breath for a moment when he referred to the "Carry On" films, remembering that I once made a fleeting appearance in a film called "Carry on Emmanuelle"—with my clothes on, I hasten to add—but he did not refer to it.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: What part were you playing?

Mr. Brinton: I was playing the part of a newscaster behind the television screen, so I was protected.

It is an interesting debate. Hon. Members have spoken seriously and given their diagnosis and potential cures. I wonder whether I might be allowed to approach the subject from a slightly different dimension. Before I do that, I should perhaps declare my interest in these matters as a consultant to the British Videogram Association and as a director of Airtime Publicity (Newsflash) Ltd., neither of which has, in fact, consulted me about the Bill, so I am free to speak entirely on my own and give my own views. I have, however, had a little experience generally within the industry and in television and radio.

I feel that we have arrived at the point that we have reached today because unfortunately many, many years ago the British film had to become involved, and have some sort of relationship, with Government. Since the time of the buccaneer who founded the nickelodeon at the turn of the century, and since those lovely 1930s-style Odeons were built and were making a great deal of money, the British industry has been in a state of almost permanent financial crisis.

The various interests involved—be they the massive, gaudy musicals and entertainments, through to the cultural and artistic low-budget side of the industry and the main feature which is not the huge expensive Hollywood extravaganza—have all looked for help wherever they could find it.

It is not unnatural that we are receiving in our post today communications from interested parties who see, as their first line of support, Government—taxpayers'—money. They seem to be saying that if that does not work, "Let us make the viewer pay. After all, he paid the Eady levy through the cinema, and that was no bad idea." The man or woman who went to the cinema and enjoyed seeing films contributed to the making of future films, thus perpetuating the art, but there were snags. As the matter developed, the Eady money did not go into the new production. It did not end up in the right pocket so to do. The audience therefore deserted the cinema. Now most of them, sadly in many people's opinion, sit at home and watch the feature film on television.

There is a justification for making the viewer pay. It is not a tax. It would be a contribution, albeit not entirely voluntary, by the film fan or buff to the future production of British films, if it could be organised in such a way. Do we want to give support through the taxpayer's money or the film buff's money to that sort of venture? Why should it not be purely commercial? Why should not commercial firms do what the hon. Member for Easington said so optimistically and idealistically, and make films which can pay for themselves and which have artistic merit? I hope that I quote him almost exactly.

The tragedy is that only a limited number of films can pay for themselves. One hon. Member spoke of one film

in 10 making a profit. To be sure, the odd film that makes money makes a great deal of money, but most of the people to whom I talk suggest that the figure is more like one film in 20. A feature film, which is what we are talking about, is special. It is not to be confused with a television feature film. Any commercial undertaking in the business of making a feature film is probably looking to invest in each film that it makes a modest £1 million to £2 million; if it is to make the 20 to make the one that makes money, a vast sum is required. The company will then need much more than that.

When I was on the Select Committee which last Session investigated private and public funding of the arts, we looked deeply into this subject, as the Under-Secretary will remember. I remember a frisson going down my spine when I had a pleasant conversation one afternoon with the gentleman in Paris who is in charge of giving money to French productions. The thing that he said that produced that frisson was that every film that needed any support had to achieve his sanction. That is why I do not want a British films authority. That is why the Select Committee, in its report, looked at the present state of film quangos and other bodies in this country, regarded it as a muddle and suggested that it should be considerably simplified. The main thrust of its suggestion was that there should be a revamped NFFC.

We went further, as some hon. Members have said. We said that in 1984 one cannot consider the feature film made for the cinema—or television, but it is really made for the cinema in that special way—unless one also takes into account what is happening in television — in broadcasting, satellite and cable. That is why some of us are still pressing that some form of unified ministerial control over the arts and communications should eventually come. I do not want a "Ministry of Culture" because that is most frightening. However, we are asking the Minister and the Secretary of State almost to achieve the impossible in the Bill because their responsibility is for film, and they do not—and presumably cannot—take much regard of what is happening in television. I believe that one cannot begin to fund the industry properly until one does that.

I think that I have pointed the way to what I feel needs support in British film production—the medium-budget film. Some of us are old enough to remember the Ealing films such as "Whisky Galore" made about 30 years ago. Such British pictures reflect our society, good or bad, and do something for us abroad. However, they need serious funding. Because the Government have not got their act together on a film and television policy unifying the two, of necessity I come down to the practical. I sincerely hope that in Committee more thought will be given to exacting a contribution like the Eady levy from the television viewer of feature films, to support such pictures. It may be too late; it may be impossible, but I believe that the impossible is sometimes possible.

Presumably we shall discuss the details of the Bill for many weeks to come, but at the moment it reminds me of a piece of sticking plaster over a wound—there is a wound in the British film-producing industry — and unfortunately the wound needs more than sticking plaster. It needs a touch of antibiotics or something else. Those antibiotics can come either from funding from a source such as I have described or from tax relief — from restoration of capital allowances or some other tax relief. I am not often given to special financial pleading because it is not my nature, but in this case the high risks involved in making and producing good feature films for any investor are such as to warrant more attention from the Chancellor.

6.25 pm

Mr. Tom Pendry (Stalybridge and Hyde): Like my hon. Friend the Member for Easington (Mr. Dormand), I have no experience of the film industry. I suppose that I must be classified as a punter. My enthusiasm began on Saturday mornings at the Odeon, which shows my age. However, I am a grateful punter, especially of late, because of the achievements of the British film industry. I shall make a short contribution to the debate because the main points of opposition have been made already, especially in the eloquent speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) and in speeches by other hon. Members on both sides of the House. Such a debate enhances the House's reputation. I hope that the Minister's response will match the contributions that have been made.

Some of my hon. Friends think that I am a bit of a softy on such occasions, but I should like to absolve the Minister of State from any blame that one attaches to the Bill. The Bill is a slap in the face to the British film industry, but that is not due to the Minister, nor to the Parliamentary Under-Secretary. The reason is that the Bill has the imprint of one of the Minister's predecessors, a certain Mr. Iain Sproat. The good people of Aberdeen may well have displaced him at the general election, but his narrow and doctrinaire approach to the British film industry lives on in the White Paper and the Bill. I hope that that will help the Treasury Bench to get off the hook in Committee.

The Minister of State listed his favourite films. We are pleased that he saw the films of which he spoke. Other Ministers have also said great things about the film industry. When introducing the White Paper, one spoke of a film renaissance, and in doing so he listed his favourite films. As on so many other occasions, today we heard about "Gandhi", "Chariots of Fire", "Cal" and "Another Country". We also heard about David Puttnam, Bill Forsyth and Sir Richard Attenborough. Those names come easily off the tongue, but it is strange that the Government have not recognised what those people are saying. If they listened to what is said about the Bill by the very people who produced those films and whose expertise they are so ready to acclaim, they would scrap it now. Therefore, we must consider it in a new light in Committee. The Bill can be seen only as a backward step by the people I mentioned and others in the industry.

The removal of the Eady levy and the abolition of the NFFC will not revitalise the industry. Anyone who knows anything about the industry knows that only too well. The Minister of State said that he has been in his job for only a few weeks, and it is clear that he has not spoken to the people I mentioned, so perhaps he has not yet grasped the point.

We accept that the Eady levy may be outmoded and oudated, but the Government have not put anything in its place. The body to replace the NFFC could be a good idea. We are not doctrinaire, but surely the measure is inadequate and biased in favour of EMI and Rank, which already have too much influence on the industry. The £1·5 million put in by the Government and £1 million put in by those two bodies are not enough. That is small fry when one considers the needs of the industry. As my hon. Friend

[Mr. Tom Pendry]

the Member for Dagenham said, the Government, who take pride in that paltry financial assistance, must recognise that it represents the cost of only one low-budget film. The industry believes that six to 10 main feature films and up to six short films should be produced annually, so the sum is clearly inadequate.

I should like to make one point that has not been mentioned so far. One may say that it is not in the Bill as such, but it is clearly associated with it. If the Minister is as worried as he says about declining cinema audiences, scrapping the Eady levy will not solve the problem. I spoke to several small cinema owners by telephone today and they are adamant that abolition of the levy will not be reflected in lower prices to the punter. If the Minister wishes the industry to pick up, especially in the suburbs of our cities and towns, he must act on the recommendation of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission report, Cmnd. 8858. We hear a great deal about free competition from the Conservatives, but the commission found that there was less than free competition in the film distribution industry, that Rank and EMI dominated the market and that many smaller enterprises were unsure what films they would be showing the next week. Four cinemas in Manchester today cannot tell the public what film they will be showing next Friday, despite many phone calls to the two major distributors. That is a disgrace and it leads to a decline in the number of people, mostly working-class people, who wish to go to the cinema. The Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Mr. Trippier), should take this on board, as many of the punters involved are his constituents too.

Greater Manchester has more independent cinemas than any other city outside London, but their prospects for survival are bleak. The vast population of Manchester itself has just two major cinemas with a maximum capacity of 3,600. One is Rank; the other is EMI. The Under-Secretary of State with responsibility for small industries knows that many of the independent cinema owners are strong supporters of his party. They are well intentioned in other respects but misguided in terms of political allegiance. Those Conservative supporters are being held up due to these monopolistic practices.

My hon. Friend the Member for Easington spoke of monopoly and duopoly. He missed out oligopoly, but it is rife in this industry and the small cinema owner is losing out. I take the north-west as an example. In Oldham there is no cinema at all any more. In Bolton, one is still open, but the Rank cinema has closed. Rank also intends to close its cinema in Blackpool, of all places, and in Bury and Sale they have already closed. If Rank and EMI are closing their cinemas but at the same time depriving the independent cinemas of the films that Rank and EMI show in the plusher areas, there is a great deal to be said for implementing the Monopolies and Mergers Commission recommendation straight away. The Palace cinema in Stalybridge is the plushest, most comfortable cinema that I have ever visited. The proprietor has done a great deal, against enormous odds, to make the cinema attractive, but he cannot get the films to bring in the crowds.

If the Minister is really passionate about putting bums on seats, he should not sit on his own bottom too long. The Government have been sitting on the Monopolies and Mergers Commission report for 18 months. It is time that they pronounced. I hope that that will be done when the Minister winds up today's debate. As I have said, I do not believe that the Minister who will take the Bill into Committee is as prejudiced as his predecessors. I hope, therefore, that, with the help of Conservative Members who have spoken so well in today's debate, the Bill will be amended and will emerge a far better Bill. If the Minister achieves that, he will deserve congratulations, and they will certainly be forthcoming from the film industry.

6.34 pm

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): I begin by declaring an interest. Hope springs eternal and I remain a shareholder of Salisbury Cablevision. The cable industry will undoubtedly flourish in the future, but it would help if Members of Parliament were more to the forefront in encouraging it and if the Treasury were rather more co-operative.

I should also declare another interest. No doubt hon. Members saw Peter Shaffer's play "Amadeus" in London. I was delighted to hear that it was to become a major film, although unfortunately a United States film. Nevertheless, wishing to turn to the United Kingdom for the greatest talent, the Americans chose to record much of the music of Mozart and Salieri in Britain, including me and my choir, the Academy of St. Martin in the Fields. I am thus perhaps the only Member with such a direct interest, apart from the role of my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Brinton) in "Carry on Emmanuelle".

Having listened to the views of the British Film and Television Producers Association and the Association of Independent Producers, I have learnt a great deal. I was surprised not to receive any information from the unions involved and I regret that. Another view that has been lacking in today's debate, with a few honourable exceptions, has been the consumer view of the Bill. As the Minister said, we are losing an average of one cinema per week due to closures. The hon. Member for Easington (Mr. Dormand) referred to the importance of entertainment in the cinema, and I entirely agree. I enjoy entertainment and drama in the cinema perhaps more than the intellectual or the avant garde, although that, too, has its place. My hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham said that people had deserted the cinemas for the comfort of their home and, regrettably, that is all too true. The hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry) said that cinemas had become few and far between. Even in the sun belt of the south of England it is now a very long way from one cinema to the next.

When Lord Gowrie opened the 28th London film festival last week he said:

> "For film makers in Britain and those who watch their work, this period is a remarkable time of revival—of new kinds of film-making and artistic exploration, and of the discovery of a vast reservoir of new talent.
>
> An enormous range of film work is going on in this country or is being undertaken by British film directors . . . In fact, the revival of British film-making must be one of the most important cultural projects in the world today. In the current year no fewer than 75 new British feature films will be completed. Furthermore, this great upsurge of work is going on alongside the steady flow of American films being made in British studios and by British technicians."

We welcome that development. He also drew attention to British Film Year, a joint project to begin in March next year involving the Government and a large number of

institutions, and suggested that that project could recreate the cinema experience for large numbers of people. I only hope that that is true.

The proposals in the White Paper were based on the assumption that the industry was booming. It said that in 1983

"The signs of a renaissance were clear".

I believe that that is misleading and wrong. The White Paper also said that

"production levels were being sustained"

and noted an increase in production of seven films between 1982 and 1983, with a total of 34, but that still means that production is close to its lowest level ever. The White Paper continued:

"Domestically . . . the cinema checked its previously steady downward trend"

but admissions dropped by a further 30 to 35 per cent. in the first part of 1984. The White Paper also said:

"in the all-important North-American market there was a much greater acceptance of British films".

In my view, however, two Oscar-winning films do not demonstrate a significantly higher penetration of the United States market. British films have won Oscars before, but very few British films have achieved national distribution in the United States. However, there has been a tremendous growth in sales of pop videos in the United States. I pay tribute to the pop industry, and to the pop video industry in particular, for its contribution to our export earnings. There is tremendous potential in the production and direction of such videos, in which we are taking the initiative. They are very popular throughout the English-speaking world, and notably in the United States.

In the United Kingdom, video has achieved 30 per cent. penetration in households with colour televisions, but that has not helped the British production industry. The lion's share of that market continues to go to American studios and to the video pirates. Video piracy costs our industry about £100 million a year. Like several other hon. Members who have spoken today, I feel that there is a strong case for a blank video tape levy of as much as £1 per tape. That would raise some £25 million a year which would be returned into the right pockets in the industry.

The White Paper succintly listed the reasons for significant market distortions in the industry. It pointed out that most overseas films already receive substantial Government support and that that means that a British film is handicapped from the outset. For instance, investment allowances in Australia have enabled the Australian film industry to make inroads into world markets on a scale of which we can only dream. The White Paper also pointed out that the cinema distribution system in the United Kingdom is dominated by the major American studios. That does not help us at all.

My hon. Friends mentioned the duopoly of United Kingdom broadcast television, the existence of which means that the prices paid for feature films shown on television do not reflect the enormous size of the audiences. The White Paper points out that the switch from the cinema to the home as the principal place for watching films means that, with the theft of copyright which naturally flows from that switch, there is no significant financial return for the producers. We are also told that home video, cable and direct broadcasting by satellite will provide a number of exciting new opportunities.

I am sure that that is true. However, the video business is levelling out at the moment, with little sign of an upward trend, and some distributors and retailers are currently facing bankruptcy. The development of cable and DBS is also passing through a very difficult phase. The reduction of capital allowances only months after the Government had agreed that the cost of the installation of the cable should be eligible for initial allowances has, in the absence of any alternative support, cast considerable doubt over the development of cable systems as an additional source of revenue for the film industry.

None of those markets, either alone or together, will be able for the foreseeable future to generate revenues sufficiently large to justify the production of feature films for those markets alone. There are now so many independent producers setting up in this country that they are finding it increasingly difficult to raise the necessary money. We must start making blockbuster films in this country, and we must be able to afford to make such films. I wish that the City would recognise the fact that our film industry contains unbeatable talent and would also recognise the comparative lack of risk. Putting money into films is not a great gamble. The risks are largely calculable. The industry undoubtedly feels that the Bill pulls the Eady rug from under its feet and that the floorboards underneath are rotten.

Mr. Brinton: My hon. Friend believes that we should make blockbuster films, by which I presume him to mean high-budget extravaganzas. Would he not agree with me, on reflection, that such films receive international distribution right away, and do not require Government or Eady support?

Mr. Key: They may not need such support in the first place, but what I am criticising is the fact that the City is unwilling to provide money and that the City, as well as the Government, has been deterred from supporting the film industry. That attitude needs to be changed. The industry feels that the investment allowances are vital, and it now feels very depressed.

Our film industry possesses unbeatable resources and assets, from unrivalled acting talent to unbeatable technology. The difference between the large screen and the television set remains enormous. I have already referred to the forthcoming film "Amadeus". I have been lucky enough to see a preview of the film. The technology, the acting and the music are stunning, and the film must be seen on a large screen to be appreciated.

Many American films such as "Star Wars", "Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom", the James Bond films and "Superman" were all made in Britain. Most people do not realise that. I have referred to the fact that video penetration in this country has been rapid and deep. However, it is now slowing down. Films have an enormous export potential, whether they are destined for television showing or the big screen, and that potential is currently under-valued. I believe that it is shared by our provincial repertory companies and theatres. Some of our provincial theatres are as good as the theatres in any capital city on the Continent.

We should not forget that there are some good American productions. During Committee stage of the Cable and Broadcasting Bill there was much discussion of the possibility of the import of cheap American rubbish, and attempts were made to define what we meant by rubbish. We should remember that there is an enormous demand for high quality British films and videos in America, and that our export potential is enormous.

[Mr. Key]

There is a big market for films in this country, but the market has shifted from the cinema to the home. Artistically, the home is not the best place to watch a film. When people watch films on television instead of in the cinema, comfort, convenience and cost have won over the technological impact of the big screen and the demands of the art form. That is regrettable.

The Minister tells us that a cinema closes nearly every week. In any year, therefore, many constituencies must be affected. The work done by the Cinema Theatre Association and by such campaigners as Mr. Alan Richardson should not go unnoticed. They are drawing public attention to the decline in the number of cinemas.

Those who campaign for the retention of cinemas need to decide whether it is the historic buildings that they want to save, or cinema as a form of art and entertainment. If they wish to save the buildings, they must concentrate their efforts on the planners and the elected district councillors. To save the cinema as an art form is a more complicated business, because they must persuade young people, families and tourists to make more use of our cinemas.

Other hon. Members have shared with us their reminiscences. I remember the day when my father took me to see "Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea". The impact of that film on a child of eight was enormous. However, in the past year alone there has been a considerable drop in cinema attendances. This afternoon I spoke to Rank Leisure Services. I was told that although Rank is supporting the £850,000 a year scheme to finance new film production, it has faced a considerable drop in attendances this year. Rank does not want to close cinemas. Indeed, it is building new ones. I believe that there is one in Bristol. It also has a responsibility to its shareholders. It could do better in terms of financing and financial returns in commercial activities other than the provision of cinemas. Rank may plan to spend the proceeds of the sale of the Salisbury Odeon to finance its new initiative. It would be no comfort to my constituents to lose their cinema.

It has also been suggested that cinemas which are under threat should be taken over by district councils. I do not recommend that. It is not the role of a council to run a cinema, and others can do it better. In my constituency, the district council has already taken over one of Rank's cinemas and turned it into a city hall. Frequently there are arts societies and centres, such as the St. Edmunds arts centre in Salisbury, which has projection facilities, but also suffers from under-financing.

Mr. Bermingham: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that a tragic result of the closure of cinemas is that in rural areas the only provision of cinema-type entertainment is by the district council, which either sets up and funds a local cinema group or puts on local shows and shows of historic interest?

Mr. Key: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. The district council in my constituency supports an arts centre and took over the old Odeon cinema and turned it into a city hall.

It is often said that cinemas are unattractive, tatty and cold, and that performances are spoilt by interruptions from yobs and the activities of vandals. That may be true, but how should we respond to it? Should provincial prices be raised to west end levels, or should cinemas be turned into clubs? I do not like that idea, because old films which one can see on television or hire from a video shop would be shown in such clubs.

The problem facing provincial cinemas is that of marketing their product and changing social attitudes. West end theatres and cinemas have learned much about that recently. If one considers the marketing of some of our theatre musicals, such as "Starlight Express", which has been highly successful and innovative, one sees what can be done to market films in the provinces. I hope that the success of "Starlight Express" will soon be repeated in the United States of America. Last month I had the pleasure of travelling on a train called "Starlight Express" from Portland to San Francisco. I warned the company to await the musical and see its profits increase as a result.

All hon. Members want the British film industry to succeed. That is the spirit of our debate. It is clear that more people in the provinces are prepared to sign a petition to save a local cinema than to support it by taking their families to see films at it. No Government can solve those problems, nor can local councils. We are dealing with social attitudes, and the importance that the public attaches to the film industry. I sincerely hope that the Bill will help and not hinder the renaissance of the British film industry.

6.54 pm

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): I listened with interest to the speech of the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key). I regret that I cannot give a list of declared interests to match his, or advertise a current production as he did so excellently. He has convinced me that I must see "Amadeus" when it comes on general release. However, I hope to convince the hon. Gentleman and other hon. Members that the Government have got it wrong. It is not the first time that they have got it wrong and their Tory Back Benchers have got it right.

I had the privilege of serving in Committee on the Cable and Broadcasting Bill. Hon. Members who served on it will know that Back Benchers got it right, and that the Home Office Minister did not always understand what they said. However, we managed to change the Bill a little and at the end of the day we got it right. I hope that in Committee on this Bill the same intelligent approach will adopted by Back Benchers, that Ministers will remain silent on occasion, listen to those who know about the industry and ignore their civil servants—that is essential if we are to achieve sensible legislation from this Bill—and that eventually we shall get it right.

No hon. Member wants to harm the British film industry—*[Interruption.]* At least those who understand it do not want to harm it. The Government Front Bench have been badly briefed. I do not blame the Minister. He has had only six weeks' experience, and many other pressing matters face him, such as insolvency, takeover bids in Nottingham Manufacturing and Johnson's. Therefore, the Minister has not had long to consider the matter in detail. That is a tragedy. We had a good chance when the White Paper was published.

I remind the hon. Member for Salisbury what the Association of Cinematograph, Television and Allied Technicians said about the removal of the Eady levy. No one objects to its removal, because it has outlived its purpose. It was introduced at a time when we needed to finance films, and it was a good way to do it. Cinema audiences were large enough to sustain a realistic levy. However, times have changed and cinema audiences have

decreased alarmingly. That is a tragedy for those who represent constituencies, such as mine, which lie between large cities. Unless we have a Rank or EMI cinema, we get behind in showing modern films. Indeed, we do not get modern films unless there is an EMI or Rank cinema nearby.

The cable industry is beginning to get off the ground. I believe in cable. Cable is bigger than entertainment. The Government sought to have cable led by entertainment. That was a big mistake, as I told them time and again in Committee. However, the Home Office did not listen. The Home Office was responsible for an industry Bill, for which the Department of Trade and Industry should have been responsible. The entertainment industry must live with that kind of mistake under this Government. The Government are an entertainment in themselves when one considers how they deal with these matters.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. David Trippier): Come off it.

Mr. Bermingham: The Minister should listen to all Back Benchers. Some of us understand the industry and are prepared to help it. Unfortunately, such Members are not in the Government. We are prepared to educate and assist the Minister if only he will listen. We want an industry that can take its place in the world, support itself and produce the quality product that we know it can produce.

The United Kingdom has some of the finest producers and technicians in the world. We have the facilities and the capabilities to produce quality films. All the industry needs is the financial stability to produce them.

The majority of our cinemas show American-based films because they are controlled by two companies: EMI and Rank. Obviously, they will show those films which will make the most money for them. They are bound to be subject to influences and pressures, especially from the American market. That has been going on year after year. It is obvious if one looks at cinema placards. It is difficult to get financial backing for a film if there is no distribution point.

We do not have the breakthrough in the American cinema market that we should like. Anyone will say that, but one has only to go to Washington or Detroit to see what is on in the American cinema. Only spectacular English films of Oscar-winning potential, such as "Chariots of Fire", break in. We have to make our own films and they must be supported financially. It is no use asking the City for money as it does not speculate on the film industry. That is a tragedy. The American financial markets are prepared to back their industry, because they realise that if good films are made and sold they are money earners. The Americans, the Japanese, the French and everyone else knows that, but somehow the City of London has not realised it. We have to live with that.

With regard to the development of cable, I have said repeatedly that we have the facilities to produce the programmes. I believe that cable will come, just as I am sure that direct broadcasting by satellite will come. They will compete with each other, but they will both come. In that event, we shall need the programmes to feed those sources of entertainment. Where will the programmes come from? If we kill off our industry, we will have to buy from America. I suggest that the next time a Minister travels in Europe, he switches on to channel 8, which is in English. It is a satellite station putting out programmes in English—but watch for the American accents. That is the tragedy.

Our cable will suffer the same fate if, through this Bill, we kill off our ability to make programmes. That was one of our major fears in Committee on the Cable and Broadcasting Bill. I plead with the Government to think again. This is not the last time that I shall make that plea. If I am a member of the Committee which considers this Bill, I shall say it again and again. I hope that many Conservative members of the Committee will have the same courage as they showed on the Cable and Broadcasting Bill. Perhaps then we shall get somewhere. It is possible to restructure film financing in Britain without it costing a vast amount of money. That would enable us to compete.

In an intervention during the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould), I said that we produced about 34 major films in 1983 whereas the Germans produced 70 and the French produced 131. I am not suggesting that quantity equals quality, but drawing attention to the funding that enables such an output. Why the difference? The answer is simple. The rest of the world appreciates that there should be tax allowances for those investing in the production of films. In 1984 the Government took away such allowances here, automatically putting us one down and making it that much more difficult to acquire finance. Why? Could it be that the Government simply do not understand?

Right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House have made some sensible suggestions about funding, such as putting a small tax of 14p or £1 on blank tapes. Anything that can be done to inconvenience pirates who are messing about with the video industry has my wholehearted support. Piracy is theft. There is no other way in which to describe it. It has been suggested that a tax of 14p would raise £10 million a year and that a tax of £1 would raise about £35 million a year. If that money were put into a newly formed National Film Finance Corporation, it would have a substantial annual base budget. If there were added to it a tax on films shown on television, the corporation would have several million pounds more. It has been suggested that the tax should be 0·25p per head of population and that that might increase the licence fee by 30p a year. I am sure that nobody would object to 30p a year. If the Government, who keep telling us that they are keen about the United Kingdom getting off the floor and beginning to invest, put just a few pounds in, perhaps by knocking the odd £1 million off Trident—only £9 billion is involved there—that would help. It would also help if the Government underwrote the structure of the National Film and Television School. I am not asking the Government for much; I am merely showing where they can raise money. However, I beg them not to set up a body that is dominated by the two greatest distributors in the country. That would do nothing for the financing of films.

If I were a director of Rank or EMI and a member of the National Film Finance Corporation and I had a little project of my own coming up, I know that I should instinctively be inclined to support my idea. The body is supposed to support producers who create the new works. I am always suspicious of vested interests, no matter how well intentioned they might be. We are supposed to be establishing a properly funded financing corporation to enable independent producers, people with good ideas and

[Mr. Bermingham]

talents, to get finance. There are plenty of such people in Britain, but they desperately need the finance if we are to produce the type of programmes that Britain is capable of producing and which are of such great export potential. A properly funded film industry is an investment for the future. It is regrettable that the Government seem not to understand the real meaning of the word "investment".

We are dealing not with an industrial problem or a City-type problem, but with the unique creation of artistic programmes which demand a slightly different approach. I hope that the Government will take the Bill away and that, when they bring it to Committee, they will have ensured that it reflects many of the views that are held on both sides of the House. We have a chance to fund the British film industry properly, and we should be fools not to take it.

7.7 pm

Mr. David Crouch (Canterbury): Before considering films I should like to refer to the problems in the theatre and on the stage.

The theatre is an important part of our national life. We could claim that we lead the world in the theatre and on the stage. We are justly proud of that. The theatre is supported by the state through the Arts Council. The Theatres Trust, of which I am a member and which was founded by Act of Parliament in 1976, is a small body without much money that sustains the live theatre and saves it from decay and decline. It operates throughout Great Britain. The only part of the United Kingdom that it does not touch is Northern Ireland.

I speak as deputy chairman of the Theatres Trust. I am also a chairman of a theatre company. What has all this to do with the film industry and the Bill? I note your nodding eagerly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as you might think that I shall be out of order. The cinema, the television screen and the live stage are all of the same family and should be recognised as such.

Live theatre is thriving not only in the west end of London but in the provinces. Theatrical success often results from the presence in the cast of actors and actresses made famous in the cinema and on television screens. Parliament and the Government have a cultural and commercial duty to secure the future of all theatre productions, including live stage shows, the cinema and television.

The Bill puts forward a new plan for the development of the cinema in the light of recent changes. In that respect it will be a help, and today's debate has shown that there is interest on both sides of the House in sustaining and securing the future of the cinema and the film industry. I hope that Ministers recognise that hon. Members on both sides of the House have shown that they do not believe that the Bill goes far enough. The White Paper of some months ago recognised the changes in the film industry, but the Bill fails to do so. The White Paper properly recognised the changed economic conditions, the reduction in audiences and the decline of many cinemas. It spoke of a massive decline in the exhibition of films during the past 20 years. However, the Bill does not live up to the hopes that were expressed in that excellent White Paper.

The White Paper also looks ahead. It does not simply moan about the decline of the cinema, but comments on the change in the way in which we see films today. Films are still made in great numbers. In 1983, more than 1,500 films were exhibited on the ITV and BBC channels, so although they are not being seen to a great extent in cinemas, they still attract enormous audiences. In 1983, there were 66 million cinema admissions, whereas 10 years ago the figure was about 3,000 million. That enormous difference was reflected in the White Paper, but it is not properly reflected in the Bill's provisions for maintaining the film industry.

The White Paper looks ahead to the new market for films. As many hon. Members have said, the market will become bigger and better, although not so much in the cinema. I am sorry that Britain does not have good small cinemas such as one finds on the continent, where going to the cinema is still part of weekly entertainment. It is a pleasure to visit small, intimate cinemas in Rome or Paris, because they are clean and show good films. The same is not true of British cinemas.

The White Paper talks enthusiastically about the great opportunities for the cinema industry and of the opportunity presented by video. There will be many opportunities in cable television and in DBS, and the Government have already provided one DBS channel for films alone.

I said earlier that live theatre was of the same family as television and the cinema. Paragraph 2.11 of the White Paper considers the relationship between films and television, and makes this telling comment:

> "It may well be that this interface of films and television is where the key to much of the film production industry's future is to be found, although the importance of theatrical exhibition in the cinema will remain. For it is in the cinema that a film establishes its reputation and its value to the small screen."

Many films are made for television, but when a film has achieved fame on the big screen, the television companies clamour to buy it within three years and broadcast it. We have seen "Gandhi" and "Chariots of Fire" not only in the cinema but at home, because their reputations were established in the cinema.

The Bill seeks to re-establish the British film industry against the changed climate of audience. It must be re-established on a sound commercial footing, but the Bill fails to do that completely. The Government are not offering much money, but I do not suggest that they should. It is difficult to get anything from the Government these days because we are living on a restrained budget, to say the least. However, there are other ways to tackle the problem. In 1983, the film industry earned about £93 million in exports, which was a great achievement. However, the giant television industry, whose turnover is three times that of the cinema, earned only £8 million in exports. I take my hat off to the struggling film industry.

In 1983, there were 66 million cinema admissions and 300 million film viewings on television. We need new measures to respond to the changed market conditions. Television shows films to a vastly bigger audience, but it does not pay a fair price for those films. The BBC and ITV companies have great power over cinema production, which enables them to buy films on the cheap and to show them to large audiences who wish to see the product of the British film industry as well as that of other countries. Television gets the benefit of the work and art of the British film industry for almost nothing.

Following the publication of the White Paper, some have suggested that a levy could be made on all films shown on television. A farthing — or in new penny

terms, a quarter of a penny—levied on each viewer would raise about £10 million, which could be used through the Government agency to back new investment and production and sustain this side of British theatre. As many hon. Members said, we must also examine the video cassette revolution in film viewing. The cost of viewing a film in one's home is about £1·50 for the rental of the tape. That is extremely cheap, and the entire family can watch the film, provided that it is suitable. There is surely merit in the idea that a levy be applied to the video cassette that we watch in the home. That would hurt no one. It is suggested that the levy should be of the order of £1 per cassette bought, and an average cassette costs £40. This could yield as much as £25 million to be put into the kitty to help the film industry's investment.

We should also consider a levy on blank cassettes, because we are only too well aware of the black market in home recording through dual use of recording machines to make copies of rented films. Such levies could produce as much as £50 million or £60 million a year with no charge to the Government or the Chancellor or strain on the Treasury.

That sum would be no more than the Australian film industry is receiving today—and what good films the Australians are beginning to produce. That is becoming notable. I used to want to see French or Italian films, but now I tend to make a point of seeing Australian films because they are so good. Whether that is because they are properly financed is another matter. All I know is that Australian films are well acted and well produced.

We are grateful for what the Government have proposed in the Bill, but it is not enough. If they are wise, they will take on board the great amount of advice they have received from many hon. Members. The aria they received from my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) was well worth hearing, and I was pleased that he was able to declare such a delightful interest.

I am not suggesting that there should be a large Government subsidy, rather that we should obtain a fair return, by means of a levy, for the important cinema industry which is part of our great national heritage—the theatre as a whole.

7.23 pm

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): This is a fairly miserable wake which does not even have the advantage of booze. However, it is an important occasion. Many years ago it became clear to the Government of this country that we are divided from the Americans by the same language and that the kind of economic imperialism at which they are so good was rapidly overtaking our weak, although imaginative, cinema industry. The Eady levy was therefore created. Harold Wilson was extremely intelligent. He had difficulty with the Treasury. As well as wisely suggesting this way out of the difficulty, he named the levy after the Treasury official concerned, and that almost guaranteed that the measure went through the House fairly effectively.

It may show my terrible naivety, but I had hoped that the Government would have taken this occasion to look at the dire situation now facing anyone working in this industry. I hoped that they would have said, "We are about as low as we can get in terms of production without ceasing to operate altogether; therefore, we shall take this opportunity to do something imaginative. We shall not fiddle around with minor changes here and there; we shall look at the whole thing and decide how to fund production in this country." The reality, which has been spelt out time and again today, is that more and more people are looking at film and tape material than ever before.

The Government are prepared to reach all sorts of deals with people about direct broadcasting by satellite or cable. When the Government's failure to insist on modern technology results in the cable companies being frightened that they will not be viable, the Government look for a means of giving the companies a small sweet to keep them in being. When there is a problem with direct broadcasting by satellite, the Government go to the ITV companies and say, "Because we want you to be involved in this, we shall give you a much longer period before your franchises come up for examination." They thereby guarantee the companies a certain amount of money.

However, when we must decide something which will determine the future of British film production for the next one or two generations, the Government run away from any sensible thought. Several hon. Members have already made points which reflect the extent of the difficulty. The Government are saying that they will wind up the NFFC and hand over its assets—not sell them—to a private company. They will have a tiny stake in that company to encourage people to invest their own money, but the determining factors in that private company will be the very people who over the years have failed to attract money for production. We need only look at the history of the British cinema and at what happened to the duopoly. I know that we are not supposed to use foreign language, but plus ça change, plus c'est le duopoly.

Whether we talk of distribution, production or exhibition, the two major companies are always involved. There is now the suggestion that we need not worry because in future a private company funded by a partnership between the Government and private industry will provide all the money for production. That has not been so in the past, and there is absolutely no guarantee that it will be so in the future.

What was so important about Eady? We could have said, "We have now reached the point where cinemas are closing at a tremendous rate. We ought to be using some money to improve the facilities available to the general public." France does, as do the most bourgeois set of shopkeepers in the world, because they know that people want to be comfortable when looking at films. Therefore, we have not helped the exhibitors.

It was claimed that the Eady levy was killing the cinema. What rubbish. It could have been used to support the exhibitor and to provide him with the money that the banks will not lend to him. It is noticeable that when the large companies sell off their cinemas they take care to ensure that written into the sale is a bar on anyone using the property as a cinema. Just as they used the bar to control what is paid for films and where they are shown, so they put the same brake on the development of the small independent exhibitor.

Equally, the measure will not help the producer. If we are serious about putting up seed money for production, we must make the sums sensible. When the Government decided to give capital allowances, my view was that, although it was a Conservative method of doing so, it was reasonably effective. Of course some people tried to get round the restrictions placed on those tax allowances. I have never known any industry in which people did not

[Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody]

seek to bend the rules to their own advantage. However, the Government then decided to remove even that small incentive.

We have been told more than once that we should consider the business expansion scheme as a useful means of replacing some of the money. The business expansion scheme will be of little benefit to film makers who will have to raise production finance for major films. With a maximum of £40,000 allowable from each investor under the scheme, there will have to be about 200 such investments before we get anywhere near a budget. It is not even a serious attempt to replace the money that was lost through the loss of capital allowances. It is worse than that. The Government have abolished the Cinematograph Films Council, which had at least some representation from various sections of the industry.

We have been told not to worry because that council will be replaced with something based on the interim action committee. But that committee was intended to do something very different from what has been suggested today. It was meant to set up a large production fund. It was meant on its own to generate enough activity for a production line on films. That is the only way that British interests can be safeguarded. It was a much rounder and more deeply thought out plan than anything that we have today.

We have no guarantee from the Government who will sit on the committee, what it will do, or what powers it will possess. As far as we can see, we shall have a private company with a limited production budget that will be controlled by people with a vested interest in trying to keep the best productions for themselves. Why should we assume that there will be independence of thought in deciding on scripts and encouraging independent producers? We have never seen that before. At what point shall we have a completely different approach? We shall see a specific rundown of the remaining sources of production finance.

The Government have failed disasterously in their duty. If the scheme goes ahead, within five years virtually no British productions will be available. Instead of looking for a means of offering some kind of real production incentive, the Government have run away from the basic problems. We could at this moment say that television is using more and more original material and that that ought to be British, not the moving wallpaper that we are increasingly buying from America. We could say that cable has a chance to generate new production and new ideas, not to become what it is in some countries—a continuous re-run of ancient films, hired at disgracefully low rentals from any tatty old library that happens to have been acquired by a company. We could say that direct broadcasting by satellite offers us an opportunity to show the world that we have not just the best actors and producers but modern techniques and ideas. We do not always want to do "Barchester Towers." We do not always want to make films which present the classic view of the British way of life.

It took 20 years to raise the finance for "Gandhi". I was involved in the early stages of that. I argued with the Indian Government for the money that eventually went into that film. Do not tell me that what we are supporting today will in any way do anything other than underwrite perhaps one hour of one independent production that may eventually finish up on somebody's television screen.

The Government have funked the opportunity of creating a really live British production industry—not just a film industry, but a production industry that could span television, cable and all the means of tape and film that everybody in Britain enjoys.

I want to see a tax not just on blank tape but on hardware. I see no reason at all why those who, certainly until recently, have had a flourishing industry in VCRs should not contribute towards the production end of the industry. What was to stop them? I see no reason why companies in the television industry should not take up their responsibility and stop moaning about what that would mean to their overall profits.

Above all, the Government today are asking the House of Commons to accept a tatty little arrangement. It will do nothing to produce new films. It will do nothing to keep independent producers in Britain. It will not help those people who have cut their teeth on advertising films and who need the budgets to go over to features. It will not protect the producer of short films or encourage those who are looking for finance for new television programmes. It will, yet again, hide the British industry in some dusty little corner where Rank, EMI and the other large companies have a little panel on the cupboard door which says, "Don't bother us. If we can't work with the Yanks, we are not going to bother to work with anyone."

7.34 pm

Mr. Roger Gale (Thanet, North): I welcome the abolition of the Eady levy. I am sorry that my hon. Friend and neighbour the Member for Canterbury (Mr. Crouch) finds the standards of our cinema somewhat lower than those he has experienced on the continent. If, in the near future, I can invite him from his cathedral city to the seaside resort of Westgate-on-Sea, I shall be able to show him a small independent cinema, which provides an excellent service to the community in comfortable surroundings, which would not survive were the Eady levy to remain. The seat penalty price demanded by that levy has come close to putting such cinemas out of business. It is imperative that such small cinemas, never mind the big two chains, should survive. They provide an invaluable social service, both to the elderly who go there for companionship as well as for what they see on the screen, and, still, to the young, who, as I said in the debate on cable television, cannot hold hands in the back row of a video tape screening.

The hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) intimated that had the Eady levy been made available to film producers, that would have financed film production. On that economic basis I can well understand why it took her 20 years to raise the money for "Gandhi".

Mrs. Dunwoody: I did not raise it.

Mr. Gale: I am sorry. I thought that the hon. Lady was claiming that she was instrumental in raising the money for "Gandhi". I am glad to be corrected.

In recent years the Eady levy, while having been a penalty on the exhibitor, has been of small value to the producer, and it is entirely right that it should go.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury on the importance of cinema and television to the theatre.

I have worked in all three and I am acutely aware of the value of big star names from the cinema and television to theatre productions. It can make the difference between a show surviving and going under.

Much of the discussion has centred on alternative funding. During the debate on cable television, I said that the major television companies made small contribution to the work of independent producers. That applies equally to television and film producers. The Independent Television Companies Association Ltd. has a purchasing cartel. When it buys in programmes made for television, or when it buys in films, it has the power virtually to dictate its own price. Any independent producer will say that that price seldom meets even the cost of production, never mind re-investment.

To be fair, the BBC—at present on its knees and asking for yet more money—exercises the same right. I am in favour of a television levy on films, but with one constraint. That levy must depend upon the ending of the craft unions' restrictive practices. I mentioned that to the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) who is a former colleague of mine. We both worked for Thames Television before we were elected to this place a year ago. The practices of my former colleagues in the Association of Cinematograph, Television and Allied Technicians and in the National Association of Theatrical and Kine Employees, which effectively prevent the major independent television companies from buying made-for-television films through their insistence that production should be financed only by those companies if it is done in-house, are extremely damaging to the industry. Therefore, it is not fair to take a stick with which to beat television companies unless one is also prepared to take the same stick to the craft unions in that industry. If we can end the restrictive practices and at the same time impose a levy on films shown on television, we shall be able to offer the small programme and film producers a real stimulus.

I suspect that most hon. Members have received lobbying documents through the post. I have received two: one from the Association of Independent Producers and the other from the British Film and Television Producers Association Ltd. My hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) has already quoted from it, but it says:

"The development of cable and Direct Broadcast by Satellite is now highly questionable."

The British Film and Television Producers Association Ltd. and the AIP have produced two highly depressing and wildly inaccurate documents. I believe that the future for cable television at least is extremely bright. I also believe that one or two companies that may have achieved franchises without having done their sums correctly may get their fingers burnt. But behind them there are plenty of others coming through which have confidence in this new industry and are determined to make it work and will do so. It will be a voracious industry that will demand an enormous number of products to put on its screens day after day and night after night. As we said during the debate on the Cable and Broadcasting Bill, where the product comes from will depend entirely on the industry.

Between the wars the American film company, Universal Films, for which I have also worked more recently, decided to go into film production and stockpiling. The other major film companies then believed that Universal would go bust. They failed to recognise something that Universal had seen, which was the advent of television and its phenomenal requirement for products. Within two years of the serious advent of television as a medium, Universal's shelves had been cleared, it had got back all of its money and, not surprisingly, had made a very handsome profit. Since then, Universal has been one of the foremost—if not the foremost—suppliers of film to the television world.

Within the next five years we are likely to be faced with the same situation. The advent of cable, not only in Britain but worldwide, will create a similar demand. It is up to us whether the film is made here or in the United States. If our film producers have the courage that I believe them to have, they will start to stockpile now. It was said that the companies involved in the new film company had done nothing for film. However, Euston Films, which is a major and very good producer of small films, is a wholly owned subsidiary of Thorn EMI and has made a major contribution to the film industry in Britain. If those companies are prepared to stake their productions now, they will sell, and in five years' time the British film industry will be thriving. They need the incentive of a levy on television film to help them, but it is up to them. They have the opportunity, and they must act now. Either they stockpile now, or in five years' time the Americans, not the British, will produce the films for cable television.

7.44 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): The Bill owes far more to ideology than to the needs of the British film industry. I think that the Government will experience considerable difficulty in Committee, because thoughtful criticisms have been made today by hon. Members on both sides of the House. Most hon. Members seem to agree that the Bill will do little to secure the industry's future.

Clearly, the Government would like to move towards a free market for the British film industry rather than a market that deserves greater and not less public support. We would clearly argue for greater public support for the industry because it is far too important to be left to the random machinations of the free market. However, one of the problems we face is that insufficient recognition is given in our society to the cinema's cultural role.

Unlike theatre, dance or the visual arts generally, cinema is essentially seen as entertainment rather than as an art form. That does not mean that something qualifies as an art form only if it bores the pants off everyone. Clearly, entertainment and art go together, but we nevertheless tend to regard cinema as essentially entertainment and not an art form. That makes a big difference, because something that has been delineated as an art form can then tap into quite extensive public support from the Arts Council, local authorities and so on. The amount is never as much as we would want, but it is considerably more than the cinema can attract.

Great emphasis has been placed on the reputation and skills of those in the British film industry. Obviously, one would wish to be associated with those plaudits. But we have tended to talk about the big international successes, most of which have been largely financed by the United States. As has been said, the British film industry is dominated by the United States. The ending of the screen quota, of the NFFC and of the Eady levy will merely accentuate that decline. I cannot see how the removal of the various support mechanisms will in any way advance the film industry's cause.

[Mr. Tony Banks]

Hon. Members have tended to talk about the industry at an international level and about the big blockbusters, but at the small independent producer level, the British film industry is still very active, although desperately in need of more support. There has been little mention in the debate or in the Bill of the need for much greater support for the film workshops within the industry.

I do not believe that the Government recognise the value to the economy in general of the British film industry. The hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Crouch) mentioned £93 million as being earned last year by the British film industry. I assume that that was the direct earnings from overseas sales of British films. But there is another figure that is more difficult to quantify in terms of the benefits of the industry for the British economy.

British films tend to create a much higher awareness of British culture in the world, and that can have a direct spin-off for the sale of British manufactured goods. I know that it is sometimes difficult to see the connection, but it is there. One has only to think back to the pop culture of the 1960s to realise how British manufactured goods achieved significant market gains as a result of Britain's role as a swinging nation. Therefore, popular culture can have a direct spin-off for manufacturing industry. I do not think that that is something the Government have recognised.

The British film industry is currently little more than an offshoot of the north American industry. If we allowed an entirely free market to operate — which even the Government are not proposing, but which I suspect they want—the British film industry would be swallowed by the United States film industry, rather as the British computer industry has been.

There is much talk about the way that the American film industry has been using our expertise and mounting significant productions here. Much of that is due to the favourable exchange rates. As those alter, there will probably be a move away from production in Britain to production in the United States, and a leaching of United Kingdom native talent. That has happened in computer and microchip technology.

The disappearance of the British film industry appears to be very much on the cards, and will not be mitigated by the Bill. That is worrying in two major respects. First, there is the gradual domination by the cultural imperialism of the United States. More and more of our television time is being taken up by cheap American imports. I do not doubt that hon. Members from both sides of the House enjoy watching "Dynasty" and "Dallas"—frankly, I do not. As we move towards deregulation, with the advent of more cable television, the floodgates will be opened to cheaper and cheaper American films.

My second concern is that the cultural industries in Britain comprise the fastest growing area of our economy. In London, the cultural industries employ 112,000 people. That makes them the largest sector of the economy in London. They also have the largest growth potential. It cannot be beneficial for that sector to be wholly unplanned and left to free market forces.

The Bill will do nothing for the film industry. It does not recognise the role of the film industry in British society. There have been many complaints from Conservative Members about the unions and restrictive practices. The ACTT, which is the main technicians' union, recognises the need to develop the film workshops. It has drawn up a model workshop agreement. That is the way to proceed for the future of the film industry. Unless the film workshops and small producers are working well and producing films, and unless the industry is healthy at the bottom, it will not be healthy at the top.

My hon. Friend the Minister for Easington (Mr. Dormand) said that the Labour party had called for a film authority—ACTT has done precisely the same. It has asked for a broadly based, adequately funded and powerful interventionist film authority with a mandate to revitalise the indigenous British film industry. That needs income. What is left after taking away the Eady levy? For all its problems, it represented a source of income. I am glad that Conservative Members have spoken of alternative ways to raise finance. The suggestion of a levy on films shown on television is gaining ground in the House. I hope that the Government will consider it seriously in Committee. It has support from all sides of the House.

The basis of finance for the British film industry should change as the medium itself changes. People have stopped going to the cinema for a variety of reasons—many of them good reasons, such as cinemas tending to be rather uncomfortable. If someone can sit in the comfort of a front room and watch a film, so be it. However, there is no reason why he should contribute nothing to the financing of the British film industry. A levy on films shown on television would be a sensible way forward.

If we are to finance a British film authority, a levy on pre-recorded and blank tapes would be appropriate. They represent one of the fastest growing areas of the communications market. The levy should be made at the point of purchase. It may do something to bring back into the industry all the profits of piracy that tapes have extracted from it. I hope that the Government will think along those lines. We need the restoration of capital allowances and a concentrated application of the business expansion scheme.

The Government are wrong not to regard the film industry as part of the important cultural sector of Britain. As we have seen in other countries, any film has a marked influence on national culture, both in domestic and international terms. The Government fail to recognise the essential difference between the film industry in Britain and the hotel or catering industries. They tend to see all industries in the same way. They miss an important and essential difference.

The Bill is not good news for the film industry. All informed opinion agrees on that. I trust that the next Labour Government will scrap the Bill and give the British film industry the material and cultural recognition that it deserves.

7.56 pm

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): I have crossed swords with the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) so often that—with the exception of his last two or three sentences—it is a pleasure to congratulate him on a thoughtful and constructive speech. I regret his last few sentences, but I shall not dwell on that.

I was interested in the hon. Gentleman's analysis of the distinction between the concepts of entertainment and art form. Whichever category it comes under, the product must be good to keep its public. In that, it is different from most standard manufactured or service products.

Entertainment and art form must be excellent to survive. Much of what the British film industry produces reaches that high standard.

The British film industry is growing. It has a new confidence and is an important national asset. The hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) said that there were now fewer films, but surely quality is better than quantity. Such fine films as "Gandhi", "Star Wars", "Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom", "1984", "Chariots of Fire", "Gregory's Girl" and — as we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) who has seen a preview—"Amadeus" have been produced in Britain during the past five or 10 years. Those, and many others, are great achievements.

There is a "renaissance" in the British film industry. The improvement in quality has been achieved in the face of an absolutely massive drop in audiences. The tables in annex B to the White Paper are interesting. A number of hon. Members have said that during the past 12 or 15 years the audience figures have dropped from 338 million to 66 million—a drop of 80 per cent. The table, which starts in 1953, shows that in 30 years there has been a drop from 1,300 million to 66 million. That is not, as my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Mr. Crouch) said, merely a massive drop; it is catastrophic.

The prime cause was the switch by the public from cinemas to television which took place mainly during the 1950s and 1960s, but which has gone on since. The "box" almost destroyed the screen. Cinemas everywhere have been closing. In my constituency, the last one to shut was the Odeon, two or three years ago. The previous one to close was the Regal, 20 years ago. Its name is perpetuated in a huge and ugly office block called Regal house, which, as my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) is well aware, houses much of the work of the local authority.

Somebody said that cinemas were closing at the rate of one every week. There are now only 1,300 screens left. Obviously, there are fewer than 1,300 cinemas, because many cinemas now have three or four screens. They are mostly to be found in city centres, although some are in the centres of smaller towns, a long way from the major cities. In the face of such a major change in social habits, it is remarkable that the film industry and the cinema, taken together, still employ about 70,000 people. Their export achievement is about £26 million per year—£100 million more than the figure for imported films. The British do not much understand foreign languages, whereas many foreigners learn English, but the disparity may also owe something to the excellent quality of British films.

Annex A to the White Paper shows that Britain is now producing more films than a year or two years ago, whereas the EC countries are producing fewer films. There has been an enormous drop. Our performance is much better than that of the other EC countries taken together.

The success of our film industry flows from the fact that British films give tremendous pleasure and enjoyment, not only through cinemas, but increasingly through new outlets such as television and video. We hope that in future they will also have an outlet through cable television. Some of the films are made by television companies.

My hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale) said that he used to work for Thames Television. I hope that the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody), who has left the Chamber, will not mind if I mention that her mother, Baroness Phillips, the Lord Lieutenant of Greater London, recently came to Thames Television studios, in my constituency, to present the Queen's award for export to Thames Television for some films that it had produced. That was a great achievement.

My hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury wondered how cinemas could increase their audiences. He compared our cinemas unfavourably with many continental cinemas, where the interiors are maintained to a higher, and perhaps cleaner, standard. That comment has often been true of British cinemas in the past. The smaller ones especially have been regarded as "flea-pits", with low standards of cleanliness and comfort. People no longer tolerate those standards and most of the "flea-pits" have closed. Obviously, it is necessary to have high standards of comfort, cleanliness and convenience.

My hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury and the hon. Member for Newham, North-West mentioned theatres and drew analogies between cinemas and theatres. It is valid to do that. A few years ago there was a report commissioned by the Society of West End Theatre Managers. It instructed a firm of public opinion pollsters to assess the reasons for people choosing to go to one play rather than another, and their motivation for going to the theatre. It found that people were not deterred from going to a particular play because of the cost of the seat, with or without VAT, because, on the whole, they found that the price of a theatre seat, including VAT, was good value; they were deterred by the whole cost of the evening, including a meal in the west end and transport into central London and from there to the theatre, with perhaps the inconvenience of parking and getting to the theatre. I am sure that the same objections apply to visiting cinemas. If going to the cinema could be made easier and pleasanter, the takings of cinemas in the west end of London and in other city centres could be increased considerably, although I do not think that cinemas could ever win back a very large proportion of the audiences lost to television.

If the British film industry has such great achievements to its name and is so successful at standing on its own feet, why does it need increased Government support? It is already improving its performance with smaller support than it received hitherto.

As a country we must build on our strengths; we must concentrate on what we do well. Britain is one of the great arts capitals of the world, in film as in other arts. Films are having a renaissance. They are developing as an art form, they are important to Britain, and we must prime the pump.

A tax of £4·5 million will be removed from cinemagoers with the ending of the Eady levy. Another £3 million a year will be added in subsidy to replace subsidies of £1 million to £1·3 million paid hitherto. That is an improvement in the financial provision for the cinema. It does not go as far as we might like it to go, but we cannot pretend that it is not there, or that it is nothing. It is churlish of the Opposition to disparage it and try to stir up resentment in the film industry. The House should give short shrift to that disparagement and support the Bill.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

8.7 pm

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): The hon. Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel) received very little support from his own side for the views that he has just expressed——

Mr. Jessel: They have just said, "Hear, hear."

Mr. Clarke: —so the hon. Gentleman should be somewhat less churlish in his own views. When I worked in the film industry, it was my practice to edit ruthlessly, and in preparing my speech I have attempted to follow that rule. If there are interruptions, I may be unable to keep my promise to my hon. Friends to be no longer than 10 minutes.

This has been an interesting and wide-ranging debate. I am sure that those who have given a great deal to the British film industry—and will no doubt be following our proceedings—will feel that, almost for the first time in recent years, we have addressed ourselves to the real problems that the British film industry is facing.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry) asked me to say — I am delighted to respond to his request—that when the Monopolies and Mergers Commission expressed its views on the industry, it paid tribute to the Glasgow experiment.

References have been made to the various Ministers who have been involved in the exercise. I shall not be saying much that is flattering about the White Paper or the Bill. With the greatest respect to the Minister of State, I have to note that, in dealing with the film industry, all the Ministers concerned have shown themselves to be accident-prone. I am glad that the Minister has been involved for only six weeks. I can imagine the damage that would have been caused if he had assumed his responsibilities earlier. Mr. Iain Sproat spent some time on this issue and it is clear that his influence on Government thinking was considerable. It is clear also that the people of Aberdeen had a greater affection and affinity for the film industry than Mr. Sproat. The right hon. Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker), the Minister for Local Government, made his contribution and his fate was even worse. It is now his task to dismantle local government. He will meet even greater opposition and even less success than his predecessor.

I was granted an Adjournment debate on the film industry before the summer recess and the Minister who had responsibilities for the industry made some comments which, even tonight, are worthy of reflection. The White Paper and the Bill will be damaging to the film industry but the events of the recent past have also been damaging. When the White Paper was published on 19 July, questions were asked by my hon. Friends and myself and the then Minister, the right hon. Member for Mole Valley, suggested that my hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) had relied on leaks for his information. I asked:

"Does he think that Mr. Hassan depended on the same leaks when he resigned from the NFFC, given that most of his predictions proved to be correct?"

However, the Minister observed:

"His predictions did not prove to be correct. Mr. Hassan resigned from the NFFC because he wanted to go into private film production, which is an expression of great confidence on his part."—[*Official Report*, 19 July 1984; Vol. 64, c. 527.]

If Mr. Hassan were present, I am sure that the last thing that he would say is that he has confidence in the White Paper or in the policies that are being put before the House. I deeply regret the damage which has been inflicted, which was reported in the *Daily Telegraph*, of all newspapers, on 26 July, a few days after the then Minister with responsibilities for these matters spoke so confidently. Even the *Daily Telegraph* observed:

"The Government's film policy unveiled last week will fail to solve any of the problems of the industry, Mr. Mamoun Hassan, managing director of the National Film Finance Corporation predicted."

It is clear that the British film industry has little confidence in the Bill. The Government should think seriously before they take up the time of the House of Commons in Committee.

The Government's policy will not succeed because they have not considered seriously the industry's real problems. The Eady levy was out of date and we know that not as many people are going to cinemas these days. Audiences began to decline after the war. Film production is having its problems in spite of excellent personnel within the film industry. The Government have failed to identify the industry's real problems, and it is surprising that they took over two years to produce a White Paper of 26 pages—in other words, a page a month. If that is the productivity that we can expect from the Government, it is no wonder that there is so much wrong with British industry and that the Minister has been so preoccupied with other matters.

The Government are going wrong because they seem to be suggesting that monetarism and movie making are one and the same thing. Monetarism and movie making do not match. We have heard properly and rightly from hon. Members on both sides of the House of the success of film industries in other countries. It must be recognised that we are facing serious competition from countries such as America and Australia. It comes also from countries that we would not normally associate with film making. It seems that those who are involved in our film industry are having their hands tied behind their backs by the Government. Given the effect that that will have on the livelihoods of those people, that is almost unforgivable.

It is interesting that the White Paper refers to only two films—"Chariots of Fire" and "Ghandhi". We know that the producers of those films would not approach the British industry in the same way that the Government have chosen. As my hon. Friend the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) said, Sir Richard Attenborough spent 20 years trying to persuade the British film industry that it would be feasible to produce a film on Gandhi.

I am sure that it will be acknowledged on both sides of the House that Scotland has been making a contribution to the film industry recently. I represent a Scottish constituency and I shall say something about Scottish film making experience. Scotland has produced Bill Forsyth, perhaps the most acclaimed new film-making talent in British cinema for many years. His work has been so successful that even the Government might have heard of it, and that represents a considerable achievement. This proves that artistic and cultural successes are compatible and that films that are apparently the most local in setting and subject matter and the closest to their roots are most likely to have world wide appeal. We should base our consideration of the film industry on an examination of films like his and do our utmost to facilitate the emergence of more Bill Forsyths.

The Scottish Film Council is involved in production and training, the promotion of film education the work of the Scottish Film Archive and the development of new patterns of exhibition through regional film theatres and societies. The Scottish Film Council manages to carry out its wide range of work on an annual grant of £338,000. This is excellent value for money but we must ensure that

the traditional Scottish virtue of thrift is not carried too far. The council will celebrate its 50th anniversary this year and I am sure that both sides of the House will wish to congratulate it on that achievement. I understand that the Lord Provost of Glasgow will do so next week. The council should receive a much enhanced grant to enable it to do even more good work in projecting the image of film making in Scotland.

Many films have been referred to during the debate and we have all paraded our favourites before the House. I liked "The Gold Rush". As I look at the Government Front Bench, consider their policy on films and reflect on the White Paper, I think of the scene which shows a party taking place inside a cabin which is slipping gradually over the edge of a cliff. It seems that the Government's role is to encourage the slippage of the cabin over the edge and not to stop it. That is the direction in which they are moving and consequently they can expect the utmost opposition from Opposition Members.

8.19 pm

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): I welcome the Bill. The system of redistributing finance around the film industry which is based on the quota system that developed in 1927, the NFFC which developed in 1949, and the Eady system, which developed in 1957—all based on 4 billion viewings when we now have only 66 million viewings—cannot last. I listened with interest to the speech by the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould). Although he argued for more public money to help the independent producers, I do not think that he or any other Opposition Member denies that the present system of finance needs reforming.

There has been a large amount of cross-party agreement during this debate. We are agreed on the ends, the cultural and national value of film-making, and the diagnosis. I believe—the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) may find this difficult to understand—that, by restoring the discipline of the free market, we can do much for the plight of the independent producers. I do not believe that they are given a fair deal at the moment.

The small producer is not allowed to operate in the free market. Four distortions affect that freedom: first, the subsidy received by overseas films; secondly, the domination of the United Kingdom distributive system by United States studios; thirdly, the duopoly of United Kingdom broadcasting companies—the BBC, ITV and the independent television companies whose fees do not reflect the enormous audiences — and, fourthly, the switch from cinema viewing to home viewing, including the theft of copyright.

How can those distortions be overcome? The Eady system is based on the principle of substantial cinema audiences being taxed, in effect, to help the producer. Clearly, that system cannot continue. We can no longer underwrite a blank cheque for large amounts of public money for new films. I agree that £1·5 million a year is inadequate, but what is the alternative?

I echo what has been said by a number of my hon. Friends, especially my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, North (Mr. Gorst), although the point had been qualified earlier by my hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson Smith). I am concerned that the White Paper rejected the argument that a levy can be imposed on the BBC and the independent television companies because, according to the White Paper, it would involve large increases in licence fees. Is that right? I believe that a number of Conservative Members will be interested to hear the reply of the Minister.

According to the Association of Independent Producers, the impact of a levy on the licence fee would be insignificant. The association says that, even if the entire cost of a levy on the BBC were passed on through the licence fee, the maximum increase required would be only 30p. I am interested in hearing the view of my hon. Friend on that point. The association says that, although there would be a reduction in the price paid to the distributors by the television companies, there would still be a benefit to British films, because they could contribute and receive funds from the levy at the expense of non-United Kingdom films.

The idea of imposing a levy on the television companies meets the point made at length by the hon. Member for Dagenham about the need for support for the independent producer, yet it avoids the difficulty of the Department involving itself in funding what must be a commercial decision. I hope the Government will at least say that they are prepared to look seriously at the AIP's suggestion and that a levy of 2·5p per viewer per film should be paid and then distributed to the makers of British films. In talking about this matter, we are looking at the future. The Bill contains the mechanism to allow those changes. I welcome the Bill and shall support it in the Lobby.

8.23 pm

Mr. Mark Fisher (Stoke-on-Trent): Few hon. Members who have spoken in this debate have been as optimistic about the effect of this legislation as the hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh). Even the Minister of State in introducing this Bill did not make the grandiose claims made by the hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle. The Minister must have regretted, by the time he reached the end of his speech, his generosity in giving way so many times. At one stage the Minister had to plead for mercy and say plaintively, "I have been in the job only six weeks. Please forgive me if I do not understand much of what I am talking about."

The truth is that the Minister's brief, far from being an international blockbuster, was low budget. The legislation is in every sense of the word low budget. To be fair to the Minister, the film industry is curious. No Government of either persuasion have come to terms with the dual and curious hybrid nature of this industry. Perhaps that is why, during the past 24 years, there have been as many as six films Bills in an attempt to achieve a financial structure for the film industry. The fact that the industry has reached its present state shows that Governments of both persuasions have failed.

The film industry is curious in that it is a highly commercial, capital-intensive, high-risk, venture capital industry which, as the Minister said, gives great benefits if a person gets it right. Most of the time, however, expert producers get it wrong. The only way in which most producers reckon they can get it right is by going for the softest options and the reassuring entertaining film. Films are also an art form. They are a way of telling stories about the way we live. If the industry is to be taken seriously, those stories should be provocative, challenging and questioning and should seek to change our perceptions of our society. That is not always a fast road to make a lot of money. Those conflicting views on and demands of the industry make it extremely difficult to legislate for.

[Mr. Mark Fisher]

If the Government have not come to terms with the film industry, it must be said also that the industry has seldom come to terms with the two conflicting demands on it. Many of the greatest film-makers that this country has produced—such as Grierson, Jennings and Basil Wright —have been unlauded and unacceptable to the industry in terms of finance. If the industry cannot get it right, it is asking an awful lot of a Government to get it right.

I must disagree with some points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) in his very good speech. I regret to say that I heard only part of it because I had to attend a Select Committee meeting. I understood him to say that he felt that the Government had got the analysis wrong. I believe that the White Paper's analysis of what is wrong with the industry is acute and well researched—it is the prescriptions that are wrong. Paragraph 5.6 of the White Paper states:

"We considered three possible ways of dealing with the present situation:

(i) retain the levy on cinemas only . . .

(ii) keep the levy concept . . .

(iii) abolish the levy outright".

That approach to the industry characterises the Government's measures, because they are all mechanical and logistical approaches.

The film industry demands more of the Government than such a mechanical and technical approach. The Government's approach in the White Paper and in this legislation — in so far as the Government have a coherent approach in the Bill—does, to some extent, address the industry's commercial problems. The Government do not, however, even begin to approach the cultural problems that this industry poses. The Government have a duty to recognise that fact. That is what is wrong. The Government's attitude is deficient. In introducing the Bill, the Minister said that he was letting the industry get on with its business, while at another moment he said that he was concerned with the commercial interests.

That is a simplistic definition of the industry's aims. The Minister did not give the House the sense that he comprehended the fact that the film industry is an artistic medium of expression and a way of telling the stories of our culture to ourselves. The Minister and the Bill do not show the Government's vision of the industry. The Minister would say that he wants the industry to be profitable and healthy. I do not know whether that is a fair characteristic, but it is not adequate to the demands that the industry lays on the Government. Those aims may be necessary—I do not deny that—but they are by no means sufficient. It is difficult to come up with a coherent vision of what this industry should be and how the Government should approach it. The idea that we should ever return to the vision of 1·3 billion attendances is nonsense. There is nothing that we can do to go back. We probably cannot even return to the levels of the 1960s. However, in the past few years the United States has shown that growth is possible. If we are to see growth in this country we should go for quality of spectacle and of the serious artistic film. That is probably the only way that we shall keep the 1,300 screens that we have at present, or more than 1,000 screens.

With 1,000 screens, we could still provide a national means of expression and communication and a basis for an international approach by the industry. The Government lack vision and any form of coherent belief in what they are seeking, so it is hardly surprising that the Bill has neither character nor personality.

Members on both sides of the House will agree that Eady should go. No one regrets its passing. *[Interruption.]* There may be one or two hon. Members who do, but I do not wish to take issue with any of my hon. Friends on that. The Bill fatally lacks any guarantees, even in the logistic terms in which it sees the industry. There are no guarantees —the Minister could not give one today—about the National Film and Television School. He has a responsibility towards the broad training of technicians in the industry because the craft and technique demands of the industry are great. If he leaves it to television money exclusively to fund that, inevitably within a few years the school will become an in-house television school, and that will not be in the interests of the country or the industry generally.

The same applies to the NFFC. The specific arrangements for that were spelt out in section 7 of the White Paper. The Minister puts flesh onto the bones of the legislation, but the Bill lacks detail and does not pin down the guarantees that he was suggesting as the way in which his mind was working. In Committee the Bill must be amended to be far more specific if we are to feel confident that the Government can deliver on some of their aspirations, much less their promises.

There is a danger—I hope that the Minister will take this on board and accept it in a decent spirit—that there will be complete commercial control of the NFFC. I am not sure that he said specifically that he would appoint the chief executive; perhaps he will only advise on the appointment. But even if he does appoint him, the chief executive and one board member are inadequate control. To whom would they be accountable? Will they report to him? Will he report to the House on their representation on that board? If most of the money is coming from commercial interests, surely the Minister, a believer in the free market, will allow the industry to manage itself. He should not control the chief executive.

The Bill contains no guarantees of production or quality, and when it came to assets, the Minister had the impertinence—if I may call it such—to ask for the applause of the House when he said that he was giving away public assets. The Government have an appalling record of flogging off national and public assets for less than their real value. British Telecom is an ideal example of money that is given away, but at least the Government are asking something for it. Here, the Minister has asked for credit for completely giving away public national assets to a private company. He must reconsider that. If Rank, Thorn EMI and Channel 4—I believe that they are the participating elements—are to benefit, does the Minister not believe that they should pay something for the residual asset rights of films, or does he believe that they should be given away for nothing? How will he explain to the Chancellor of the Exchequer the fact that he is giving away money so casually and easily?

There are other curious aspects of the Bill. We need not go into them in too much detail at the moment. The Minister leaves the NFDF in a curious, ambivalent position. Once it is cut off from the present form of the NFFC and the development agency, it has only a minor role. I am sure that it will be grateful for the small amount

of money thrown in its direction but to whom is it to relate and how will it fit into the market-oriented and market-conscious industry that the Minister is considering?

The Minister has given £10 million over five years. He will say that figure is realistic, and he would characterise the Opposition as unrealistic in asking for more public money. However, when it suits their case, the Government are keen to show the realism of the French Administration in what the Government regard as cutting public expenditure. Many Opposition Members and many people in the country who are unemployed would love to have the cut-back levels of public expenditure that the French nation is even now enjoying.

The Government like quoting France, so let us quote France back to them. Even after only six weeks, the Minister should know that the French Government subsidise the industry—it is difficult to calculate exactly —to the tune of approximately £77 million a year. Of that, £55 million goes directly to production, distribution and exhibition, and £22 million goes on training, conservation, festivals and other forms of promotion. The money comes from box office receipts and a television levy and from the Government directly. That aid to the French industry is across the board. That is another aspect of the Bill which is inadequate. It recognises just the production and distribution problems; it does not recognise the wider problems of training, short films, development money, workshop activities, as mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks), non-professional film-making, or even the Minister's role.

Those matters all come under the French Minister of Culture, Jacques Lang. He has a fund of his own which supports films of international importance. It supports film-makers such as Bresson, and Orson Welles and Andrej Wajda who are not even French film-makers.

Under clause 4 the Minister will have the important right to invest in production. I hope that he takes the opportunity and enjoys his role as a film producer. Something that even the French do not do, and which I believe we should, is to take a far greater role as a country and Government and build up a new film audience by becoming involved in education. There is a role for commercial film-makers—documentary and feature—in polytechnics, schools and colleges to create an understanding for film and to put it onto the educational curriculum; to create a language of film and understanding of what film is about; and how it can relate to people's lives in the same way as the short story, the novel, the painting or any other medium of expression.

I believe that the Bill tackles a difficult subject, but that the Minister has missed a golden opportunity. It is not too late for him to repent. After only six weeks in the job, I hope that he will have the modesty to accept that he has not learned everything about it and will accept constructive amendments in Committee. We cannot have the film industry that the Opposition believe the country and the people deserve, but in Committee at least we can obtain a much better Bill.

8.37 pm

Mr. Jeremy Hanley (Richmond and Barnes): While I welcome the Bill, I welcome all the more my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary's second son, who was born within the last half hour. If the British film industry can be as fruitful as the Minister, we have nothing to worry about. Over the past few years we have welcomed "Superman", "Superman II", and "Superman III"—I hasten to add that the analogy falls a little short there—but may I welcome "Rossendale and Darwen III" to the earth today. I am sure that I speak for the whole House when I wish mother and child and, from the Conservative Benches, the Minister well.

My father made 64 British films; my mother made 27 British films; and my sister some 18. My mother and sister would like it to be known that they are available for offers some time after Christmas. I made two films, although I must add that I retired at the peak of my career aged one and a half following "Holiday Camp". I just could not follow that. It was shown again recently on Channel 4. I am grateful that I and my children could see it, but I believe that it is right—I shall mention this later—that levies should be paid for blank tapes because I shall not now have to go to the cinema and I shall not ever again have to pay to see that little gem of the British cinema and the little gem that appears in it.

I was born in Beaconsfield and for the first few years of my life lived in Denham. Those names echo loud and clear around the film world. In my constituency of Richmond and Barnes I am proud to have Twickenham studios. In fact, my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel) said just before the election that one of his greatest losses due to the boundary changes was not only the film studios but the many people who worked there, many excellent artists.

British cinema has had the most remarkable renaissance. I think that it is fair to say that the films of my parents over many years were low-budget films, but British films of quality, whatever their budget, have been around for years. Only occasionally did they find international acclaim, but the fame that they found was regular enough to give all producers, both independent and tied, some hope. What the British film industry did with small funds, occasionally even with rare colour film, was often second to none. I should like to think that the British film industry has not wasted its funds, as the industry in other countries has wasted much bigger budgets.

The new dawn began with "The Railway Children". With such films, the independent producer heralded the new dawn. Then came "Gregory's Girl" and "Local Hero". I thought that the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) did a beautiful job of an audition for Bill Forsyth's next film. He has exactly the right tone of voice and reminded me of half the cast of "Gregory's Girl" and two thirds of the cast of "Local Hero", although he did not remind me of any of the cast of "Chariots of Fire". There was also "Gandhi" which was produced by one of my constituents, Sir Richard Attenborough, although he would wish that I were not his representative. Films of that ilk have without doubt put Britain into the forefront of the industry—not just in our rightful place, but on top of the world, as the recent Oscar awards showed.

Those who saw "Chariots of Fire" in the cinema could not have failed to feel their breasts swell with pride. The cinema was the right medium for seeing that film. I have seen it both in the cinema and on video tape at home. While I admire video, use it and think that the video tape player is one of the greatest inventions of my lifetime, I believe that those who have not seen such a creation as "Chariots of Fire" in the local cinema have missed out terribly. The sound, the effects, the size, the scope of the

[Mr. Jeremy Hanley]

spectacle and the atmosphere are still absolutely unbeatable. What a tragedy it is that the average Briton is turning away from the cinema even today.

Today, I am glad to be able to call on those who enjoy films on television to try the cinema now. Great steps are being made. People are trying hard to design a modern emporium that is more suited to the needs of British entertainment. The cinema is no longer the old flea-pit that we used to have. It is now comfortable and air-conditioned, and even smokers are segregated. But my hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Mr. Atkins) will still find comfort in the back row.

To encourage the return to the cinema, I welcome the scrapping of the Eady levy. The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher) said that almost everyone in the House would support the scrapping of the Eady levy. I find it difficult to understand why it has been in existence for so long, except that it has provided useful funding for many worthy causes. I shall mention those in a moment.

Since everyone agrees that the Eady levy should be scrapped, why do we have to wait until 12 October 1985? There are powers for the Secretary of State to scrap it earlier. I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to announce that date as soon as possible so that cinema owners can plan for its abolition.

I support a levy on television films. I fully understand the extra cost to the licence that that might bring. Some say that it is just a recycled Eady. I would say that it is an up-to-date Eady because it recognises the way in which films are seen by most people. Eady was relevant and necessary in its day. Now it is not necessary, and it is disadvantageous and destructive to the cinema. I would encourage people to go back. Now that people hire films for £1, £1.50 or £2 a night, as my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Mr. Crouch) said, and if we are to have a levy, which can be justified, the modern Eady should be on blank tape and on cinema films shown on pre-recorded tapes on television. There should be a levy on blank tape not only for sensible funding purposes but because, as my hon. Friend the Minister will know, there should be compensation for what I regard as institutionalised theft of intellectual property—a case that I have long supported.

The hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) said that the Bill did not give the vast support that she wanted. It is her job to oppose, but she could have been more constructive. The Bill is not the gathering together of film, television, video, audio, radio and everything that she required, with massive central funding. It does not nationalise the entertainment industry. However, it removes some of the last vestiges of state interference without removing state funding. That is the best combination that anyone in the House can wish for.

With regard to the replacement of the NFFC, the contribution of £1·1 million annually for three years from organisations in the film, television and video sectors to partly finance low-budget feature films is excellent, but that is the same amount as the NFFC budget beforehand——

Mr. Fisher: What about the portfolio of rights?

Mr. Hanley: Indeed, the portfolio of rights is being given and it will produce £200,000 a year, but I believe that if one is to give benefit to the film industry, it is not right to carp on the fact that it has not been sold for a vast amount to those who own it at the moment, or even to the Government, with their central funding.

It is constructive to give the new company a good start with some of the jewels in the crown of the British film industry. As has been rightly said, the Government will make £1·5 million available per year for the next five years to co-finance films with the new company.

There is also £500,000 a year for five years to continue the work of the national film development fund. That is helping at the earliest stages of creation and is greatly to be desired. I would not have fully supported the death of the Eady levy without the £600,000 a year for the National Film and Television School. The independent television companies, the BBC and the cinemas all benefit from that school. It is truly the cradle of this great industry, of which we are all so proud. The sponsorship of British Film Year is also an excellent and progressive step.

There are also tax changes in the Bill. I support them in the main. The effect of the change in the system of capital allowances is being felt genuinely by those in the film industry, but over the next few years taxation in general will be such that the benefits of lower corporation tax on a regular year-by-year basis will outweigh the immediate disadvantages of the change of system.

One other change that I must mention on behalf of some of my constituents is the change in taxation status of those working in the film industry. It has nothing to do with the Bill, but the Inland Revenue is too harsh in assessing people under schedule E rather than schedule D when they work in the film industry. Many of my constituents have either been driven outside the country or have had to change their job. That has helped to increase the costs of the film industry.

Therefore, on behalf of my constituents, myself and my family, and particularly on behalf of "Rossendale and Darwen III," I welcome the Bill.

8.48 pm

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): This has been a remarkable debate in several ways. Most hon. Members on both sides of the House are agreed that the present financial structure of the British film industry is unsatisfactory. Most of us are also totally committed to the welfare and prosperity of the future of the British film industry. Most of us, again on both sides of the House, have said that we do not think that the Government have got it completely right. I for one will say exactly that. I hope that when we consider the Bill further in its passage through the House, the Government will listen to the genuine points that are being made via hon. Members on both sides of the House about the detailed provisions for the future of what is an extremely important industry for this country.

First, we must recognise the importance of films as an art form. In this country we quite properly believe that it is right to support the creation and performance of the arts. By means of central Government support through the Arts Council we make about £14 million per year available to support the production of opera at Covent Garden. When one compares that with the sums envisaged by the White Paper and the Bill one must ask the Government to pause and consider whether they have got their funding priorities right. As the hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Crouch) said, the arts are all of the same family. We must therefore

consider how the Government and the community should foster and ensure the prosperity of the film industry in the context of policy towards the arts as a whole.

The thrust of the White Paper and the Bill relies very heavily on the commercial sector and on commercial motives. I believe that that is misguided. As my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) said, we must remember that the film industry is a major income producer for this country through the films sold and distributed abroad and the way in which British goods and materials as well as British culture are promoted by the film industry and its products. That is extremely important. It is thus absolutely right that there should be a commitment to sustain and support the future of the industry.

The question then arises as to how that support and sustenance should be provided. With regard to the encouragement of new film-makers, the Government state in the White Paper:

"In keeping with the main thrust of our policy for film we believe that this important work should be firmly based in the private sector and directed towards the development of talent for the commercial market."

The core of the Government's policy is the private sector and the commercial market. I believe that in the White Paper and in the Bill the Government rely too much on that sector and on the good will of its two dominating companies, Rank and EMI.

Like other hon. Members on both sides, I support the abolition of the Eady levy as an inefficient, expensive and not very effective means of raising funds. The tax is at the wrong point of delivery. When cinema audiences throughout the country are dwindling and private video viewing is increasing it is clearly nonsense to maintain a levy on cinemas while there is no levy whatever on video.

I take just two examples of the Government's proposals to replace the levy. On funding for the NFFC, the first problem is that there is no apparent guarantee beyond three years, although the Minister hinted that funding might well continue. The White Paper refers to

"arrangements with certain organisations in the film, television and video sectors".

When the Government refine the legislation before bringing it back to the House they must be far more explicit and give much more substantial guarantees about that funding. Concern has also been expressed about the National Film and Television School. The same problems arise in that context—the dependence on the good will of the commercial sector and the restriction of guarantees to five years. The entirely insufficient funding envisaged for both the NFFC and the NFTS in the White Paper and the Bill is most disappointing.

The hon. Member for Canterbury mentioned Australia. When one compares the Government's proposals with the way in which the Australian Government support, nurture and provide finance for the Australian film industry, the prospect is depressing indeed.

It has been said that the British film industry is undergoing a renaissance. To a certain, very limited extent, that is true, in that a number of extremely good and successful films have been produced in recent years. Looking deeper at the spread of work in the industry, however, there is less cause for hope. We must be concerned about the spread of support for the industry and the way in which new talent is enabled to work. In my constituency brilliant young technicians in film production and in the artistry that goes with it are currently unemployed and their talent is going to waste because the commercial film industry has no opportunities for them. That is the problem facing the British film industry. The alternative proposals put forward by many hon. Members — a levy on blank tapes and on films shown on television, amounting to a tiny amount per viewer— could bring enormous amounts of money into the British film industry and bring about a real renaissance, not just a few more star turns such as "Chariots of Fire", "Local Hero", "Gregory's Girl", "Ghandi" or "The Killing Fields", but real breadth of support for the British film industry and British talent.

I strongly echo the comments made about the phasing out of capital allowances through the Finance Act 1984 as a tax incentive to film production. That has imposed a real burden especially on small film producers and it is a major threat to the welfare of the industry.

Very little has been said today, and nothing is said in the White Paper or the Bill beyond a passing reference to the extremely good work of the British Film Institute, about the need to preserve our film archives.

We have a precious heritage of old and original film material, some of which is at serious risk because there are no proper facilities to maintain, catalogue and preserve it. That is something that we should be extremely concerned about. That material is part of our cultural heritage and an aspect of our genius through the ages, and we ought to preserve it.

Similarly, we should cherish the British genius and talent that is now waiting to be tapped and to produce the many films that I am sure that we are capable of producing in future. We should enable that genius to flourish. I do not think that the Bill provides the framework for that quality and quantity of production, and it is sad that that is so. I hope that in the coming months the Government will make enough changes to the Bill to ensure that it provides that framework, and that the British film industry will flourish rather than die.

9 pm

Mr. Derek Conway (Shrewsbury and Atcham): Many interesting aspects of film have been covered in the debate. Before I was elected to the House I served on the board of a regional cinema. The experience was valuable. I joined the board with serious misgivings about the way in which the film industry and such organisations were financed — sometimes with the aid of considerable public support. However, my period of service on that trust changed my attitude towards the film industry.

I welcomed the remarks of the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) who made a positive contribution to the debate. He welcomed the abolition of the Eady levy, so perhaps we do not have too far to go. With one or two exceptions, the tenor of the debate has suggested that there is all-party support for the British film industry. What is being debated, therefore, is the best way forward. With that aim in mind, and bearing in mind that the National Film Finance Corporation has been in existence since 1949, I draw the attention of the House to clause 3 and to future financing methods.

The industry has had quite a good run since 1949, with support from successive Governments of all political persuasions. It is uncharitable of hon. Gentlemen to suggest that the Conservative party does not support the film industry. In 1980, after the Government review introduced by my right hon. Friend the Member for

[Mr. Derek Conway]

Chingford (Mr. Tebbit), then Under-Secretary of State for Trade, a further £13 million was devoted to the financing of the corporation. It is interesting that in 1981 and 1982 the Select Committee on Education, Science and Arts urged in its report that the NFFC should be reorganised —although it may not have envisaged a reorganisation such as this. The Committee observed that there was no guarantee, according to the evidence that it had heard, that Eady money returned to the producers of films or was reinvested in film production. One hopes that the new private company will receive—as we are assured it will —money from the film, television and video sectors amounting to £1·1 million per annum over three years in order to finance low-budget feature films. Opposition Members, and some of my hon. Friends, have voiced doubts about the return of £200,000 per annum from past projects. I should be happy to see that as a form of underwritten grant rather than a straightforward contribution to the rights from past years. Perhaps the Government might consider such an arrangement. It would help to ensure that the new private company was taking the right path.

We have been assured that the Government will provide a further £1·5 million a year for five years to co-finance films with the corporation, but there is nothing in the Bill to explain what will happen to the rights from those projects when they return to the Department. Will they go to the Exchequer or be reinvested in the industry?

My hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Mr. Crouch) commented dramatically on the income that the British film industry earns for this country. I am sure that he and other hon. Members will recognise that the flexibility which the Bill will ensure will stimulate rather than harm the industry.

Much has been said today about the National Film and Television School. It has been justifiably praised for its international reputation. As we know, it receives £500,000 a year from the Eady levy. I understand that the cinema corporations, the independent television companies and the BBC have undertaken to provide £600,000 a year for the school for the next five years and that the Government will provide £200,000 to update the facilities in the next financial year. I wonder whether the support is sufficient and long-term enough to ensure that the school's justified reputation is enhanced still further.

The possibility of a levy on video tapes has been discussed. The one thing that worries me as a matter of principle is that once such a levy is introduced, similar ones could be introduced on audio tapes. That would have serious effects, especially on the blind. Nevertheless, I accept that pirating is a problem. Although I would not oppose such a step now, it should be taken with a great deal of caution and after much consideration.

As the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) said, there is a need for specialist cinemas as they concern cinema as an art form. One of my anxieties about the Government's proposal to abolish the GLC, and especially the metropolitan county councils, is the effect that abolition will have on regional arts councils and, therefore, the support that they provide for specialist cinemas throughout the country.

I hope that the British film industry will not suffer from the snob appeal with which we tend to regard other art forms. That has been the tenor of the debate. It is essential that the Government's undertaking to prime the pump continues. The Bill will give the industry greater flexibility. I am sure that it is flexible enough to make maximum use of it.

9.6 pm

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): I am not surprised at some of what has been said about Ministers not having a close association with the film industry. I do not wish to embarrass them but the Under-Secretary for Trade and Industry and the Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry both look quite debonair and capable of playing opposite many of our gorgeous ladies in the film industry.

The film industry has declined slowly but surely. I welcome the opportunity being given to Back Benchers to change that in Committee. I have no doubt that they will put Ministers in their places and point them in the right direction. They should be helping our ailing film industry, which has been famous throughout the world for many years. Nevertheless, it has been declining. When we watch television, we cannot help noticing some of the rubbish that we get from the United States of America. There are gaps for British films and actors.

I have a list of some famous British actors who have been encouraged to go to the United States. Right hon. and hon. Members will remember some of their names, especially more elderly hon. Members. I refer to Sir Cedric Hardwicke, Charles Laughton, Gladys Cooper, C. Aubrey Smith and, last but not least, Boris Karloff. They were all famous British actors who were drawn across the Atlantic because we were not sensible. Even now we are losing famous actors to the United States. The Government should provide greater encouragement for them to stay.

We have premiers of famous films and usually a Minister attends. His chest stands out for a yard with pride for British films. I want to see that at the Dispatch Box, especially from the Chancellor of the Exchequer. I have seen his chest puffed out, but I should like to see pride in the House for British films.

The United Kingdom has marvellous acting talent and the Government should encourage it. They should provide proper facilities for British films to be made, and for British people to see them, whether in the cinema or on television. We should build more cinemas and encourage people to see films there. We have the facilities, and the Government should find the money to finance the job.

9.10 pm

Mr. Norman Buchan (Paisley, South): I am pleased that I returned to the Chamber in time to hear the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes). The Government take credit for everything that British people do and refuse resources for them to do more. My hon. Friend is absolutely right, even if he goes back further in time than I do.

I follow the hon. Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley), who was first to congratulate the Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on another useful production. The Minister represents Rossendale and Darwen and he is now doing his bit to secure the survival of the species. I, too, congratulate him. I have seen no greater sign of nobility than the Minister sitting doggedly throughout the debate. Whether his wife will approve of that as highly as we do is another matter.

The debate has been marked by one singular fact. It was expressed by the hon. Member for Hendon, North (Mr. Gorst), who said that it could have been an all-party debate with all hon. Members on one side except for the Government Front Bench. Without exception hon. Members have said that the White Paper is insufficient and will not work. The hon. Gentleman also said that it was strong on analysis but weak on prescriptions.

Both Opposition and Tory Members have spelt out regrets at the Government's failure to grasp opportunities. My hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry) said that the Government praise but do not listen, and my hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham) said that the Government had got it wrong. Those are echoes of what is being said by the industry. The main producers' association states:

"The Association was extremely disappointed with the direction of the White Paper, in that it failed completely to provide some form of financial incentive to offset the loss of Capital Allowances."

Conservative Members echoed that view. The memorandum continues:

"The Association was deeply shocked by the 1984 budget proposals for the abolition of Capital Allowances in the face of pledges made for their continuation by the same Government in 1983."

It will be a long time before the Government are forgiven for breaking that pledge.

The association further states:

"The White Paper suggests that home video, cable and DBS will provide a number of exciting new market opportunities for the future. It is our view that the developments are likely to be considerably delayed . . . The development of cable and Direct Broadcast by Satellite is now highly questionable."

The Association of Independent Producers echoes that even more strongly. It states:

"The White Paper and the Films Bill indicate that the Government intends to give financial assistance which will not exceed £1·5 million. We feel very strongly that the organisation should be given sufficient funding to enable it to produce between ten and twelve feature films per year, and six short films . . . the cost of one low budget film in 1984 is £1·5 million."

The Association of Independent Producers talks devastatingly about the White Paper, which states:

"Production levels are being sustained."

The association says:

"The paper notes an increase in production of seven films . . . to a total of 34."

In 1982, Germany produced 70 films, and France produced 131. The White Paper states:

"Domestically . . . the cinema checked its previously steady downward trend."

The association states:

"Yet, admissions dropped a further 30 to 35 per cent. in the first part of 1984."

The White Paper claims:

"In the all-important North American market there was a much greater acceptance of British films."

The association states:

"Two Oscar-winning films do not demonstrate a significantly higher penetration of the United States market."

The ACTT echoes the criticism. With regard to feature films, the union states:

"The industry in the United Kingdom is clearly dependent, at this time, on the flow of American investment to generate employment and income."

The union says that the Government have failed to understand that the Hollywood style of feature, where our only input is one of technical expertise, is different. We have heard much about that expertise today, but it does not produce one low-budget or middle-budget film, which is what we need.

The union states:

"But it is this type of production, which expresses social and cultural concerns genuinely indigenous to British society, and budgeted way below the level of Hollywood fantasies, that we believe can be richly assisted by Government-aided investment. Without that assistance this sector will be unable to develop systematically, creatively, and in defiance of the American hold on the world market."

We are facing a double problem—the sell-out of the funding to the two major firms and the problems with broadcasting, television and pirate videos.

To answer those criticisms we have what, by any standards, is a fairly shabby document. It is disappointing because it does not share the producers' and the union's anxiety about the future, and they are outraged by the Government's failure to take the opportunity that we have here.

There are three reasons for the Government's failure. First, they do not understand the impact of the new technologies, such as cable and DBS, and the feedback from those technologies to films. The hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Crouch) understood that, but the Government have not. The British film industry now has inadequate funding to compete with the money that will flow in from abroad.

Secondly, the Government have failed to see beyond their blinkered devotion to private enterprise and private profit. They are replacing the levy with a private structure that is based upon the two main elements of the industry. Since the Government cannot see beyond private enterprise, they have decided to subsidise it. They will not subsidise the public sector, but they will subsidise EMI and Rank to control the financing of the industry.

Thirdly, the Government have no imagination. They do not perceive film as anything but a commercial commodity—an object to be produced, bought and sold. They do not understand the importance of film to our cultural life.

Those failures of imagination and understanding led to the inadequate White Paper. The proposed system will fail because the funding is insufficient and because there will be no control over the new body. The Government have proposed nothing new to create funding or a different structure for the industry.

Among the many Back Bench suggestions was the possibility of levies on blank tapes or film cassettes. I am tempted towards that for two reasons. The first is that no one doubts that the kind of piracy that is now taking place means that the film producers are not getting an adequate return for their work, from which they could obtain the seedcorn for the future. Secondly, I am concerned about copyright.

The introduction of something like video has a number of implications. The blockbusters will make their money in the commercial cinema, but copyright is vital for small or medium-sized budget films. I do not discard the concept of additional funding through a tiny levy on blank tapes or the possibility of a slightly bigger levy on film cassettes which, after all, are sold for commercial purposes. Such a move would at least help in the fight against copyright piracy, which has gone on since the times of Shakespeare. It could also be argued that it is necessary, given our present economic needs. However, none of that is a substitute for proper public subsidy of this industry.

Conservative Members, particularly those on the Government Benches, have suggested that a useful opportunity is in front of us. They argue that, as we share the same language as the United States, there is a huge

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market to be penetrated by our industry. My hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) and I remember hearing the same argument about the Common Market. We were told, "Here is a consumer market of 200 million people into which we can flood our goods." But the opposite happened, and their goods flooded into the United Kingdom with the result that we now have the largest deficit in trade in manufacturing goods in our history.—[HON. MEMBERS: "Whose fault was that?"] The Conservative party has been in government for six years, and Conservative Members ask that. They have destroyed British industry around their ears, and they ask whose fault it is. They are now trying to do the same to the British film industry. I do not want to spend too much time on such idiotic remarks, but if we look at what happened two years before, when we joined the Common Market in 1972, the answer is evident.

If the opposite is true in relation to that, it is even truer in relation to an organisation whose mainspring of production is the American Hollywood film. That is why we have reason to be anxious.

I am also perplexed by the curious way in which Conservative Members have tried to separate the artistic from the commercial. They make a curious distinction between films as commercial products and films as art. I do not understand what gives rise to that point of view. Was Chaplin or Buster Keaton commercial or artistic? In my view they were commercial, good film and culturally valuable. Is "Gregory's Girl" commercial or art? It is both. I cannot for the life of me understand why we should seek to make such a distinction in defence of a shoddy commercially based White Paper.

If there is no difference between the commercial and the artistic, there is a difference between film for television and film for cinema. There is a major difference between the product for the cinema and the product for the small screen in the home. The comparison in painting is between the big public statement—the religious paintings in the churches or the statues in the square—and the easel painting for the home. That distinction has not always been fully seized upon by our producers. If we neglect the cinema and allow films to die away, a major part of our culture will disappear. That is why it is important to get this right.

One sees the same in the social response involved. I remember a marvellous 10-second shot of Chaplin going into a hotel, tramp's costume and all, and as he put his elbow on the reception desk, his left foot came up and started circling, feeling for the customary brass rail to rest his foot on. The audience responded because that demanded a community response. It would not get the same kind of response in the home. Therefore, we must pay attention to this distinction.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) took up the point of my hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham that we are seeing a kind of colonisation—a commercial and cultural surrender to the United States. We are not facing a free market. We are surrendering to an extent to the mercies and good will of EMI and Rank in order to survive. The market will be taken over by the Americans because it is already half rigged in their interests. Only if we understand that shall we be able to combat the problem.

In Committee—we give fair warning now—we shall need to probe deeply the nature of the strange beast that the Government are creating to replace the present funding of our films—that rough beast, composed of EMI and Rank, slouching towards the bank to be reborn. The concept is wrong, first, because it removes public involvement—public support, subsidy and return—and hands it over to an organisation whose operations must be determined fundamentally by its own interests. It is not only that it is insufficient, but it is doing the wrong thing. Middle and low-budget films and the independent producer will be squeezed out. We shall probe that deeply and do all that we can to reverse it in Committee.

We must also discover in Committee what kind of locus there is for the educational aspects. There has been some argument as to what will happen to the film school. I should like to know what the Minister has in mind. Will it be an education department responsibility or the same kind of structure as now? Funding is available and the kind of funding that my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) suggested, should be forthcoming, both to develop and to fund the film school.

Films are more than commercial projects. The White Paper neither answers nor begins to answer some of the problems that arise when we consider the future of our films. The funding of the arts in Britain is a disgrace. It is the lowest in the western world. Mr. Deputy Speaker was tempted to intervene when the hon. Member for Canterbury spent some time talking about the theatre and the Theatres Trust. But he was correct. Just as the intense work that was done in his field by the Select Committee on Education, Science and Arts, which reported two years ago, has been largely ignored by the Government, so too its recommendations in relation to film have been ignored and ignored for the same reasons. This is a penny-pinching, mean-minded and ultimately completely philistine Government. I absolve some Back Benchers, but the Government, with their monetarist theories, are the most philistine Government that we have seen for a long time. Until they understand that film is more than a commercial project and more than a commodity to be bought and sold, they will not get it right. They cannot even get it right for national reasons. I shall give a historic example to illustrate the importance of film. After the war, the Italian film industry developed with films such as "Rome — Open City" and "Bicycle Thieves". Hon. Members will remember that the importance of the great Italian directors of that period, such as Rossellini, da Sica and later Visconti lay in helping to liberate Italy from the ignominy of Fascism. In the eyes of the world it was largely the Italian film industry that helped to slough off the ignominy of Fascism and helped Italy to emerge with dignity into the world. Those of us who lived through that period recall that vividly.

Therefore, film even more than domestic television is a vital instrument for our people and the nation. Just as it served a purpose in Italy after the war, it can serve another purpose for us. The British Council may fall victim to the cuts instituted by the Foreign Secretary, by the grace of the Chancellor of the Exchequer. I hope that the same thing will not happen to our film industry. It would seem that the Government just do not understand. As my hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield said, the Government praise the films but refuse to provide the resources that will enable other films to repeat their success.

What shall we do when in their place? I shall take up some of the suggestions of Conservative Members and the Select Committee. One problem is that we have neglected to place the arts and the film industry in their rightful place in the nation's thinking. For the first time, there is this year a Minister for the Arts in the Cabinet. However, it has been made clear to the world—God knows why—that he has been included in the Cabinet not for that, but for other reasons. We should have a single Ministry for the arts that encompasses not only music and the theatre but also films. We should recognise the importance of film not only in our commercial but in our cultural life. In addition, a British film authority should take over the main job of guiding, advising, funding and educating for a proper film industry.

British films have played a notable part in presenting an image of Britain to the world at large. But they are now being starved of the resources that they need to do that job properly. Nevertheless, independent producers and directors such as Bill Forsyth have produced films such as "Gregory's Girl" and, more recently, "Comfort and Joy", and there have also been bigger scale films, such as those directed by Attenborough. Hon. Members should bear in mind the response that one finds in the cinema to a film such as "Gregory's Girl". It is quite different from the community response that that sort of film meets with when it is shown on the small screen. One of the most important features of "Gandhi" was the sense of spaciousness within India. Those aspects cannot be repeated on television. The fight is on not merely to provide a cheap and subsidiary product for television, but to save the film industry both for our cinema and for what it can do for this country's image abroad.

9.33 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Trade and Industry (Mr. David Trippier): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) and the hon. Member for Paisley, South (Mr. Buchan) for the kind things that they said about the recent arrival in the Trippier family. For as long as I have been privileged to be the Minister with special responsibilities for small firms, I have been saying that small is beautiful, but tonight that phrase has taken on a whole new meaning in the form, I understand, of a boy weighing 6 lb 11 oz who is to be called Edward David. I know that it is your privilege, Mr. Speaker, to name people, but I hope that you will be kind enough to allow me to get away with having done so. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear".]

I have listened with interest to the debate, but what has struck me most forcibly is not so much the support that our policy has received as the wholly negative approach of much of the opposition. The sort of tone adopted when many of the points were made suggested that we had a patient who was seriously ill and fading fast, and that all that would save him was a blood transfusion — regardless of the identity of the donor. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Turnover in feature film production in Britain is the highest for years. Alan Sapper, the General Secretary of ACTT, made it clear when he met my right hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker), now the Minister for Local Government, that more of his freelance film members were in work than for many years.

Leading members of the industry know that production in all areas is stronger than ever before. They know that we have more new talent than ever before and more quality films than ever before. Yet Opposition Members persist in the pretence that the industry is some kind of lame duck. That is patently untrue.

Everyone says that the film industry is special, and in many ways they are right. Film production has no settled industrial structure like other industries—a point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, North (Mr. Gorst) and the hon. Member for Easington (Mr. Dormand) and touched upon by the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher).

My hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) was right to say that cinemas are declining fast. However, new technology is allowing the strong underlying consumer demand for films to show itself in new ways. In many ways, the film industry is a microcosm of British industry generally in the nature of its problems. My hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Brinton) touched on that point in his excellent speech. There is an urgent need for Government to stop fiddling around with parts of it through endless regulations which not only waste everyone's time but remove vital degrees of freedom from both the industry and the consumer in certain key areas.

In replying to the debate and a number of the points raised, I wish to concentrate on two areas—cinemas and production. I agree with the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale) about the need to remove the Eady levy from cinemas. It has been an unreasonable and unjustifiable piece of discrimination. It is imperative that it is removed, but I wish to make it quite clear exactly why we are doing so. It is most definitely not a question of legislating to support the ailing cinema. In the consumer demand for films, the film industry faces strong competition from newer technological means. Television shows an enormous number of films — a trend that began in the 1960s. It has now reached the point where in 1983 BBC1 and BBC2 showed 786 films, the ITV companies about 350 films and Channel 4 about the same number. They were all pre-existing films to which they had acquired the TV rights and not films that they had either made themselves or commissioned from outside.

The thing that especially distresses cinemas about TV competition is that there is no direct market relationship between the consumers and the films that they see. The TV licence is, of course, paid by the consumer, and TV advertising obviously comes through in the prices of the goods and services advertised. However, it is not like the cinemas, where the patron makes his choice of film and pays his money to see it.

Video also provides strong direct competition for the consumer's money. Here again, the market relationship is not completely clear cut. Video recorders are used to timeshift TV programmes and, like TV itself, the consumer tends to regard them as an overhead.

Even the tape hire transactions have had distortions in the high level of piracy. However, thanks to private Members' legislation — fully supported by the Government—the means have been made available for rights owners to seek effective redress. That has cut piracy dramatically. However, there are signs of a levelling off of growth in video recorder ownership. With the past fragmentation of ownership rights, the industry has squandered 30 years of film in three years. Also, as the video market matures, there are signs of a diminution in the viewing of pre-recorded material as the length of

[Mr. David Trippier]

ownership of a VCR grows. Signs of contraction are there, and it may be that that element of competition with the cinema will become less intense.

It is probably reasonable to assume that there are 4 billion individual film viewings via TV, where it is, in terms of marginal cost, free. For VCR owners, three pre-recorded items, mostly films, in two weeks is a reasonable estimate. In audience terms, those are now well ahead of cinema, but in the fight for the consumer, cinemas are tied by the levy. We are removing it to allow cinemas to compete more effectively for their place in the consumer's priorities. Whether they do or not is up to them.

The various outlets for film represent a series of separate market windows. There are clearly interrelationships, the most important of which is that cinemas are the showcases. A successful cinema release is a major factor in determining the prices paid by other market outlets and, indeed, the timing of the release of a film in those media. Not only are we standing back from interference with the cinema sector; we are indirectly giving producers additional freedom in determing the exploitation pattern that will let them maximise their earnings from their films.

I listened carefully to the hon. Member for Easington, who made a valid point in regard to the other aspect of the cinema that I regard as being of high importance. Cinemas provide a social and leisure activity, particularly in city centres and deprived urban areas. It is essential that those cinemas, all of which are private sector operations, should have the financial burden of the levy removed so that they can continue to contribute to a balanced development in inner urban areas.

The hon. Member for Easington also referred to clause 4(3), which gives the Secretary of State powers to engage an outside person to make recommendations and discharge his functions in regard to the development finance scheme only. I think the hon. Gentleman will find his point answered there.

Mr. Tony Banks: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Trippier: With great respect to the hon. Gentleman, I have so many points to make that I must press on with my speech.

The film industry's links with the educational system are very interesting. One particular area of promotion is films relating to set books in the educational curriculum. Wherever possible, cinemas try to offer reduced prices to children. Extra freedom there will be very welcome.

Cinema is also the reason why people such as David Puttnam make their films in the way they do. I was very impressed with a report that I read of his comments at the launch of British Film Year, when his new film, "Killing Fields" was shown. He said:

> "I loathe seeing films on television. I loathe seeing films on video cassettes. For me there is a wholly diminished image. There's absolutely no point (for TV and video) in Roland Joffe and all the rest of the people I've worked with over the past four years killing ourselves to get the sound perfect and the image perfect. Why on earth did Chris Menges ever bother to take his light meter out? There's no point because basically the image you see on television is vastly diminished. It's a terrible way of seeing a film and I'm not prepared and neither are my colleagues to see cinema vanish in this country without a hell of a fight."

That was, as I mentioned earlier, at the launch of British Film Year. It is another excellent example of a diverse industry that is determined to get people back to the cinemas to promote the United Kingdom as a film-making country and sell more films abroad. But in the United Kingdom it will seek to do more than that. It will seek to promote greater awareness of the present place and future potential of film in industry and education.

It is an exciting initiative and the Government fully support the objectives as well as the strong and determined self-help theme implicit in the initiative. The Government have agreed to provide £250,000 to support that activity. Particularly impressive is the way that all parts of a highly individualistic industry are working together in a common cause.

I turn to the arguments that have been advanced on the problems raised by the removal of the Eady levy by the hon. Members for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry) and St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham). I shall refer to the Government's decision not to extend Eady-style levies to other exhibitors' media. I find the analysis in the White Paper on this issue perfectly clear and the conclusions completely logical. I am at something of a loss to understand the justification for the "levy everything" school of thought. Most of the consequences of Eady abolition have already been dealt with by my hon. Friend the Minister of State but there is the issue of the "loss" that will be suffered by producers, who were the principal intended beneficiaries of the levy when it was first introduced. The final figure for this year's Eady levy payments into the British films fund was £3·8 million. I remind the House that the levy year ends in October.

With the prior charges, the £1·5 million to the National Film Finance Corporation and the payments to the National Film and Television School and the British Film Institute production board, payments to or on behalf of producers will be about £1·6 million. It is virtually impossible to estimate what the current levy year will bring in. However, if the payments fall off in reasonable proportion to the decline in cinema audiences, which is running at a fairly consistent 25 per cent. down on last year, the payment to producers will be a good deal less, especially when the additional payment to the British Films Institute is allowed for.

Let us take a generous view of the loss of expectations of producers and take the £1·6 million in payments that is likely for this year. The first thing to realise is the significance of "on behalf of". Most of the Eady payments are assigned by producers to distributors. The figure varies from year to year but it averages out at between half and two thirds being assigned in this way. Again, taking the most favourable assumption for producers, their loss from Eady abolition is about £600,000. We have already made it clear that the Government are putting back into production nearly twice that sum via the new company. The "loss-to-producers argument" is clearly unjustifiable as an argument in favour of levy extension.

One of the arguments for extending the levy is that television is somehow unfair to film-makers. It appears that the independent side is reasonably well endowed with money. There seem to be two slight variants of the argument. The first is that television has a general duty to the film industry and should pay it more than it pays for the purchase of film rights. The second variant seeks to introduce a degree of sophistication into the proceedings by expressing the argument in competition policy terms. The argument goes that the BBC and ITV are a duopoly and conspire together to pay trivial prices for television rights to films. The facts do not bear out that assertion.

It is generally known that a film should have three years to establish its full potential before it goes on to the small screen. I doubt whether there are more than about 120 new films in the English language, pre-promoted in the cinema, that are suitable and newly available in the most recent 12 month period. The rights owners are enormously skilled at packaging films in groups, rather like auction lots. There will be one highly desirable film offered with some which are mediocre and few which cannnot be got rid of in any other way. There are slight differences in the list of large films that ITV wants from the ones that the BBC wants but it is a question of strong competition for scarce goods forcing the price up and definitely not the reverse.

For the BBC, an extra payment in favour of the rights owner would be in effect an addition to the licence fee. That would be a problem for my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary. I regard the proposition as utterly unreasonable. Among the leviers, the Association of Independent Producers has sought levies on various items to raise about £35 million for the independent maker. I have good news for it. There is a levy on ITV companies and £45 million now goes straight to that area of independent programme making. The mechanism is, of course, Channel 4.

The last major area to be cast in the role of sacrificial lamb is the video industry. Again, I suspect that the choice has much to do with the growth image the industry presents. In its early days it was unquestionably disorderly. Major video rights were held in a fragmented way and there was no clear "best" solution to the right retail mechanism. The question was, should it be sale or hire? Piracy was rampant in the chaos. Maturity has, however, come quickly to this industry and, as is so often the way, the highly enterpreneurial small firms in the sector can give a lead where one might have expected longer established companies to set the tone.

With the dramatic reduction of piracy, for the reasons I have already mentioned, a more settled pattern to rights ownership and the dominance of renting now clearly allowed for, there is simply no justification for saying that any producer suffers an economic loss in this sector either because it is disorderly or because he suffers as a result of someone else's dominant market position. Those would be the only arguments for an Eady-style levy on video tape, and it would, of course, have to be on pre-recorded tape. The Government have made it plain, and I repeat it now, that this argument does not stand up.

The argument then turns to blank tape, and I can assure the House, particularly my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) that the Government will open the question of a levy on blank tape for copyright purposes to a further process of consultation. This levy should be the subject of further consultations because it would be a levy on copyright grounds only — to protect copyright owners. It would not be to recycle funds from one part of the industry to another—a process that the Government regard as wholly inappropriate.

Considerable dissatisfaction has been expressed here and elsewhere about the tax regime for films. The hon. Members for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) and for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Freud) have made that point. While this is, of course, a matter for my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who made the Government's new corporate tax strategy completely clear in his Budget statement, it seems that I will have to reiterate the point. Although there has been extensive debate about the implications for films, it might be useful if I remind the House of the regime that we have now and just how we arrived at it.

The main rate of corporation tax is being reduced from 52 per cent. to 35 per cent. by the financial year 1986. The small company rate has been reduced to 30 per cent. already. To help business further, the national insurance surcharge has been abolished. We maintain that lower tax rates will encourage enterprise and risk-taking and will reward success and profitability. Just as important, the distorting effect of excessive tax subsidies will be removed, so that investment decisions will be influenced more by the commercial judgment of managers and less by the characteristics of the tax system. In particular, businesses will no longer be drawn into investment by distortions in the tax system, which have led to the multitude of avoidance devices of one sort and another. That point was correctly made by my hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson-Smith). These changes apply to the film industry as much as to others, but the film industry has pointed out special aspects of its business which it believes deserve special treatment.

There are three main principles underlying our approach. First, we recognise the contribution to the economy and to employment that a prosperous and innovative film industry can make. We have shown that we are good at making films. Secondly, the taxation of the film industry has to be properly integrated into our overall tax policy. All industries can claim to be special in some way. Thirdly, we are firmly opposed to the use of films for artificial tax avoidance purposes by people who have little or no interest in films or film making.

The Government have recognised, however, on the basis of detailed discussions with the industry, the special nature of the film industry. We have introduced four special measures to help. First, the entitlement of films to capital allowances—which was due to run out in 1987 —has been made permanent for British films, but the rates of capital allowance are to be those applicable to machinery and plant generally.

Secondly, the film industry will have the option of choosing to take the capital allowances—at the going rate — or to be taxed on an alternative basis which allows expenditure to be written off on revenue account, broadly in line with the income accruing to the film.

Thirdly, the industry is to have a further option, which is to graft a system known as "cost recovery" on to the write-off basis I have just described. In effect, that will mean that expenditure on a film can be written off even more quickly in certain circumstances. I want to make it clear that that option is available to no other industry. It goes as far as we reasonably can. To go any further would effectively reintroduce the distorting effect of investment subsidies, and it would also reintroduce the distorting effects of the tax treatment to which I referred earlier and which was the basis of crude tax manipulation.

That brings me to the fourth special provision for the film industry, which is the one that I regard as of key importance. It is the extension of the business expansion scheme to the film industry. It was clearly misunderstood by the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody).

The House will be familiar with the provisions of the scheme, whose aim is to encourage the creation of new firms and the expansion of existing small firms. Those companies are vitally important as a source of new jobs

[Mr. Trippier]

and prosperity, as the recent CBI Gallup survey shows. The aim is also, of course, to encourage investment in activities which may be high-risk and which might play a valuable part in creating prosperity tomorrow. We provide, through the business expansion scheme, a generous level of relief which to some extent matches the risks.

The business expansion scheme is now in its second year. The evidence is that it has already been a success. The picture that is emerging for the first year—1983-84 — is that the scheme has attracted a great deal of money, and that most of it has gone into new businesses. That is particularly relevant to the film industry. It is plain that the scheme is directly applicable to films. The scheme is designed to mobilise a new source of financing — equity investment by individuals — for start-up companies and small established companies wishing to expand. As I have said, the idea is to provide growth of real activity including jobs.

Film production, as has been said by a number of hon. Members, is an extremely risky business. It also involves real economic activity at every stage from production through to shooting and editing and arriving at the original master negative disc or tape. The risks can be particularly high and raising finance can be hard for the small independent film producer, especially one who has yet to make his name.

The film industry lobbied for inclusion in the scheme and we accepted that. Film production companies are indeed involved in the sort of active and high-risk business which the scheme is designed to help. I should like the Oliver Twists among Opposition Members and in the industry to bear in mind the following facts. There is strong Government support for film as art from my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Arts of about £7·5 million. The Government commission about £4·5 million of "shorts" a year. There is already a £45 million levy on ITV paid direct to independent producers through Channel 4. All that added to the new support already announced amounts to some £57 million of support, which is well in excess of what the most demanding lobbies have asked for, and well in excess of the £35 million that is referred to as the money that France gives to its film industry.

All that is important. It is a fantastic sum of money. The industry is strong and diverse. There is a clear choice. We have a commercial film industry. We can have it debilitated by subsidy, or we can have an industry which is dynamic and diverse. I know which I would rather see, and Government policy, by removing bias from the business framework and by getting rid of three quangos, eight Acts and 25 statutory instruments, will achieve that success.

Question put, That the Bill be now read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 216, Noes 106.

Division No. 11] **[10 pm**

AYES

Alexander, Richard
Amess, David
Arnold, Tom
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Vall'y)*
Baker, Nicholas *(N Dorset)*
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Benyon, William
Best, Keith
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, John
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Braine, Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brinton, Tim
Brooke, Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Browne, John
Bruinvels, Peter
Bryan, Sir Paul
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon A.
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nick
Bulmer, Esmond
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Hon Adam
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(N Luton)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carlisle, Rt Hon M. *(W'ton S)*
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Clegg, Sir Walter
Cockeram, Eric
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Couchman, James
Cranborne, Viscount
Crouch, David
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dunn, Robert
Durant, Tony
Emery, Sir Peter
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Anthony
Fenner, Mrs Peggy
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fletcher, Alexander
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Freeman, Roger
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Gardner, Sir Edward *(Fylde)*
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gorst, John
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony
Greenway, Harry
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, E. *(B'y St Edm'ds)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Ground, Patrick
Gummer, John Selwyn
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Harvey, Robert
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Sir Paul *(SW N'folk)*
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, J.
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Hickmet, Richard
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Hirst, Michael
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Hooson, Tom
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Stratf'd-on-A)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hunt, David *(Wirral)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jackson, Robert
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(W Herts)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Mrs Elaine
Kershaw, Sir Anthony
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knight, Gregory *(Derby N)*
Knight, Mrs Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Lamont, Norman
Latham, Michael
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim
Lewis, Sir Kenneth *(Stamf'd)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Peter, *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
McCurley, Mrs Anna
Macfarlane, Neil
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
McQuarrie, Albert
Major, John
Malins, Humfrey
Malone, Gerald
Marlow, Antony
Mates, Michael
Mather, Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Hal *(B'grove)*
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Mills, Sir Peter *(West Devon)*
Miscampbell, Norman
Montgomery, Fergus
Morris, M. *(N'hampton, S)*
Morrison, Hon P. *(Chester)*
Moynihan, Hon C.
Mudd, David

Murphy, Christopher
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steven
Onslow, Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Osborn, Sir John
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Pawsey, James
Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Pollock, Alexander
Porter, Barry
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Proctor, K. Harvey
Raffan, Keith
Rathbone, Tim
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
St. John-Stevas, Rt Hon N.
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Silvester, Fred
Skeet, T. H. H.
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Trippier, David
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Tim Sainsbury and
Mr. Ian Lang.

NOES

Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Bagier, Gordon A. T.
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnett, Guy
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Benn, Tony
Bermingham, Gerald
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'rmline E)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Buchan, Norman
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Carlile, Alexander *(Montg'y)*
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Thomas
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S.)*
Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cowans, Harry
Crowther, Stan
Dalyell, Tam
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dormand, Jack
Douglas, Dick
Dubs, Alfred
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Fisher, Mark
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Freud, Clement
Golding, John
Gould, Bryan
Gourlay, Harry
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hardy, Peter
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Haynes, Frank
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart *(Vauxhall)*
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, Dr. Mark *(Durham)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamond, James
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Loyden, Edward
McCartney, Hugh
McGuire, Michael
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Robert
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Maxton, John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Miller, Dr M. S. *(E Kilbride)*
Nellist, David
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
Park, George
Pavitt, Laurie
Pendry, Tom
Penhaligon, David
Prescott, John
Redmond, M.
Robertson, George
Rogers, Allan
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Ross, Stephen *(Isle of Wight)*
Rowlands, Ted
Sheerman, Barry
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C.*(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'kl'ds E)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Tinn, James
Wainwright, R.
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert
Welsh, Michael
Williams, Rt Hon A.

Tellers for the Noes:
Dr. Roger Thomas and
Mr. Ray Powell.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read a Second time.

Bill committed to a Standing Committee pursuant to Standing Order No. 42 (Committal of Bills).

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at this day's sitting, the motion relating to Ways and Means may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour. —*[Mr. Archie Hamilton.]*

FILMS BILL *[MONEY]*

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Films Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any sums required by the Secretary of State in connection with the giving of financial assistance under the Act.—*[Mr. Archie Hamilton.]*

WAYS AND MEANS

FILMS

Resolved,

That, in connection with any Act resulting from the Films Bill ("the Act")—

(a) charges to income tax and corporation tax may be imposed by provisions made by or under the Act and restricting the operation of section 72(7) of the Finance Act 1982 (expenditure on production and acquisition of films etc.); and

(b) it is expedient to authorise the payment into the Consolidated Fund of sums required to be so paid by virtue of the Act.—*[Mr. Archie Hamilton.]*

Consumer Protection

10.10 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Alexander Fletcher): I beg to move,

That the draft Gas Catalytic Heaters (Safety) Regulations 1984, which were laid before this House on 22 October, in the last Session of Parliament, be approved.

The regulations now before the House put on a permanent basis the prohibition which I placed last year on the supply of liquid petroleum gas catalytic heaters and replacement elements containing unbonded or loose asbestos.

The original prohibition was made by the Gas Catalytic Heaters (Safety) Order 1983, which was laid before Parliament on 18 November last year and came into operation three days later. With the expiry of the order on 21 November this year, a decision now has to be made on the future of the ban. It is my view that, in the interests of public safety, the ban should continue indefinitely.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Gas Catalytic Heaters (Safety) Regulations 1984, which were laid before this House on 22 October, in the last Session of Parliament, be approved.

Legal Aid and Advice

10.14 pm

The Solicitor-General (Sir Patrick Mayhew): I beg to move,

That the Legal Advice and Assistance (Financial Conditions) Regulations 1984, dated 16th October 1984, a copy of which was laid before this House on 31st October, in the last Session of Parliament, be approved.

Perhaps it will be for the convenience of the House if the following three motions on the order paper relating to legal aid were discussed at the same time.

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East) *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Speaker: If there is disagreement, the motions should be taken separately. However, would it be the wish of the House to take the two motions relating to England and Wales together and then the two motions relating to Scotland?

Hon. Members: Yes.

The Solicitor-General: In that case I shall direct my remarks also to the second motion relating to England and Wales:

That the Legal Aid (Financial Conditions) Regulations 1984, dated 16th October 1984, a copy of which was laid before this House on 31st October, in the last Session of Parliament, be approved.

Last year my noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor decided to revert to a November uprating for the financial limits. That was more administratively convenient because the legal aid dependants' allowances are automatically increased in line with those for supplementary benefit which are, of course, uprated annually in November. The first two motions increase, respectively, by 4·7 per cent. the income and upper capital limits for civil legal aid and for legal advice and assistance. The increase maintains the present relationship between legal aid and supplementary benefit. However, there is no increase in the lower capital limit for legal aid. The alignment of this limit with the supplementary benefit capital limit was introduced last year, and the supplementary benefit level is to remain the same as last year — £3,000 — because last year it was increased substantially in excess of the rate of inflation.

The legal advice and assistance regulations raise the upper disposable income limit for the green form scheme from £103 a week to £108 a week. The capital limit above which assistance is not available increases from £730 to £765. The legal aid regulations raise the lower disposable income limit — the level of disposable income below which no contribution is payable—from £2,050 a year to £2,145. The upper income limit — the level above which legal aid is not available—increases by the same proportion from £4,925 a year to £5,155. The lower capital limit is to remain at £3,000. The upper capital limit above which legal aid is not normally available is to be increased from £4,500 to £4,710.

My noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor proposes to increase the capital limit for assistance by way of representation. It is an extension of the legal advice and assistance scheme and provides representation for certain specified proceedings before courts and tribunals to £3,000 —the same level as the lower legal aid capital limit. As this increase requires primary legislation, it will have to wait for an appropriate opportunity. That opportunity will arise on the Administration of Justice Bill, which is to be

introduced this Session. It is intended that the Bill should contain an appropriate amendment of the Legal Aid Act 1974. I believe that the increases are useful.

10.18 pm

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): I welcome any increase in the legal aid limits and it would be churlish to over-criticise these provisions. However, several matters worry me. The first relates to capital limits. We all know the hardship that the supplementary benefits capital limit creates. In a constituency such as mine, many people own small amounts of land of no practical utility and virtually unsaleable; yet such ownership can exclude them from supplementary benefit. The same considerations can arise in relation to legal aid. I can understand the considerable reluctance of people to enter into litigation, however justified, if the price is the sale of their only remaining assets.

It is right to remind the Government that one cannot be glib or smug about the new levels set in these instruments. Private litigation is still fully available only to the very rich and to those who are at the lower end of the income bracket. Families in receipt of national average incomes, in the middle income bracket, will be virtually excluded from litigation except in the most desperate circumstances, because the financial limits still require substantial contributions to be made, even if legal aid is available.

To take a higher income bracket, I strongly doubt whether a right hon. Member who has only his parliamentary salary with which to keep his family could afford to go to law on a serious issue, because the cost of litigation would be too great a risk for him to undertake. It is regrettable that people on middle incomes are faced with the choice between possible bankruptcy and not going to law. I hope, therefore that the Government will accept that we have a long way to go before we have a fair legal aid system.

I now turn to a related issue which has caused considerable concern during the past few days. The Master of the Rolls, whose views we respect and pay great attention to, appears to have suggested that our civil litigation system should in some extraordinary way become self-financing. I hope that the Government will wholeheartedly reject that notion now. It is no part of our legal tradition—I am proud of that tradition and reject many of the criticisms made of it—that litigants should have to pay for the courts to which they take their cases, except in some arcane commercial spheres of which the Solicitor-General is aware. I hope that the Government will unequivocally say that the civil courts, the county court and the High Court, will remain open to all litigants and that judges' services and court services will not be charged for.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. The hon. and learned Member is going wide of the regulations before the House.

Mr. Carlile: I have made my point and I shall not labour it further. I accept your rebuke, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

My only additional point is that these limits—we await with interest the Administration of Justice Bill—should be available to people appearing before various forms of tribunal, especially industrial and the medical appeal tribunals, and that the legal aid system should be extended——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I cannot allow the debate to move in that direction. The hon. and learned Member is leading the House into a debate about the scope of legal aid. He must confine his remarks to the regulations before the House.

Mr. Carlile: With respect, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am concerned about the financial limits and I am suggesting the sphere in which they should be applicable. I think I have made the point. I hope that the Government will give those who are worried about such matters some encouragement tonight.

10.24 pm

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Grantham): I hope that I shall not fall foul of you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, during my observations on the regulations. With the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile), I support the uprating and feel it would be rather churlish to be too critical of it. However, there are several questions that the Solicitor-General might wish to answer regarding the legal aid regulations. The first point that the House should bear in mind is that, although the two sets of regulations sound similar, they are not in thee least similar. The legal aid regulations cover representation at trial, whereas the legal advice and assistance regulations relate to the green form scheme and to many other non-litigious matters.

There are several other important distinctions between the two regulations. The first and perhaps the most obvious, because it appears on the face of the regulations, is that the financial eligibility criteria are different. Another distinction is that the calculation of disposable income for the purpose of the civil legal aid regulations is done on a much more generous basis than for the green form scheme.

The Solicitor-General may wish to answer some questions that flow from the Royal Commission's report on legal services, which is the latest and by the far the most comprehensive examination of legal aid. It contained three specific recommendations, which touch on the regulations and which the Government have taken no steps towards implementing. The most pertinent recommendation for tonight's purposes is the positive suggestion that the financial eligibility limits for civil legal aid and for the legal aid and advice scheme should be merged and assimilated. The Benson commission report says in terms that the time of an uprating is the time when the financial criteria should be merged. Why have not the Government moved more positively towards assimilating the financial limits for both classes of legal aid? I see no reason why the financial criteria should be different.

The second question that flows from the Benson commission's recommendation follows what the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery said about the cost of litigation. The Benson commission said that, in its opinion, all financial eligibility criteria should be scrapped and that no financial criteria should apply to the regulations or to legal aid. The commission recommends that there should be no cut-off point, but that there should be a sliding scale of contribution, so that those with higher incomes pay much higher contributions. However, anyone who practises in the courts knows that the possession or legal aid is an enormous advantage to a litigant. Those who fall just outside the upper limit are put at a severe disadvantage compared with those who receive legal aid. Do the Government have any long-term intentions of

[Mr. Douglas Hogg]

implementing the recommendation of the Benson commission so that the eligibility criteria determined by income and capital are scrapped? I do not press the Government to do it now because I recognise that it will have spending implications, and I despise those who call for economies in general and expenditure in particular.

The final question that flows from the Benson commission relates to the calculation of disposable capital for the purpose of the eligibility criteria. One is obliged to take into account redundancy payments and personal injury damages awards. As we all know, personal injury damage awards frequently include a large loss of earnings element. A certain amount of double counting goes on if we include those sums both in the computation of capital and the computation of income. It was for that reason that the Benson commission said in positive terms that personal injury damages should be excluded from the computation of disposable capital. Do the Government have any long-term plans to implement that recommendation? Incidentally, the Benson commission also recommended that redundancy payments be excluded from the computation of capital. Do the Government have any long-term plans to implement that recommendation?

However, I differ from the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery on the question of the contingency fee fund. Once one recognises that these regulations exclude many people from access to the courts and legal advice, one must ask, "Why not a contingency fee fund?" It has the advantage of being self-financing and would help a number of people who would not have assessments under these regulations. Although I know that this has not commended itself to the Lord Chancellor—and it did not commend itself to the Benson commission—do the Government have any sympathy at all with that proposal?

I have asked four specific questions. I am not calling for immediate increases in public spending, of which I do not approve. However, we are entitled to some clear indication from the Solicitor-General about the Government's long-term views on these matters. Save for those minor considerations, I support the uprating.

10.31 pm

Mr. Humfrey Malins (Croydon, North-West): I too support the regulations, but the House ought to bear in mind the fact that in the last few years the cost of legal advice and assistance has gone up dramatically, from £11·9 million in 1979-80 to an estimated £57·4 million in 1984-85. That is a considerable increase in the cost of this scheme.

Mr. Andrew Hunter (Basingstoke): Do those figures cover criminal legal aid or merely civil legal aid?

Mr. Malins: They cover legal advice and assistance under the green form scheme. From £60 million spent on criminal legal aid in 1979, it is expected that next year we shall spend about £130 million. We should always be cautious of the increasing cost of legal aid.

The assessment of legal aid has hitherto been carried out by the DHSS. In my own constituency, the DHSS has been responsible for assessments over many years. It is planned that the assessment will now take place by means of a postal declaration form. A number of people at the DHSS feel that the result will not be a financial saving to the legal aid fund, because, when given a form and asked to state one's means, the temptation is perhaps to minimise one's capital and income. A person may perhaps not disclose matters which he should. Apart from fearing possible job losses if their work is replaced by a pro forma which an applicant completes, people in the DHSS are also concerned about whether the proposal will save money in the long run.

Does the Solicitor-General believe that the postal declaration form for civil legal aid applicants will save money, or does he fear that it will cost jobs, as my constituents fear that it will?

10.34 pm

The Solicitor-General: I am grateful to the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) and my hon. Friends the Members for Grantham (Mr. Hogg) and for Croydon, North-West (Mr. Malins) for their contributions to this short debate and for the welcome that has been given to the upratings.

I think that all hon. Members would agree that there are advances that we would like to make, but anybody who knows about litigation knows that legal aid support falls short of what most of us would like to see. One must concede that there are many people for whom litigation is a considerable personal hardship but who none the less fall outside the respective criteria. On the other hand, I know that the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery and my hon. Friends will recognise that that must take its place in the substantial and keen competition for existing resources and we must simply do the best that we can. I am glad that we have been able to make the advances that are embodied in the regulations.

The hon. and learned Member for Montgomery asked about capital limits, and in particular the inclusion within assessable capital of small land holdings. I cannot hold out any hope to him that there will be the amendment that he proposes. On the other hand, I can say that the hon. and learned Gentleman knows that the legal aid and advice committee is, at the request of the Lord Chancellor, considering the whole question of eligibility for legal aid. It is expected to report to my noble and learned Friend in December, and I do not doubt that that is one of the questions it will wish to take into account.

The hon. and learned Gentleman's last point related to a recent speech by the Master of the Rolls. Any speech by the Master of the Rolls is entitled to considerable attention and respect. It was made recently. My noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor will wish to give that speech full consideration, and he will note what has been said today by the hon. and learned Gentleman.

My hon. Friend the Member for Grantham said that the financial criteria for legal advice and assistance under the green form scheme are different from those for legal aid. He is right about that, but there is a relatively simple explanation. The average bill for advice given under the green form scheme is about £50. In other words, it is a low-cost scheme, and in those circumstances much lower criteria in terms of personal assets, whether of income or of capital, are appropriate. Therefore, I cannot hold out any prospect of the kind of change that my hon. Friend would like to see, although that is one of the questions that the committee appointed by the Lord Chancellor will, I do not doubt, consider.

My hon. Friend drew attention to the Benson committee's recommendation that the criteria for legal aid and advice should be merged. What I have said already

comprehends the answer to that and to his second point that financial criteria should be scrapped and a sliding scale substituted. He was, as he nearly always is, fair enough to concede that that would involve substantial increases in costs, and I have to say the gloomy thing that we all have to say about resources. None the less, the committee is considering that and there is not long to wait before its report in December.

My hon. Friend asked why take into account, when looking at capital assets, the proceeds of a successful redundancy claim and a successful claim for personal injury compensation. Everyone must have some sympathy for that idea, but if it is looked at closely it does not stand up. The purpose of legal aid support is to enable somebody who lacks the financial resources to do so to bring proceedings. It matters not very much that a person's financial resources have entered his bank account by reason of a claim for personal injuries compensation or whether by reason of, let us say, inheritance. For the purpose of deciding whether the legal aid scheme will support one, what really matters is whether one has the means of financing litigation onself. That is why I do not for my part see any prospect of meeting my hon. Friend's third question.

Finally, my hon. Friend raised the question of the contingency fee. I am dead against contingency fees. The contingency fee system, which is run——

Mr. Douglas Hogg: A contingency fee fund.

The Solicitor-General: If I have understood the matter correctly—and I am not at all sure that I have—it is a development of what we already have. The legal aid fund has a statutory right to obtain its expenses from what has been recovered. However, if my hon. Friend writes to me —or perhaps more importantly to his noble and learned father—he may receive a fuller, and certainly more authoritative reply.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: He always signs "Hailsham of St. Marylebone."

The Solicitor-General: No doubt my hon. Friend can interpret who that is.

My hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, North-West mentioned a pilot scheme in certain parts of England and Wales which is designed to reduce the cost of applications for legal aid. I agreed with him when he drew attention to the increased cost of legal aid. He gave us certain figures with which I do not disagree. I could give others, but it is too late now to do so. There is no doubt that the claims on the legal aid fund have increased alarmingly. But, equally, the number of claims that has passed the scrutiny of the legal aid committee has also increased. The reasons for that are complex. However, I know that the Lord Chancellor agrees that claims for legal aid should be subjected to close scrutiny. I shall certainly draw his attention to what my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, North-West has said.

I was asked by my hon. Friend to say something about the postal scheme. The purpose of the pilot postal scheme was to test whether we could save money without losing the degree of scrutiny that is necessary. It has been rather successful, so to a limited extent it is going to be adopted. I hope that what I have said has reassured my hon. Friend to some extent. We are keen to see that there is the same degree of financial discipline over the legal aid scheme and its administration as we look for elsewhere in the public sector. What he has said about it will, I think, be very helpful.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Legal Advice and Assistance (Financial Conditions) Regulations 1984, dated 16 October 1984, a copy of which was laid before this House on 31st October, in the last Session of Parliament, be approved.

Legal Aid and Advice

Resolved,

That the Legal Aid (Financial Conditions) Regulations 1984, dated 16 October 1984, a copy of which was laid before this House on 31st October, in the last Session of Parliament, be approved.—[*The Solicitor-General.*]

Legal Aid and Advice (Scotland)

10.43 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. John MacKay): I beg to move,

That the Legal Advice and Assistance (Scotland) (Financial Conditions) Regulations 1984, dated 24th October 1984, a copy of which was laid before this House on 31st October, in the last Session of Parliament, be approved.

The two sets of Scottish regulations that require an affirmative resolution this evening, the Legal Aid (Scotland) (Financial Conditions) Regulations 1984 and the Legal Advice and Assistance (Scotland) (Financial Conditions) Regulations 1984, make the same increases in the financial limits for Scotland. I shall remind the House of what they are.

The advice and assistance regulations raise the upper disposable income limit for the green form scheme from £103 a week — *[Laughter.]* Sorry, am I reading the wrong thing? The Legal Advice and Assistance (Scotland) (Financial Conditions) Regulations raise the weekly sum from £103 to £108, and the Legal Aid (Scotland) (Financial Conditions) Regulations 1984, as my hon. and learned Friend the Solicitor-General has explained, raise the lower limit from £2,050 to £2,145 and the upper limit from £4,925 a year to £5,155.

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East) : Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. MacKay: I am going to sit down so that the hon. Gentleman can make his speech. I commend the regulations to the House.

10.44 pm

Mr. Harry Ewing: We sympathise with the Parliamentary Under-Secretary who has drawn the short straw. As the Minister who should have dealt with the regulations is absent, he has had the great misfortune to have to pick up the brief without even beginning to understand it. We objected to the regulations for Scotland and for England and Wales being taken together. It was no reflection on the Solicitor-General, because he will appreciate that there are major differences between the two systems. The first major difference is that for the legal advice and assistance scheme in Scotland the colour of the form is pink, whereas in England and Wales it is green. The form in Scotland is known as the pink bomber. I am sure that the House is interested in that.

I am sure that the Minister will appreciate that there is a major difference in the system for criminal and civil legal aid in Scotland compared with England and Wales. Civil legal aid in Scotland is granted by the legal aid committee and criminal legal aid by the court. In England and Wales, all legal aid is granted or refused by the legal aid committee.

My first question relates to those charged with offences arising from the dispute in the mining industry. There appears to be a variation of practice in the sheriff courts. I understand that the responsible Minister has given information to my hon. Friend the Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) to the effect that in Kilmarnock and Dunfermline little or no legal aid has been granted to such persons. What is the current position for the granting of legal aid for such accused persons? I assure——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will not take us too far outside the scope of the regulations.

Mr. Ewing: I assure you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that my feelings are hurt by you thinking that I would take the House too far. I hope that I have left sufficient with the Minister to receive an answer to my question. It affects the granting of legal aid. I trust that the Minister will especially refer to the granting of criminal legal aid.

Mr. Gordon Brown (Dunfermline, East): We want an assurance that the limits will be properly applied. My hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Ewing) referred to legal aid, advice and assistance to miners involved in the present dispute, some of whom have been charged with offences. We want an assurance that everything is being done to ensure that they receive legal aid. In my constituency and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas), the evidence is that no miner who has been charged with an offence has received legal aid, advice or assistance paid for by state funds.

Is a notional income assumed to have been earned by the miners, as is the case with social security regulations? Is there another, more sinister reason? It is that which prompts us to ask whether the limits are properly applied?

Mr. Ewing: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his intervention, to which I hope the Minister will give a definitive answer. I would be astonished if anyone, whether a miner or anyone else, was refused legal advice and assistance. That is a different matter from an application for legal aid when a person comes before a court to defend himself—whether it be a miner charged with an offence arising from the dispute, a person charged with a traffic offence, or anyone else. I hope that the Minister will give us a definitive answer to the question, particularly in relation to my hon. Friend's constituency and Dunfermline and Kilmarnock sheriff courts. Through the years — it was the case when I had some responsibility for these matters — we have always discussed the possibility of extending the legal aid scheme to tribunals and to other areas of representation throughout Scotland. Even at this late hour, could the Minister enlighten the House as to the thinking——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I hope that the Minister will not respond to that question. The regulations do not allow hon. Members to discuss legal aid. They may discuss only the increases in the capital allowances and returns.

Mr. Ewing: I can see that I shall have to ask for legal advice and assistance in dealing with the matter. We have traditionally asked questions about the way in which the scheme could be extended. I hope that the Minister will respond in the traditional fashion and tell us that serious consideration is being given, and that some advance can be expected next year.

10.51 pm

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): I declare an interest, in that I am technically still a partner in a small provincial firm of solicitors, Messrs Andrew Haddon and Crowe, in Hawick. Anything that I say should be taken in that context.

I heard what the Minister said about the opportunity being taken at this time of the year to uprate the legal aid limits in the context of and in proportion to the social

security increases. That, as far as it goes, is right and proper, but I should like to refer to the pink form scheme, which had its genesis in the 1972 legislation. There was a much more accurate reflection of the increase in costs when increases were made in the capital and income limits. It related to the increase in litigation costs, rather than the movement in the retail price index.

If the Minister speaks to whichever of his colleagues is dealing with these matters, and does the arithmetic in the cold light of dawn tomorrow, he will find that, measured by that yardstick, the income and capital increases necessary to keep pace with the position in 1972 will be far higher than the figure of nearly 5 per cent. that we are discussing this evening. In future, when the Minister is battling with the Treasury to get the necessary annual upratings, I hope that he will bear that calculation in mind rather than the change in the RPI.

My next point derives directly from my experience in administering the pink form scheme. It was £600 prior to June 1983. That was the disposable capital limit for the pink form. It is now increased in the orders from £730 to £765. That is a very restrictive disposable capital limit. As a practising solicitor, I frequently had to tell people that because of that limit they could not go to the courts. There were old age pensioners who had saved up a nest egg so that they could have a proper burial. They had legitimate causes to take to the courts and could not do so because they had £800 or £900 put aside for burial costs. It happened on several occasions in a small provincial office, so I assume that it is a much greater problem in some of the bigger city offices. That matter, more than anything else, requires urgent attention.

I hope the Minister will consider the points that I have raised, and that he will have some answers next year, apart from trying to do something about them in the meantime.

10.55 pm

Mr. John MacKay: First, I respond to the contribution of the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) on his point about the the pink form. He urged that the limits should be increased at a faster rate. I repeat what has already been argued—that the priorities for Government spending must be balanced. The balance is being achieved in the form of upratings—a method which has been adopted by previous Governments. The regulations limit the cost which the applicant has to meet even if legal costs increase at a greater rate. There is a departmental review of legal aid, both civil and criminal. My right hon. Friend will read with interest what the hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Ewing) have said. .

The hon. Member for Falkirk, East had a little fun at my expense at the beginning of his remarks. My hon. and learned Friend the Solicitor-General tells me that in England and Wales legal aid is provided for criminal cases and that the issue is decided by the courts, not by a legal aid committee.

I am in some trepidation about following the course which I was invited to take by the hon. Member for Falkirk, East. Most of his questions turned on legal aid for criminal cases, whereas we are talking about civil legal aid. That point should be remembered. Criminal legal aid is determined by the courts, which consider whether the award would be in the interests of justice and whether it would occasion financial hardship to the accused or his dependants if he were not to be granted legal aid. That is a matter entirely for the courts. There can be no intervention in these matters by my right hon. and hon. Friends. The comments that have been made about the miners and other matters will be considered in the departmental review. I shall draw my right hon. Friend's attention to the issues that have been raised.

Mr. Gordon Brown: Will the Minister give us an assurance that the inconsistencies in the administration of legal aid to miners during the course of the current dispute when they have appeared before the courts will form the subject of at least part of the review that is being conducted by his right hon. and noble Friend the Minister of State?

Mr. MacKay: Opposition Members are always drawing attention to inconsistencies in the courts, whether in sentencing or in other respects. The answer is always the same. The courts are free to make their own decisions on the cases before them. That applies to sentencing and the granting of legal aid.

Mr. Donald Dewar (Glasgow, Garscadden): There have been allegations—I cannot verify them because I have not been involved—that some sheriff courts—Dunfermline and Kilmarnock are two examples—are denying certain categories of accused persons legal aid as a generality and almost in universality. Presumably legal aid is being denied on the basis that it would be against the interests of justice to make it available. There is widespread concern about this, but there is no general beef about the administration of legal aid. Will the Minister give an assurance that the suggestion that legal aid is being denied in some instances will be examined as part of the review to which he has referred, or perhaps more urgently, to ascertain whether something can be done?

Mr. MacKay: The hon. Gentleman has fairly said that he has heard general allegations. If hon. Members representing the relevant constituencies wish to write to my right hon. Friend, I am sure that he will respond.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Legal Advice and Assistance (Scotland) (Financial Conditions) Regulations 1984, dated 24th October 1984, a copy of which was laid before this House on 31st October, in the last Session of Parliament, be approved.

LEGAL AID AND ADVICE (SCOTLAND)

Resolved,

That the Legal Aid (Scotland) (Financial Conditions) Regulations 1984, dated 24th October 1984, a copy of which was laid before this House on 31st October, in the last Session of Parliament, be approved.—*[Mr. John MacKay.]*

Coal Industry Dispute

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn—*[Mr. Durant.]*

10.59 pm

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): For nearly nine months, 145,000 miners and their families have stood out against all that the Government have been able to throw at them. The miners have thwarted the Government's plans to destroy several communities, to seek directly the end of 70,000 mining jobs, to seek indirectly the end of a further 85,000 which depend on those miners being in work and to destroy the already tarnished hopes of a new and young generation growing up in the mining communities. For nearly nine months, despite everything that the Government and the media have thrown against the miners, their families and their communities, this strike remains solid.

The strike remains an inspiration to workers as a whole on how to resist the attacks of the Tories. It has destroyed the myth — often propagated by Tory Members of Parliament in the House — that trade unionists are selfish, greedy and always out for themselves. This strike is not principally about today's jobs for today's miners. It is also about miners fighting for the generation hoping to inherit those jobs and, on behalf of their class, to reverse the general tide of unemployment in the black spots of Britain.

Tory Members of Parliament, as shown by their peals of laughter, have no chance of understanding the sacrifice of the past nine months, when families have sold cars, houses, furniture, televisions and videos and told children, "There are no birthdays this year. There is no Christmas coming up and there will be no holidays." The sacrifice that those families have made on behalf of themselves and their class is something that Tory Members of Parliament, with their salaries and their family background, would never understand.

This generation of miners has refused the bribes handed out by the Tory Government. They have refused to be bought off by redundancy payments — the lump sum social security benefits—which in recent months have been dangled as carrots in front of miners. The miners have resisted the Government's attempts to starve miners and their families back to work, with the criminal removal of £15 a week from the benefits paid to the families of striking miners. The families of strikers are worse off than the families of those who have committed major crimes —murder and so on—who now rest in the prisons. The families of striking miners have resisted the Government's attempts for nine months with the magnificent support of ordinary workers and their families in the rest of their class, whose collections of food and money, especially in the period to Christmas, have helped to alleviate some of the suffering and to sustain the families.

The families of striking miners have also resisted nine months when 8,000 workers—brothers and sisters of mine—were arrested. One in six of those arrested have been released without charge. That is an indication of the blanket nature of the arrests. Three quarters of the rest of those who have been arrested have been taken under what I would describe as the bogus charges of obstruction of the pavement, obstruction of the highway and obstruction of a policeman. They have been charged under section 5 of the Public Order Act 1936 and other legislation used by the police to remove the pickets and picket organisers from the picket lines.

In addition, during those nine months of attacks, the miners have had set against them daily, every evening on the television screens, a biased media and, often, the twisted propaganda of the National Coal Board. The finger of the Government hovers behind that campaign of misinformation. That is what we have come to expect from a Tory media and Tory press. *[Interruption.]* When one looks at the number of editors of daily newspapers who have received knighthoods from the Government who are in the pockets of their millionaire owners——

Mr. Alexander Eadie (Midlothian): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Obviously, some Conservative Members have had a very good dinner. This is a serious subject, and my hon. Friend is entitled to be heard and to put the point of view representing his constituency.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): No matter how unacceptable or unpopular their opinions may be to some, hon. Members are entitled to express them, provided they keep within the rules of the House.

Mr. Nellist: The campaign of misinformation launched by the media is what we have come to expect from those editors who received knighthoods from a Tory Government who are in the pocket of their millionaire owners.

One of the aspects——

Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark (Birmingham, Selly Oak) *rose——*

Mr. Nellist: If the hon. Member wants to make a point he has plenty of opportunity with the Tory propaganda that comes out daily in the media.

One of the aspects of the strike——

Mr. Beaumont-Dark *rose——*

Mr. Nellist: One of the results of the strike and the campaign of disinformation by the Tory media against miners has been the spur that that has given to Socialists and trade unionists within the Labour movement.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark *rose——*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Mr. Beaumont-Dark) must restrain himself. Clearly the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist) is not giving way.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: He is not restraining himself.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member must not shout at me from a sedentary position.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: I will shout at you standing up.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Neither will the hon. Member stand on his feet while I am on mine. The hon. Member for Coventry, South-East is entitled to express his view and make his speech——

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: Rubbish.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: —and I hope that the House will allow him to do so.

Mr. Eadie: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Did you hear the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly-Oak (Mr. Beaumont-Dark) say "rubbish" to you while you were reprimanding him?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. No, I did not hear him say that. If the hon. Member said it, I deprecate it, but the hon. Member has already left the Chamber.

Mr. Nellist: One of the consequences of the media attacks on the NUM, the miners' families and trade unionists in general will be the spur that it gives to Socialists and trade unionists within the Labour movement to create a daily Socialist alternative to the Tory papers of Fleet street. Contrary to the attempts that have been made over the past two weeks to give the impression that the strike is crumbling, three quarters of the miners on strike remain solid. If Tory Members present in the House at this late hour wish to take some comfort from this afternoon's figures from the Coal Board, I offer them figures to destroy their case. In Scotland 225 miners returned to work making a total of 1,258 miners at work trying to weaken the strike. That is 9·5 per cent. of work force; 90·5 per cent. remain on strike. In Yorkshire — Tory Members seem to be overjoyed about this — 450 went back, according to the National Coal Board. That makes 1,785 at work according to the NCB, and means 3 per cent. of the work force. It means that 97 per cent. of the miners are on strike.

In south Wales, according to the NCB, nine miners went back this morning. That makes 85 miners at work —less than 0·5 per cent. It means that 99·6 per cent. of the miners are on strike.

When do we hear Government spokesmen, the press or other parts of the media use figures of 90, 97 or 99·6 per cent. of miners on strike as a demonstration of the strength of the dispute? It is an illustration of the misinformation that pours out of the "tube" daily. Those figures do not give confidence to the Tory Government. It is a sign that time is running out for them. *[Interruption.]* It explains the marked reluctance of Tory Ministers and others in the House to give straight answers to questions about the dispute.

If a Member asks a Minister in the Department of Energy whether he will answer questions on the consequences of the strike on power stations, to gain an admission about the power stations that have already closed because of the strike, the simple answer is no. The Minister is afraid to tell the truth.

When we ask about the depth and penetration of oil imports over the past 12 months — where they are coming from, and how much they cost the Government —the information, apparently, is unavailable. Either the Government are not telling the truth when they say that the information is not available, or they ought to organise the Departments better, because senior civil servants are being paid a great deal of money not to collect information to give the Government a picture of what is happening. When we ask how many power stations have been built over the past 10 years, apparently the information is not readily available. Plainly, the Department of Energy cannot even count. When we ask about the movement of coal and whether imports are coming through the ports, the Department of Energy is not prepared to tell us. And those are just the questions that the Table Office accepts.

Then there are all the questions that the Department of Energy will not even take from the Table Office. The Department is not prepared to say what happened on 5 November, when there was a yellow alert and the grid was in a state of partial emergency. It will not list the power stations having difficulty generating electricity. The Department is not prepared to give any form of answer to those questions. It is a sign of the Government's weakness that they are not prepared to back up their claims with detailed facts and figures.

The blame for the dispute rests not with the miners, who have conducted a heroic struggle in the past nine months, nor with the NUM leadership, but squarely with the Cabinet and the Government. The Government planned for the dispute seven or eight years ago when they were in Opposition. A report by the present Secretary of State for Transport, commonly known as the Ridley report, was released by *The Economist* in 1978. It spoke of dealing with the enemies of a future Tory Government — in particular, the miners—and set out a plan for doubling the coal stocks, which took place in the first four years of the Tory Government, reaching a record total of 58,500,000 tonnes. It referred to contingency plans for the import of coal — we have seen the effect of that at Hunterston in Scotland — and spoke of encouraging hauliers to recruit non-union drivers. It also referred to establishing dual oil and coal-fired power stations the oil for which, despite the Government's refusal to answer questions, is widely rumoured to be costing £25 million to £30 million per week.

The Ridley report also spoke of cutting off the money supply to strikers and establishing a large mobile squad of police to deal with picketing. *[Interruption.]* That, together with the appointment of MacGregor, after he had butchered the steel industry, a subject on which my family has a personal axe to grind—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is entitled to make his speech in his own way without continual barracking and jeering from hon. Members.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Can you give an assurance that all the bars in this place have been kept open? If they have not, it might not be a bad idea if you made the necessary arrangements to get them open so that the Tories can get back where they came from and carry on drinking.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: This is a very serious subject. I hope that whether or not hon. Members agree with the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist) they will at least give him the chance to make his speech in his own way.

Mr. Nellist: The Government's preparations for the dispute included the appointment of MacGregor, with his record of butchering the steel industry—my family has personal experience of those cuts — and his record as head of the Amax corporation in America in the 1970s. But all that preparation has not succeeded — despite those who worked throughout the dispute and are rightly described as scabs and despite pressure from the Government's starvation policies and direct pressure from the police. Miners in my area of Warwickshire have experienced that pressure in the past two or three days, with threats that unless individual miners went back to work the police would press more severe charges to ensure that they got sacked. Despite all the pressure on individual miners in recent days and weeks, the Government's preparation has failed.

The Government's preparation has failed largely because of the heroic role played by the women in the coal mining areas. In the first week of the dispute, MacGregor

[Mr. Nellist]

said that he would like to hear from the miners' wives. He said that once and he never said it again, because there are now 170 support groups established by the women in those areas. After the dispute is over, there will be a legacy of women who were previously trapped within four walls listening to interviews with the Prime Minister on the Jimmy Young show and being told that their only role was as providers for their menfolk and their children without any political or industrial role in the community. They have learnt what it is to struggle, to sacrifice and to organise and they will put those talents to use when the strike is over by coming into the organised labour and trade union movement.

Despite all those attacks, and in particular the organised, cynical and calculating use of the police against mining communities throughout the country, the Government have failed. I remember visiting my brother-in-law, an NUM member, at Selby three or four months ago when my sister was about to have a baby. We watched the television. At 20 minutes to six o'clock we watched the BBC news headlines. There was a story about seven policemen being sent down south to arrest post office robbers who were known to have sawn-off shotguns. Two of those policemen were shot. One was shot in the head and groin. He ended up on a life support machine and subsequently died. At a quarter to six I switched over to watch the ITV headlines, expecting the same sort of story. But the story was about 1,000 policemen on horseback, with dogs, truncheons and riot shields, escorting one man — Brian Green — into the Gascoine Wood area of the Selby coalfield.

That shows eloquently that, when it comes to the real issue of law and order, the Tory Government think it a bigger crime to stand on a picket line and defend jobs than to use sawn-off shotguns, attack post offices and kill police officers. *[Interruption.]* That is the sort of attack that has separated communities in the mining areas from the police and created gaps that will take generations to heal.

This morning on Radio 4 was one of the few occasions on which the voice of a miner's wife has been heard. She was a woman from Yorkshire. She said that before the strike, if someone was attacked in the street, he would telephone the police. "If the police are attacking you, who do you phone?", she asked.

That is the price that the Tory Government will have to pay—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Unless the hon. Member for Great Yarmouth (Mr. Carttiss) desists from interrupting from a sedentary position, I shall have no option but to ask him to withdraw from the Chamber. I hope that we can have order for the remainder of the hon. Gentleman's speech.

Mr. Nellist: That is the tab that the Government will have to pick up for the blitzkrieg that they have conducted against the pit villages of south Yorkshire—Armthorpe, Grimethorpe and Fitzwilliam. They have tried to soften up the pit communities. They have tried to warn the communities that surround power stations that when they try to move that coal in the weeks ahead police and perhaps troops will be used in a similar way in those communities.

Throughout the dispute, inside and outside the Chamber, we have heard the Government talk about economic and uneconomic pits. The Secretary of State has talked about a subsidy of £130 a week to keep miners working in what he describes as uneconomic pits. They would more accurately be described as pits starved of investment, or facing difficult geological conditions. Even if it costs £130 a week to subsidise getting that difficult coal, would it really matter? That rabid Left-wing newspaper, *The Sun*, estimates that it costs £150 a week to keep someone on the dole. That would be the net economic cost of the sacrifice of the communities that the Tories are attacking.

So far, the Government have been prepared to spend £4,000 million attacking the miners and their families. They say that there is not enough money for houses or for education. That £4,000 million would be enough to provide an increase of £25 a week for everyone registered as being on the dole. *[Interruption.]* It would be enough to provide a tax cut of £4 a week for every insured worker. Yet the Tories say that there is not enough money to give benefits such as that, but they have the money to attack the National Union of Mineworkers, because the dispute is not about economic and uneconomic pits. It is about attacking a trade union and attempting to destroy it as a preface to weakening the rest of the trade union movement. It is not about the sequestration of NUM funds. In the words of the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, it is about the castration of the NUM. It is about neutering the trade union movement.

The reasons are plain to see. Despite the Chancellor's attempt to deny it, and the talk from the Government Front Bench, there has been no economic upturn for working people. Five million are unemployed. Six million live in damp houses, and 9·7 million cannot afford a week's holiday away from home. Eighteen million people live on the poverty line. The Government's only solution is to mount further attacks on the unions that protect working people. That is the rationale behind the attempted destruction of the NUM. The miners are a shining example of how to oppose the Government. They show that workers have not been bought off in their struggle. They have not been bought off, as some sections of society have suggested, because they now own cars and houses with brass knockers on the front door.

In the past nine months I have been proud to stand on picket lines shoulder to shoulder with miners. It is where every Socialist, every trade unionist and every Labour Member from the bottom to the top of the tree ought to have been. The Tories have tried to isolate the NUM from the rest of working people using the media, the police and cuts in benefit. The miners will not be broken and the Tories will reap a whirlwind from the dispute. They are responsible for the rebirth of Socialist traditions in the NUM and the trade union movement as a whole.

The Prime Minister is respected in Britain for one thing alone. She stands resolutely for her class, for the moneyed, for the aristocracy, who pay for her to come to this place. She fights for her class. Among the miners and other workers there is a new generation of young men and women who are fighting for their class. The blame for the dispute rests with the Cabinet and the Government. The miners will not be broken. The whirlwind that the Government will reap will lead in the not too distant future to their downfall and an early election. Those in the ranks of the miners and the trade unions who are now joining the Labour party are doing so because of the dispute and because their eyes have been opened to capitalism and the way in which the Tories have attacked working people.

They will not be satisfied with trying to patch up capitalism and piecemeal reforms, such as Labour Governments have, unfortunately, put through in the past. They will want to ensure that no young person goes without work when they leave school, that no pensioner dies of hypothermia while the Government gather coal stocks of 58 million tonnes, that our children have the same sort of education as those who go to Eton and Harrow and that they have the same sort of homes as those on parliamentary salaries and above. That is the language of Socialism. Through their attacks on the workers, the Government are creating a new generation of Socialists out of the miners' strike.

11.22 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. David Hunt) *rose——*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Before I call the Minister, I have an apology to make to the House and the hon. Member for Great Yarmouth (Mr. Carttiss). I am afraid that I have done him an injustice. It appears that the hon. Member that I sought to reproach earlier for sedentary interventions was not him but the hon. Member for Leicestershire, North-West (Mr. Ashby).

Mr. Hunt: It will be difficult to respond to the stream of irresponsible invective that we have heard from the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist), but I should like first to observe the normal courtesy of congratulating him on securing this opportunity to debate the important issues in the coal mining dispute. May I ask him to reflect for a moment that he was able to do so because he was successful in a ballot? It is a sad fact that precisely such an opportunity to participate in a ballot has been denied to the NUM and its members. That is especially inappropriate for a union that has a great tradition of democracy, and whose book states clearly in rule 43:

"A national strike shall only be entered upon as the result of a ballot vote of the Members".

Some areas were given an opportunity to vote and they decided two to one against joining a strike and many of those who voted in favour of a strike have carried on working pursuant to that democratic decision. The rest have chosen the only alternative. Deprived of the democratic right to a ballot, miners have been voting with their feet for an end to this tragic and unnecessary dispute. They are voting now with their feet in ever-increasing numbers.

Only a month ago, when I first came to this important responsibility, an average of 10 men a day braved the mobs to return to work. Three weeks ago about 75 men a day were abandoning the strike, two weeks ago the numbers rose to an average of 500 a day, and last week it doubled to an average of 1,000 men a day who rejoined their colleagues at the pits. Today, more than 2,200 have returned to work, bringing the total of NUM members no longer on strike to more than 60,000. That means that there are now more than 90,000 men at work in the industry, from a total of 222,000 employees.

Five times as many Conservative Members are present in the Chamber as Opposition Members. My hon. Friends will ask why there has been this surge to work and why so many NUM members have defied the barricades. They are some of the bravest men in the country. As Lord Stockton said in the other place last week, they are some of the best men in the world. One must be brave to be one of the first four men who defied abuse and intimidation to return to work at Bilston Glen colliery on 5 June. This morning, 642 men were at work at that important pit.

Only two weeks ago, two men returned at Bersham colliery for the first time. Today 307 worked at that north Wales pit on the first two shifts. The hon. Member for Coventry, South-East has tried to exercise some influence at the Coventry colliery. I understand that he has been on the picket line there regularly. Nevertheless, today nearly 700 men are at work, which is a 60 per cent. attendance.

The hon. Gentleman talked about a struggle by the working classes, but he is talking about a fight in which miner is set against miner and community against community and about damaging internal strife within a great and proud industry.

Faced with a leadership of the NUM which openly boasts that its position has not budged an inch since the dispute started, miners must feel a growing sense of disillusionment about their leadership's totally intransigent attitude. Before them is the most generous offer ever made to miners since nationalisation. That offer includes: a guaranteed job for every mineworker who wants to stay in the industry—the kind of guarantee that makes my constituents in Merseyside green with envy; no compulsory redundancies and the highest redundancy benefits in western Europe; a pay increase to keep miners well ahead of average industrial wages; continuing investment on a substantial scale in the industry's future —£650 million more than originally envisaged in "Plan for Coal"; an undertaking now to examine the 4 million tonne capacity reduction proposed in March and to consider the future of the five particular pits under the industry's review procedures; a new independent advisory body within the colliery review procedures; and an enterprise scheme to bring new jobs to mining communities.

That is what the Board has offered. By contrast, what is Mr. Scargill offering his industry? Twenty producing coal faces have already have been lost during the dispute so far, and a further 80 coal faces at about 50 collieries are causing serious concern.

The hon. Gentleman did not leave me much time to reply, so I must conclude my remarks. The Government want this great coal industry back to normal working as soon as possible. Those of us who care about the industry want to see a coal industry that increases its markets and makes itself highly competitive. The only way ahead for the industry is for the miners to reject the extremism of their leadership. The support for the hon. Gentleman is shown by the absence of his hon. Friends tonight.

The Question having been proposed after 10 o'clock and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at twenty-nine minutes past Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 20 November 1984

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

MESSAGE FROM THE QUEEN

QUEEN'S SPEECH (ANSWER TO ADDRESS)

The VICE-CHAMBERLAIN OF THE HOUSEHOLD reported Her Majesty's Answer to the Address as follows:

I have received with great satisfaction the loyal and dutiful expression of your thanks for the Speech with which I opened the present Session of Parliament.

PRIVATE BUSINESS

GREATER LONDON COUNCIL (MONEY) (NO. 2) BILL

Considered; to be read the Third time.

BOURNEMOUTH BOROUGH COUNCIL BILL *[Lords]*

Read a Second time and committed.

HIGHLAND REGIONAL COUNCIL (UIG PIER, SKYE) BILL

Considered; to be read the Third time tomorrow.

Oral Answers to Questions

EMPLOYMENT

Labour Statistics

1. **Mr. Skinner** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what are the latest figures for unemployment both nationally and regionally; and if he will make a statement.

The Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Tom King): At 11 October the number of unemployed claimants in the United Kingdom was 3,225,000. I will, with permission, publish the regional figures in the *Official Report*.

Mr. Skinner: Is the Minister aware that when all the fiddled figures are added on to those there are now more than 4 million people struggling to survive in the dole queue? Is it not obscene that, at a time when all these people are without a job, more than 350 Members of Parliament, mainly Tory, SDP and Liberal, are doing moonlighting jobs on the side? Is it not high time that, if workers can be put in legal straitjackets, a law was passed to insist that Members of Parliament have only one job apiece?

Mr. King: I am never quite sure what hon. Members are trying to prove by trying to argue about the figures. I have said clearly from the Dispatch Box that whether the figure is 4 million or 3,250,000, the present level of unemployment is far too high. I hope that every hon. Member will accept that, so that we can start off from the same point.

Our concern is to ensure that we create the maximum number of new jobs, and I know that the hon. Gentleman will have been pleased to see that last week I announced that, for the first time for some months, there was an increase in the numbers employed in manufacturing industry — in September the number increased by 13,000. As to the number of people at work, I know that every hon. Member will share the hon. Gentleman's satisfaction at the increased number of people going back to work in Bolsover and will be pleased that today some 1,785 of his constituents crossed the picket line.

Mrs. Jill Knight: Has any study been made into, or has my right hon. Friend any knowledge of, the number of people who have been rendered unemployed by a strike, either by themselves or by other people? Is this number not significant, and should it not have publicity?

Mr. King: My hon. Friend will be aware that the recent disappointing figures, compared with the earlier improvement in the employment situation towards the middle of last year, have been due to two factors. One was the rise in interest rates, and I know that my hon. Friend will share my pleasure in noting that, according to the Barclay's figure, interest rates are now about 2·25 per cent. below the July level. The other factor has undoubtedly been the miners' strike. It is worth remembering that the dispute was originally about 20,000 miners' jobs and that all those who wish to work are now effectively guaranteed employment. My information as to the impact of the strike is that 10,000 people have lost their jobs in ancillary industries as a direct result of the strike and a further 20,000 have lost jobs in associated industries. That has been the effect of the miners' strike on unemployment.

Mr. Lofthouse: Is the Minister aware that the unemployment figures include ex-miners cheated out of their rightful unemployment pay because the redundancy terms which they were persuaded to take——

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is very wide of the question. There is a later question on the miners' strike. The hon. Gentleman must confine his question to unemployment nationally.

Mr. Lofthouse: With respect, Sir, the question is about unemployment, which includes miners. Is the Minister aware that unemployed miners are being denied their rightful unemployment pay because they were persuaded to take redundancy pay, but the date of expiry of their notice was after the beginning of the strike? Is he aware that his colleague the Secretary of State for Energy has now recognised that and is putting the matter right in relation to the miners' redundancy pay scheme——

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is very wide of the question.

Mr. King: I am not sure what the hon. Gentleman's complaint is, as he says that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy is putting the matter right. If the hon. Gentleman is concerned about unemployment and about the situation in his constituency, however, I hope he will now realise that the best way to assure future

employment is to encourage his members to settle on the terms agreed so that we can begin to see much better employment prospects.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Lofthouse: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I shall take the point of order afterwards.

Mr. John Browne: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that in the past year more than 250,000 people have taken up jobs that have been created in the British economy? In view of the severe recession in the world economy, does he agree that those figures reflect very well on the Government's enterprise policies?

Mr. King: Yes, I am pleased to confirm that this is the only country in Europe to have a significant increase in jobs in the past year and that 250,000 more people are at work than at this time last year. If we can get an end to the present extremely damaging industrial dispute I believe that that, with the fall in interest rates, which is highly significant for the general activity level of British industry, will bring very encouraging prospects for further jobs.

Mr. Prescott: Is the Secretary of State aware that in his 12 months of office he has presided over an increase in unemployment of more than 3,000 per week? Can he give an estimate of the likely level of unemployment in October 1985, in the fourth year of economic recovery, or must we ask Lord Young? Does he accept that the promised £1·5 billion cuts in income tax will produce only 25 per cent. of the jobs that public investment would produce? That being so, what advice will he give the Chancellor?

Mr. King: First, I welcome the hon. Gentleman to his new responsibilities. He makes an unfortunate comparison because although I accept that unemployment has risen during the year in which I have had the privilege of holding this responsibility, and I regard that as very serious indeed, unemployment has not risen so fast as it did when the former leader of the Labour party, the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) was the Secretary of State for Employment. Nevertheless, I shall try to do even better in terms of employment prospects. Meanwhile, I hope that the hon. Gentleman, instead of giving unequivocal support to the miners' dispute, as he chose to do from one platform, will observe the canniness of the present leader of the Labour party and seek an end to the dispute so that there can be the prospect of more jobs.

Following is the information:

Unemployment—unadjusted including school leavers 11 October 1984

Region	*Unemployed—Thousands*
South East	767·9
(Greater London)	(392·6)
East Anglia	76·8
South West	200·5
West Midlands	353·3
East Midlands	198·0
Yorkshire and Humberside	301·8
North West	445·9
North	237·5
Wales	178·6
Scotland	342·9
Northern Ireland	122·0

Enterprise Allowance Scheme

2. **Mr. Squire** asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the future of the enterprise allowance scheme.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Alan Clark): As my right hon. Friend announced in the House on Monday 12 November—[*Official Report*, Vol. 67, column 445-46]—the scheme will be extended and expanded from 1 April 1985 to provide places for up to 1,250 people each week in 1985-86.

Mr. Squire: I congratulate my hon. Friend on that excellent news. May I ask for his confirmation that a very high percentage of the enterprises thus established remain active and are playing a major role in reducing unemployment?

Mr. Clark: Yes, my hon. Friend is right. Up to 75 per cent. of those receiving the allowance are still trading 18 months after start-up and thus 6 months after the allowance has stopped. In addition — and perhaps more significantly—over 50 additional jobs are created for every 100 firms supported in the first instance.

Mr. Madden: What advice can the Minister give to a constituent of mine who took voluntary redundancy from British Rail last December on the basis that the enterprise allowance would be available, but was told in April that the scheme had been terminated? He subsequently lost his redundancy money, his firm has failed, and he is seeking compensation from the Department of Employment for misinformation.

Mr. Clark: If the facts are as the hon. Gentleman has stated them, it is clear that a serious mistake was made. I assume that he has written to me about it. However, the papers have not yet reached my desk.

Mr. Speller: Will my hon. Friend bear in mind the greatest anomaly of all? When one member of the family receives the enterprise allowance, if another member of the family, such as the wife, then becomes unemployed, the DHSS deducts the enterprise allowance from the gross income of the family, thus rendering ineffective the whole purpose of the scheme. Will my hon. Friend bear that point in mind when considering the future of the scheme?

Mr. Clark: With respect, that is not fair. The allowance is a form of income and where incomes are aggregated those procedures apply. The DHSS is following the proper procedures.

Mr. Wigley: Is the Minister aware that there are many people who apply for places on the scheme well within the 12 months during which they receive unemployment benefit, but if they have to wait to join the scheme they lose the benefit because the 12-month period is exceeded. Would it not be better if people's entitlement began on the date on which they first applied?

Mr. Clark: The hon. Gentleman draws attention to a state of affairs which, regrettably, did exist during the period when there were very long waiting lists. Thanks to the developments that my right hon. Friend has announced, the waiting lists have been reduced to three or four weeks in most parts of the country. I therefore hope that this disappointing situation will no longer apply.

Job Release Scheme

3. **Mr. Knox** asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he is satisfied with the operation of the job release scheme.

Mr. Alan Clark: Yes, Sir. We shall continue the full-time job release scheme on the present basis for a further year. We shall be making changes to the part-time job release scheme designed to improve its attractiveness and the help that it can give to reducing the problem of unemployment.

Mr. Knox: Does my hon. Friend agree that the job release scheme is one of the best schemes for alleviating unemployment and that too few people are involved in it? Is there not a strong case for expanding it substantially?

Mr. Clark: I understand my hon. Friend's views, which are echoed in many parts of the House, but the question of how resources are allocated within the total of over £2 billion for employment and training measures is a matter of priorities. My hon. Friend should reflect on the fact that the net cost per person taken off the register by the enterprise allowance scheme is about £650, whereas the cost of taking someone off the register through the job release scheme is £1,630. When the money is allocated, such considerations have to be borne in mind.

Mr. Meadowcroft: Is it not rightly baffling to many people that the better-off, especially in the public sector, are retiring ever earlier while poorer people cannot take advantage of the job release scheme because the age limit has been raised? Should it not be reduced?

Mr. Clark: Early retirement, at whatever level, is a matter for employee and employer. People who wish to take advantage of the job release scheme have only the last year of their working life in which to do so because we have made a judgment as to the allocation of resources under special employment measures.

Mr. Evans: Does the Minister acknowledge that job release is a popular and excellent scheme which reduces unemployment? Will he also acknowledge that the scheme was introduced by a Labour Government, who improved it three times in as many years, unlike the present Government, who earlier this week devalued the scheme by increasing the participation age to 64?

Mr. Clark: Of course the scheme is valuable and the hon. Gentleman is quite right in saying that his party changed the rules three times.

Mr. Evans: Improving it.

Mr. Clark: However, his party did not promulgate the enterprise allowance scheme, which is much more cost-effective and has the additional advantage of being job-generative.

Coal Industry Dispute

4. **Mr. Ron Davies** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what is the total number of people in the United Kingdom presently affected in their normal working routine as a consequence of the coal industry dispute.

Mr. Tom King: The vast majority of the country has been completely unaffected by the miner's strike in its normal working routine. It has however undoubtedly caused real hardship in particular areas and lost a significant number of jobs — especially in companies closely associated with the coal industry.

Mr. Davies: Does the Secretary of State appreciate that in the South Wales coalfield for every one working miner there are still 200 miners on strike? Does he further appreciate that a slow drift back to work is a recipe for conflict and that there will never be a complete return to work in the mining industry unless there is a negotiated settlement? If his Department has a role to play in avoiding conflict and resolving difficulties, will he say what action he proposes to take, bearing in mind the stated willingness of the NUM to reopen negotiations? What steps does his Department intend to take to bring about the resumption of negotiations?

Mr. King: I am surprised that an hon. Member who represents a south Wales constituency can stand up in the House and speak about the miner's strike without commenting on the behaviour shown to the general secretary of the TUC when he tried to bring forward a few home truths to those who thought that violence was the way to respond to that situation. If the hon. Gentleman believes that negotiation is the way in which to solve the dispute, it is a great pity that we did not hear his voice a little earlier.

Mr. Sumberg: Is my right hon. Friend aware that many of my constituents who work in the paper industry are suffering because of the dispute as paper mills are having to pay more for their energy? Will he remind the House that the longer the dispute continues, the greater will be the threat to their jobs?

Mr. King: The unattractive feature of the leadership of the NUM, which claims to be fighting to defend jobs, is that while its members have a clear assurance from the chairman of the National Coal Board, it is endangering the jobs of many other people in other industries. I have already given the House the figures. My best estimate on the figures that are available to me is that 30,000 people in other industries have lost their jobs as a direct result of Mr. Scargill's intransigence.

Mr. Barron: Does the Secretary of State accept that the number of people who will lose their jobs permanently as a result of the rundown of the coal mining industry could be as high as three for every job that is lost in that industry? The NUM has consistently advanced that argument. Do the Secretary of State's figures agree with that estimate? What does he propose to do if the Secretary of State for Energy goes ahead and gets rid of 20,000 jobs in the industry this year?

Mr. King: The hon. Gentleman knows that the best prospects for jobs in the coal industry depend on an efficient industry, low-cost coal production and low-cost energy. That also affects employment throughout the country. Such a policy was supported by Opposition Members when they had responsibility for these matters, but now their diaries are consistently too full for them to reaffirm it.

Mr. Wrigglesworth: Does the Secretary of State agree that the great tragedy of this dispute is that, with the reduction in the number of uneconomic pits, we could have an expanding coal industry which would benefit all those who supply the mining industry and use its products as well as the miners themselves?

Mr. King: I very much agree with the hon. Gentleman. I am struck by the fact that some of those most closely involved on the union side of the industry do not seem to believe in its future. A friend of mine in the American coal industry—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. We are making very slow progress as it is.

Mr. King: During this dispute that man has been in Germany selling deep-mined underground coal produced in the United States, and he has done so competitively. Those orders could be for British coal and could mean jobs for British miners if only people had the courage and determination to grasp the opportunity.

Labour Statistics

5. **Mr. Strang** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what is his latest estimate of the number of young people under the age of 18 years who have been unemployed for a year or longer; and what was the comparable figure five years ago.

The Minister of State, Department of Employment (Mr. Peter Morrison): On 11 October 1984 the number of claimants under the age of 18 years who had been unemployed for over one year was 16,830. The figure of 3,825 for October 1979 was not derived on a comparable basis.

Mr. Strang: Do the Government look upon these young people as a lost generation? When will the Minister recognise the misery and waste of mass unemployment? Is it surprising that there is such an upsurge in drug abuse and crime when many of our young people are living in communities where the vast majority have no hope of real work?

Mr. Morrison: I suspect that the hon. Gentleman does not realise there there is no reason whatever why anyone under 18 should have been long-term unemployed. Why on earth did they not go on the youth training scheme? They did not do so because the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short) and others told them not to, yet there was no reason whatever why they should have become long-term unemployed.

Mr. Rowe: Will my hon. Friend consider making a small contribution to this important problem by negotiating with his colleague in the Department of Trade and Industry the possibility of a small revolving fund to be administered by enterprise agencies to allow suitable people under 18 to set up business on their own?

Mr. Morrison: As my hon. Friend will appreciate, my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State runs a successful enterprise allowance scheme which becomes available to young people at the age of 18. The community programme is also available when young people reach 18. Were it not for Labour boroughs such as Hackney, Islington, Tower Hamlets and Newham, which do not approve of the community programme, there would be places available for those young people.

Mr. Sheerman: Will the Minister ask the Secretary of State and the Chancellor to give the House some figures which give the real truth about youth unemployment? Will he also say why the House was misled on 30 October when 50 per cent., 60 per cent., and then 70 per cent. were quoted as the percentage of people leaving YTS this year and getting jobs? Surely misleading the House is not the sort of thing at which Ministers should become professionals?

Mr. Morrison: The hon. Gentleman will, I am sure, have read the latest outturn figures from the youth training scheme. Just under 60 per cent. are going into jobs and 13 per cent. are going into training of some sort or another. Those figures are very much better than any of the outturn figures under the youth opportunities programme. If the hon. Gentleman believes everything that Youthaid says, he is not concentrating on the real facts.

Closed Shop Agreements

6. **Mr. Marlow** asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many people are covered by closed shop agreements protected by law.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Peter Bottomley): Very few. I am aware from press reports of only three such ballots in favour of a closed shop. They covered about 1,100 employees. From 1 November, unless a closed shop has been overwhelmingly approved in a secret ballot, there is an automatic claim for unfair dismissal.

Mr. Marlow: Does this not prove that the old, anti-democratic, unrepresentative closed shop, which has made little kings out of bullies and machiavellian princes out of knaves, is now a thing of the past?

Mr. Bottomley: It demonstrates that unions do best for their members when their members are voluntary members.

Mr. Eastham: Is the Minister aware that in New Zealand the Conservative Government introduced 26 pieces of repressive legislation against trade unions, which brought absolute chaos to New Zealand, and that they have now been kicked out and the Labour Government intend to repeal the repressive legislation? Do the British Government intend to follow a similar course?

Mr. Bottomley: The Government will seek to follow political democracy with trade union democracy and to give more power to union members to control their own futures and unions. I suspect that the hon. Gentleman will support that.

Labour Statistics

7. **Mr. Andrew MacKay** asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the current level of unemployment.

19. **Mr. Yeo** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what is the current level of unemployment.

Mr. Alan Clark: At 11 October the number of unemployed claimants in the United Kingdom was 3,225,000. That figure is disappointingly high. The creation of sustainable employment depends on a healthy economy, competitive industry and a flexible labour market. Our policies are directed to those ends, and we continue to look for ways of building on what has been achieved.

Mr. MacKay: Is my hon. Friend worried that employment opportunities created by the Government's

excellent decision to abolish the national insurance surcharge on 1 October will be jeopardised by inflationary and irresponsible wage claims in the private sector?

Mr. Clark: That is regrettably a factor which Opposition Members never seem to consider. They wax indignant about unemployment figures but never ask themselves whether there has ever been an excessive wage claim which led to an increase in the labour force employed.

Mr. Yeo: Does my hon. Friend agree that many smaller businesses have considerable potential for job creation but are deterred from taking on new labour by the existence of onerous employment legislation, the abolition of which would not cost the Government a single penny?

Mr. Clark: Certainly there is scope for examining the burden of legislation on small businesses. My hon. Friend will appreciate that we have a duty always to bear in mind considerations relating to health and safety and the maintenance of standards that would benefit the work force.

Mr. Leighton: Is the Minister aware that in the London borough of Newham 1,879 young people have never had a job, and that of those, 1,016 are 18 and over? Has he the least idea what that means for morale, drug abuse and crime? What message can I give them from the Government, after five years of Tory policies? Shall I tell them that the present position is what was intended? Is it a success or a failure? Does the Minister care about the future of those young people?

Mr. Clark: If the hon. Gentleman had heard the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, he would know that there is no reason why anyone of that age in Newham should not have had either a job or training experience. The message that I recommend him to give them is to restrain those in Militant Tendency and other similar persuasions, who never cease to talk down Government initiatives, schemes and other measures in that area, and to examine and take advantage of those opportunities.

Mr. Heffer: Does the Minister agree that it is a bit thick for Conservative Members, who are well-fed, well-heeled, well looked after and who, in the main, have never worked for their living, to talk about high wages putting people out of work? Is he aware that in part of Merseyside, where there is high unemployment, people earn the lowest wages in the country and that, therefore, unemployment is forcing wages down? What reply do the Government have to that?

Mr. Clark: I know nothing about the hon. Gentleman's heels, nor about how well-fed he is. I can only say that Liverpool city council, which has tried determinedly to exclude private enterprise and private capital, is drawing the fire of the community groups and the trades councils within its purview. The council must recognise that its action offers the best route to increasing unemployment in that city.

Coal Industry Dispute

8. **Mr. Adley** asked the Secretary of State for Employment when he next intends to meet the Trades Union Congress in order to discuss the implications for Government policy of the miners' strike; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Tom King: I have no meeting planned with the TUC to discuss the implications of the miners' strike.

Mr. Adley: Although I am sure that my right hon. Friend recognises the dilemma of the TUC general council, which feels the need to pay lip-service to Mr. Arthur Scargill, is not the reality that the council has shown by its silence and lack of action its complete disapproval of the violent methods used by Mr. Scargill? In view of the personal and political courage shown by Mr. Willis, would it not be appropriate now for the Government to extend their hand to the TUC to try to improve the relationship between them and the TUC?

Mr. King: I made it clear that I have no meeting planned to discuss this matter, but I meet the TUC in committees with hon. Members to discuss various matters, and I am always ready to meet the TUC on matters of common interest. The TUC has paid a heavy price for the resolution that was passed at the conference. Had the TUC led negotiations earlier, it might have been helpful. I pay tribute to the brave words of the general secretary of the TUC at that most unpleasant meeting at Aberavon.

Mr. Woodall: Is the Secretary of State aware that he should meet members of the TUC, if only to discuss my constituents who are employed by private contractors to carry out work for the National Coal Board, but who have been laid off since the strike started? They received unemployment benefit until recently, when a bright boy at the Department of Employment decided that the men were affected by the strike and would benefit from it. Will he ensure that those men receive their rightful unemployment benefit?

Mr. King: The hon. Gentleman knows that that is not a matter for me. It is a matter for adjudicating officer concerned with such matters. If the hon. Gentleman is trying to tell the House that much hardship has been caused by the dispute and that many people have lost their jobs as a result of the NUM action, many hon. Members would agree with him 100 per cent.

Mr. Roger King: Were my right hon. Friend to run into the TUC members on the proverbial Clapham omnibus, would he talk to them about secret ballots and say that if the mineworkers had had a secret ballot they would not have gone on strike, and that if the Austin Rover workers had had a secret ballot, they would not have spent two and half weeks on strike and be returning to work only now?

Mr. Tom King: I was pleased to see the announcement today of the decision of some workers to return to work. It underlines more clearly than any speech could that the car park meeting and the show of hands is no longer acceptable for issues of such importance to people's livelihoods and futures, and that the importance of a proper secret ballot before industrial action cannot be overstated.

Mr. Mason: Why have those mineworkers who were declared redundant before 6 March, the first day of the strike, who have received their redundancy notices and who have played no part whatever in the strike, been denied their unemployment benefits?

Mr. King: As I have tried to say, under the existing rules this is a matter for the adjudicating officer, not for Ministers. I very much hope that nobody will be in that

situation much longer. The number of people who have lost their jobs as a result of the dispute—now 30,000—emphasises the importance of bringing it to an end at the earliest possible moment.

Mr. Bill Walker: When my right hon. Friend meets the TUC, will he bring to its attention the fact that the decision of Labour councillors in Fife to send vast sums of public money to the miners and the NUM will have an impact on jobs in that area, because it will increase the rates?

Mr. King: The House will welcome the increasing evidence of a return to work, which is widespread and not confined to Bolsover. I hope that we shall soon have a majority of miners returning to work and that the ratepayers of Fife can be protected from that quite unnecessary impost.

Mr. Prescott: Is the Secretary of state aware of the speech to be made tonight by the Secretary of State for Energy calling for national unity and conciliation in the mining areas, which seems to many of us to be like Attila the Hun calling for a peace conference? Does the Secretary of State accept his responsibility on that new theme of conciliation? Will he follow the lead set by my right hon. Friend the Member for Salford, East (Mr. Orme), the bishops and the general secretary of the TUC in calling for a convening of the parties to the dispute, or does he simply want to sit aside, hoping that the NUM will be smashed and industrial relations soured for generations ahead?

Mr. King: I have never seen my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy in the guise of a wolf on the fold as, I believe, Attila came down. It is no good the hon. Gentleman standing up now and asking for a bit of negotiation and conciliation, when he has said that he backs to the hilt the leader of the NUM, who proudly states that he has not budged an inch throughout the negotiations. If the diary of his right hon. Friend the Leader of the Labour party had been a little less full so that he could have had the courage to tell the NUM and the miners the truth, we might have got an earlier settlement of this damaging dispute.

Wolverhampton

9. **Mrs. Renée Short** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what new initiatives he plans to reduce the level of unemployment in Wolverhampton.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The Government are concerned about the level of unemployment in Wolverhampton. A substantial number of people in the area are benefiting from employment and training measures, including the enterprise allowance scheme, which we have recently extended. Sustainable employment depends on a healthy economy and competitive industry.

Mrs. Short: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the Secretary of State came to Wolverhampton recently and that many of his friends told him that they were disturbed by the high level of unemployment, which now stands at 16 per cent.? Will the hon. Gentleman now answer the question and tell me what initiatives he has to reduce what is an unacceptably high level of unemployment, which has been at that level now for a number of years?

Mr. Bottomley: With her record of interest in employment measures and opportunities, the hon. Lady will know that that requires partnership between the Government, local authorities, and, most of all——

Mrs. Short: That is available.

Mr. Bottomley: —the ability to create new markets and meet the markets that are available. The hon. Lady will be as aware as I am that, for example, the motor industry, for which much subcontracting is done in her area, has seen more demand for cars but fewer being supplied from Britain. It would be helpful to have her support to get people back to work to produce the cars rather than to see people going on strike.

Mr. Budgen: Does my hon. Friend agree that the horrifying problems of Wolverhampton cannot be cured in isolation from those in the rest of the country, but that neither Wolverhampton nor the rest of Britain is satisfied by the Government collectively wringing their hands and talking vaguely about the need to make labour markets more flexible? Some immediate action is needed to reduce the rigidities in the labour market, such as the abolishing of the wages councils.

Mr. Bottomley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving me his views, now that I am at the Dispatch Box rather than sitting beside him. However, it is not just the wages councils that are important, because it is also important that employers should obtain a greater return from employing people than the mere cost of doing so, and that unit labour costs should stop rising and should remain steady or fall, as happens with many of our competitors.

Industrial Action (Lost Working Days)

11. **Mr. Fatchett** asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many working days have been lost through industrial action in 1984 to date.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: It is provisionally estimated that in the first nine months of this year 15·8 million working days have been lost through stoppages of work due to industrial disputes in the United Kingdom; and that four fifths of these days have been lost as a result of the mining dispute.

Mr. Fatchett: Does the hon. Gentleman realise that 1984 will see twice as many working days lost through industrial action as happened in the last year of the Labour Government, in 1978? In the years subsequent to 1978 we have had three pieces of industrial relations legislation from this Government. Does the hon. Gentleman think that the number of lost working days is a sign that that legislation has failed or a sign of its success? Are not this Government concerned with causing chaos in industrial relations?

Mr. Bottomley: I do not think that the hon. Gentleman has even convinced himself. With the exception of the mining dispute, the number of days lost has fallen. The mining dispute, however, involves an example of a union not listening to its members and not asking them before going on strike.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Neil Hamilton** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 20 November.

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher): This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House I shall be having further meetings later today. This evening I hope to have an audience of Her Majesty the Queen.

Mr. Hamilton: As the miners' strike is being satisfactorily brought to a conclusion by the continued return to work, may I ask my right hon. Friend about another problem on which progress is rather less than satisfactory? Is she aware that France has failed to meet its deadline for imposing the collection of the levy on the overproduction of milk? Is she further aware that in Italy no progress whatever has been made towards implementing a quota scheme? Does that not show that there is little desire in those countries to make economies in the common agricultural policy and that, therefore, there is no case for increasing the EC's own resources?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has made it quite clear to the Commission that, with regard to the super levy, either all of us collect it or none of us do so. We shall not be in a position in which Britain keeps the rules while others do not. With regard to the increase in own resources and the conditions under which that increase will be put before the House, an order will be placed before the House when we are fully ready to do so.

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton: The Prime Minister never ceases to preach to everyone about the need to obey the law, so what is she doing about the 500,000 or so companies which refuse to obey the law by filing their annual accounts with Companies house?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that those cases are followed up, and that it occasionally takes some time to file such accounts. However, the matter is not in my hands but in those of the law enforcement authority.

Mr. Ian Lloyd: My right hon. Friend will be aware of the grave concern caused throughout the country by the news that £250,000 of public property has been destroyed. I refer to the NCB computer and the geological centre. She will be further aware that no single step has probably had more damaging effects on the employment prospects for those in the coal mining industry. What measures are being taken to ensure that Mr. Scargill's Visigoths are not allowed or encouraged to continue such behaviour?

The Prime Minister: That was an act of vandalism and an attempt to destroy other people's jobs by destroying the equipment with which they work and the possibility of doing very important geological research. The matter will, of course, be pursued by the police and I hope that those responsible will be brought before the courts in the ordinary way.

Mr. Steel: In view of the extraordinary outburst from the pulpit on Sunday by the chairman of the Conservative party, will the Prime Minister make it clear that she sent a full and positive reply to the church leaders' letters on Ethiopia without questioning their facts, as he sought to do? Would it not be an improvement all round if she made the hon. Gentleman a bishop, and took some bishops into her Government?

The Prime Minister: I do not tangle with bishops—I leave that to very distinguished ex-Prime Ministers, one of whom, during a maiden speech in another place a few days ago, said that

"episcopal and archiepiscopal plunges into economics are very often rather eccentric, even capricious." —[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 13 November 1984; Vol. 457, c. 236.]

Q2. **Mr. Loyden** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 20 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Loyden: Is the Prime Minister aware that the Government's intention to smash the trade union movement by pursuing policies of mass unemployment, by destroying local democracy and by reducing the living standards of working people and their families will not be achieved? Is she further aware that final victory will elude her and that the trade union movement and the Labour party will emerge stronger, not weaker, than they are now?

The Prime Minister: What is reflecting badly on the trade union movement, and doing it great damage, is the NUM's refusal to hold a ballot and its persistence in using violence to extend the strike. It would be far better for everyone if the miners returned to work and business returned to normal.

Q3. **Mr. Ward** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 20 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Ward: During her busy day, will my right hon. Friend find time to reflect on the decision of the leadership of the NUM to seek financial assistance from Libya and the Soviet Union? Is it not astonishing that unions that believe in freedom should seek financial help from countries where there are no free trade unions?

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend that maximum aid comes from a country with no free trade unions. I noted some time ago that the leader of the NUM condemned Solidarity and said that he disagreed with it, even though it is a union trying to establish free trade unionism in a Socialist state.

Mr, Kinnock: In view of the statement of the Chancellor of the Exchequer last week that he expects to have scope for further net reductions in taxes of about £1½ billion in next year's Budget, can the Prime Minister now give the House a categorical assurance that her Government will not extend VAT to books, periodicals and magazines or to children's footwear and clothing?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman is using an old, customary ploy, by which I shall not be trapped, of putting forward a number of measures and asking me to deny them one by one. He knows full well that he must wait for the Budget. I shall not fall for that ploy.

Mr. Kinnock: If the Chancellor of the Exchequer can tell us what he expects to do with taxes next year with cuts

in health, education, social services and housing, why cannot the right hon. Lady tell us what she will do about VAT?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman is well aware that at this time of the year the Government must introduce to the House the public expenditure figures for the coming year. It has always been so. He should be aware by now that the Budget is introduced in the spring, not before Christmas.

Q4. **Mr. Teddy Taylor** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 20 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Taylor: Can my right hon. Friend find time today to offer congratulations to the British Steel Corporation on the huge improvement in its production and financial performance, despite all attempts to disrupt its activities? As the BSC moves towards financial break-even, will my right hon. Friend make a point of congratulating the work force, the management, the present chairman and the past chairman—who I think was called Mr. MacGregor?

The Prime Minister: I gladly join my hon. Friend. Those who work for the British Steel Corporation know full well that to keep their jobs they have to keep their customers. They are doing that and serving them very well, in spite of all the difficulties placed upon them by a fellow trade union.

Mr. Nellist: Is the Prime Minister aware that the £4,000 million which her Government have spent in the past nine months in attempting to destroy the National Union of Mineworkers could have provided a £25 a week increase for every registered person on the dole or a £4 a week tax cut for every registered insured worker? Is it not a fact that, in the face of her attack on jobs, 90 per cent. of the miners in Scotland are on strike, 97 per cent. of the miners in Yorkshire are on strike, and 99·6 per cent. of the miners in South Wales remain solid?

The Prime Minister: If the hon. Gentleman is interested in people keeping their jobs, he should stop supporting strikes.

Q5. **Mr. Nicholls** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 20 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Nicholls: Given the fact that the general secretary of the TUC has now come out forthrightly against violence, and bearing in mind that that violence would probably cease if the TUC and the NUM were to obey their own guidelines on peaceful picketing, has not the time now come for those guidelines to be obeyed? Should not a call be made for those guidelines to be obeyed? Can my right hon. Friend think of anyone better placed than the Leader of the Opposition to make such a call?

The Prime Minister: I think that we all appreciated the general secretary's forthright denunciation of violence. We would also all appreciate it if the TUC guidelines on picketing were henceforth to be obeyed by all trade unions that belong to the TUC.

Q6. **Mr. Gareth Wardell** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 20 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Wardell: It seems to be highly probable that the Council of Environment Ministers on 6 December will consider issuing a directive on beverage containers, which will seriously affect employment in the tinplate and aluminium industry in south Wales. Will the Prime Minister give an assurance that she will instruct her Minister to veto that directive if the Council so decides?

The Prime Minister: I do not know whether the Council of Ministers will decide in that way, but I cannot give the hon. Gentleman that assurance.

Sir Peter Blaker: With regard to the attempt by the president of the National Union of Mineworkers to obtain aid from the Soviet Union, would not the members of that union who value freedom be wise to bear in mind that there is one form of aid which the Soviet Union is always ready to provide, and that is advice and instruction on how to disrupt and destabilise institutions in the free world?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend makes his point very effectively and I agree with him.

Mr. Donald Stewart: Following the right hon. Lady's description of herself on television last night as an English Prime Minister, is she aware that many Scots will welcome the acknowledgement that she has no mandate for government north of the border? Therefore, will she ensure that legislation is introduced into this House at least to redeem the promise of her noble Friend Lord Home that a separate Scottish Government should be set up?

The Prime Minister: The United Kingdom has had many Scottish Prime Ministers and it is about time the English had a chance.

Q7. **Mr. Tom Clarke** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 20 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Clarke: Has the Prime Minister today responded to the view of the Australian Prime Minister that we should stay in UNESCO? If she has, has she borne in mind the views of the United Kingdom commission as well as 25 human rights organisations in Britain? Will she just for once respond to the Third world and to the non-aligned nations, instead of hanging on to American coat-tails?

The Prime Minister: The many criticisms that have been made of UNESCO are abundantly justified, both as to the direction of its expenditure and its attempts from time to time to prevent freedom of speech and freedom of the press in parts of the world.

Q8. **Mr. Ralph Howell** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 20 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Q9. **Mrs. Peacock** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 20 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Dalyell: Have all signals to and from the Conqueror been retained, other than those that were in the missing log book?

The Prime Minister *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. There was some confusion because the two previous questioners were not present. We are on question No. 10.

HMS Conqueror

Q10. **Mr. Dalyell** asked the Prime Minister why HMS Conqueror was ordered to return to the scene of the sinking of the General Belgrano on Monday 3 May 1982.

The Prime Minister: HMS Conqueror was not ordered to return to the scene of the sinking of the General Belgrano on 3 May 1982, but was ordered to continue operations in accordance with her current rules of engagement. Early on the morning of 4 May 1982, London time, HMS Conqueror signalled her intention to return to the area where Belgrano was attacked. She was then ordered not to attack warships engaged in rescuing survivors from Belgrano.

Mr. Dalyell: Have all signals to and from the Conqueror been retained, in any form, other than those that were in the so-called missing log book?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman has asked a number of questions about this matter. I prefer to check precisely before giving him a specific reply.

Points of Order

3.31 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse (Pontefract and Castleford): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. During questions to the Secretary of State for Employment I put a supplementary question arising out of question No. 1. You ruled, Mr. Speaker, that my question was not exactly in order. Although I do not want to question your ruling, I find it difficult to understand why a question about ex-miners on the employment register is not in order during questions about the unemployed generally. Bearing in mind the totally unsatisfactory answer to part of my question and the totally misleading answer given to my right hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Mason), I give notice that I intend to raise this subject on the Adjournment.

Mr. Speaker: I must correct the hon. Member. I did not say that his question was out of order. I said that he was going wide of the question. The hon. Member was dealing with unemployment and redundancy pay, whereas the question was about the number of people unemployed. It would have been far more appropriate for the hon. Member to have raised his point during questions Nos. 4 or 8.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is it possible for the Chair to introduce some sort of penalty against those hon. Members who table questions to the Prime Minister and then do not have the courtesy to turn up? Two Conservative Members did not even bother to take their places today. May we have a penalty of, say a six-month bar on tabling questions?

Mr. Speaker: This matter has been raised every week since the Recess. I repeat, for the benefit of the House; what I said last week: I never call the names of those right hon. and hon. Members who give me notice that they cannot be in their places.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Does this matter concern Question Time?

Mr. Dalyell: Yes, it relates to Question Time. May I express my gratitude to those Conservative Members who did not turn up. You allowed me to put a substantial question, Mr. Speaker. The supplementary question was equally substantial, and the Prime Minister did not answer it. Will the right hon. Lady say publicly that she will answer that question either now or in the future?

Mr. Speaker: We are getting into the bad habit we saw last Session. I hope that in this Session hon. Members will avoid trying to prolong Question Time by raising points of order. I am glad that the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) was fortunate today in being able to put his question.

Anglo-Irish Summit

3.34 pm

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I will make a statement on my discussions with the Taoiseach on 18 and 19 November. I was accompanied by my right honourable and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. Dr. FitzGerald was accompanied by Mr. Spring, the Tanaiste, and by Mr. Barry, the Irish Foreign Minister. The text of the communiqué issued after our meeting has been placed in the Library of the House.

This was our second bilateral meeting in the framework of the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Council. We exchanged views on European Community matters and on other current issues in international affairs. We also reviewed the work done over the year under the auspices of the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Council at both ministerial and official levels on a wide range of matters.

We had a thorough and realistic exchange of views on developments in relation to Northern Ireland, taking into account the positions of the two Governments; the report of the New Ireland Forum; and the proposals of constitutional democratic parties in Northern Ireland as set out in documents published in recent months. We agreed that it was a major interest of both our countries, as well as both the majority and minority communities in Northern Ireland, that there should be lasting peace and stability there.

The Taoiseach and I further agreed on the need for efforts to diminish the division between the two communities in Northern Ireland and to reconcile the two major traditions that exist in the two parts of Ireland. I affirmed yet again that Northern Ireland was part of the United Kingdom and that it will remain so unless the majority in Northern Ireland wishes otherwise. The Taoiseach for his part, while reaffirming the Irish aspiration to a united Ireland, recognised that any change in the constitutional status of Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom would come about only with the consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland.

We also agreed that any attempt to promote political objectives by means of violence or by threat of violence must be rejected, as must those who adopt or support such methods; the identities of both the majority and the minority communities in Northern Ireland should be recognised and respected, and reflected in the structures and processes of Northern Ireland in ways acceptable to both communities; the process of government in Northern Ireland should be such as to provide the people of both communities with the confidence that their rights will be safeguarded; co-operation between two Governments in matters of security should be maintained and where possible improved.

We also agreed on the importance of creating a political framework in Northern Ireland which was acceptable to both the majority and minority communities. We recognised that this can be brought about only with the full co-operation of the Northern Ireland political parties themselves. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland will be continuing his discussions with the Northern Ireland political parties with this in view.

The Taoiseach and I agreed that there should be close and continuing discussion on these subjects between the two Governments in the framework of the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Council. We decided that it would be useful for us to meet again in the early months of next year to take stock of progress and to pursue our established aim of promoting peace and stability in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Neil Kinnock (Islwyn): I welcome the fact that another meeting has taken place between the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach, and that an undertaking has been given that a close "and continual" dialogue will go on. I strongly endorse the categoric rejection of violence and the threat of violence contained in the joint communiqué and in the Prime Minister's statement this afternoon.

Will the Prime Minister say whether the Government's attitude is still expressed by the words of the right hon. Member for Waveney (Mr. Prior) when he was Secretary of State for Northern Ireland that

"the present situation . . . is not satisfactory for the Government, . . . for nationalists in Northern Ireland, . . . for Unionists, . . . for the Irish Government"

and

"not satisfactory for our two countries."?—[*Official Report*, 2 July 1984; Vol. 63, c. 29.]

If that is still the Government's attitude, will the right hon. Lady explain why, in spite of the grave and enduring problems in Northern Ireland, this recent meeting did not produce more tangible results? Does it mean that the Prime Minister is now content with the status quo in Northern Ireland, with all its misery, cost and lethal dangers? If she is not, how does she explain her dismissal of the New Ireland Forum report even as a basis for further discussion and possible addition?

Is the Prime Minister aware that responsible authorities, including the Irish Government and the Roman Catholic bishops, are alarmed at the risk of loss of confidence in the democratic process among many in Northern Ireland? Did the right hon. Lady and the Taoiseach discuss that alienation, because it is of such continuing and widespread anxiety? Is she aware that it is essential to encourage those who work for change by democratic means so that they are strengthened and the forces of terror are weakened and defeated?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman raises the fundamental problems. He will be the first to recognise, as will be many Opposition Members who have held office in Northern Ireland, that it is easy to recognise the problems, easy to analyse and define them, but very difficult to get the necessary agreement, to find a political framework acceptable to both the majority and minority parts of that community, in spite of all the efforts that have been made—they are strenuous and superb efforts by the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the security forces to eliminate terrorism. We have excellent co-operation with the Taoiseach and across the border on trying to improve security.

I think that most people would accept that we have not yet been successful in getting a political framework acceptable to the minority and majority communities. It is difficult. My right hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Sir H. Atkins), the first Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in our period of office, had a round table conference, but we were not successful in getting anything out of it, although the discussions went well. Then my right hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Mr. Prior) initiated the Assembly, but the Republican party, the SDLP, did not take part in it. So we have to try yet again.

Sir John Biggs-Davison (Epping Forest): To carry the Northern Ireland majority with her in improving the Anglo-Irish partnership, will my right hon. Friend press for the abandonment by the Irish Government of their perverse claim to the sovereignty of Northern Ireland and the honouring of the tripartite agreement of 1925?

The Prime Minister: I know that the Unionists in Northern Ireland, who are the majority, feel very strongly about that claim, which is in the Republic of Ireland's constitution. But what to do about it is, of course, a matter for the Taoiseach. My hon. Friend will notice that in my statement I said that I believed that the Republic still retained an aspiration to unify the whole of Ireland. We of course reject that solution.

Mr. James Molyneaux (Lagan Valley): May I congratulate the Prime Minister on the courage and clear-sightedness that she showed in taking the Government off the treadmill of initiatives which in the past have been the cause of so much turmoil? Will she consider phasing out summits of this type, which also add to instability?

The Prime Minister: I think that all of us would still like to find a political framework that was acceptable to both the minority as well as the majority communities. We have not yet succeeded in finding it, and I hope that all Northern Irish political parties will play a constructive part in trying to seek it, because those in the Republic of Ireland and many of us believe that unless and until we get that we shall not be able to get the full improvement in security which we all seek.

Mr. Michael Mates (Hampshire, East): Will my right hon. Friend take this opportunity to repeat to all the people in Northern Ireland that neither community has anything to fear from improved and continuing working relationships between herself and the Taoiseach—the Unionists because of the often-stated guarantee that their position as full citizens of the United Kingdom will not be changed against their will, and the nationalists because it must be in their interests that their problems and aspirations, which only recently have been publicly acknowledged by the Official Unionists, can only benefit from increased and better co-operation?

The Prime Minister: I believe that we are right to hold these bilateral meetings with the Taoiseach and his Ministers, and we shall in fact continue to do so. As my hon. Friend knows, we reject the three proposals in the New Ireland Forum; and, of course, the majority of Northern Ireland knows that it will continue to be part of the United Kingdom unless it wishes otherwise. I hope that that will give the majority the necessary confidence to get together with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and enter into another round of political talks.

Mr. Merlyn Rees (Morley and Leeds, South): On the negative side, the Prime Minister has confirmed that she has rejected the main parameters of the New Ireland Forum. On the positive side, the communiqué yesterday and her statement today make it clear that

"the identities of both the majority and the minority communities in Northern Ireland should be recognised and respected, and reflected in the structures and processes of Northern Ireland".

[Mr. Merlyn Rees]

It was also said that instructions had been given to the intergovernmental council to work on that and to bring proposals back in the new year. What instructions have been given to the intergovernmental council in this respect?

The Prime Minister: Precisely what was said. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman realises that throughout the communiqué we have tried to convey the flavour that we depend strongly on all political parties in Northern Ireland to assist in bringing that section of the communiqué to fruition and a satisfactory conclusion. We cannot just impose a solution on them, and we had to institute direct rule because there was no alternative solution. The statement means what it says—that we shall work to try to find a solution, but we look to constructive help from all those involved in the political parties in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Michael McNair-Wilson (Newbury): While accepting the need for a new political framework in Northern Ireland, and the fact that Northern Ireland will continue to be governed from Westminster, may I ask what thought was given in the discussions to transforming the Assembly into something closer to a local administration more able to cope with the local government problems of the Province?

The Prime Minister: That is one proposal, but it must depend on its widespread acceptance as a possible solution. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will be talking to the Northern Ireland parties that seek to proceed by agreement and co-operation. It will be difficult to get a solution otherwise; and in the absence of an acceptable political framework we shall not be able fully to get rid of violence. If we cannot do that, without security it will be difficult for people to have the freedom that they should have as citizens of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Stephen Ross (Isle of Wight): I welcome the terminology of the statement, but why is it not possible to go a little further? Why could we not accept the challenge of terrorism with which both Governments are faced and set up a joint security commission now? Why can we not have a parliamentary tier to the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Council? I trust that the Prime Minister will not say that that is up to Parliament, because it is up to the Government to take an initiative. Is there not a paramount need for close co-operation between London and Dublin?

The Prime Minister: The joint security commission is one proposal. These matters will be pursued. However, a number of people think it better to try to get a solution to both security and the political framework at the same time, believing that the one may assist the better solution of the other. I am aware of the hon. Gentleman's views about the parliamentary tier, but it is not for Government to propose that; that must be left to Parliament. But if the Government were to propose a parliamentary tier between the Assembly in Northern Ireland and the Dail in the Republic of Ireland a number of people would have considerable views against that.

Dr. Brian Mawhinney (Peterborough): Can my right hon. Friend confirm that part of the realism of her meeting included the fact that as there is no ambiguity about Northern Ireland's constitutional position no one will be allowed to deflect her from taking the necessary security and political measures in the Province by trying to suggest that ambiguity exists?

The Prime Minister: There is no ambiguity about the position in Northern Ireland. I have tried frequently to make that clear, and to reaffirm the position of Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom, and it will remain part of the United Kingdom unless the majority there wishes it otherwise. I hope that that gives sufficient confidence to make improvements in the security situation and to try to have a new effort to secure a political framework that is more acceptable to the minority in Northern Ireland.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Is the Prime Minister aware that there is bound to be immense disappointment at the negative view that she took at the New Ireland Forum which, after all, represented 90 per cent. of Irish nationalist opinion on both sides of the border? How much bloodshed and suffering could have been avoided in Ireland in the past 100 years if British Governments had responded in time to the constitutional progress and proposals made there? Yesterday was quite a victory for the Provisional IRA.

The Prime Minister: I disagree very strongly with the hon. Gentleman's last sentence and regard it as most unhelpful. I have made it quite clear that the Government will not be bombed into taking any different approach to the Republic from that which we would have taken in the absence of bombing. It would be totally and utterly wrong if we were to be bombed into doing anything that we would not otherwise have done. The hon. Gentleman, if he is absolutely frank, is well aware that the proposals in the New Ireland Forum were rejected by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland very quickly after they were published, when he made it clear in a statement that we rejected reunification, the federal solution and the joint authority proposals. The hon. Gentleman is well aware of that.

Mr. Ivor Stanbrook (Orpington): No one could accuse my right hon. Friend of not trying to accommodate the interests of the Irish Republic, but has not the time come to stop treating Northern Ireland at arm's length constitutionally? Would it not be in the interests of all the people of Northern Ireland if we treated it as a region of the United Kingdom like any other, which it undoubtedly is?

The Prime Minister: I am well aware that a number of people in Northern Ireland hold that view, and that is one possible solution, but we seek a wider measure of acceptance before putting forward any further proposals.

Mr. John Hume (Foyle): Leaving aside the Prime Minister's comments at her press conference yesterday which caused deep and justifiable anger and offence in Ireland and contributed very little to the communiqué's stated objective of peace and stability in Ireland, does the right hon. Lady agree that her fundamental mistake is her insistence that the problem of Northern Ireland is a Northern Ireland problem? Is she not aware that the problem of Northern Ireland is a matter not just of relationships within Northern Ireland but of relationships within Ireland and between Ireland and Britain? Does she agree that that is the failure of British-Ireland relations,

which were pushed into a corner and allowed to fester? Does she appreciate that when she gives a total veto to a tiny section of the people of both islands she paralyses all progress? Will she accept that the right approach is to seek the maximum consensus of all the people of both islands?

The Prime Minister: I do not recognise the press conference at which I was present. I had hoped that there might be a possibility of getting more co-operation, but the hon. Gentleman's comments do not give me much hope.

Mr. David Crouch (Canterbury): Is my right hon. Friend aware that there is widespread admiration for her having had a meeting with the Taoiseach on the subject of Northern Ireland in view of all that she herself has experienced in recent weeks? It is readily understandable that she could not accept the three proposals in the New Ireland Forum, but will she tell us to what extent her talks with the Irish Prime Minister went beyond the condemnation of violence and the subject of crisis management to consider the question of political progress?

The Prime Minister: We most certainly considered the question of political progress and we tried to go from many of the generalisations to practicable propositions, but I am very much aware that whatever proposal is put forward it will not have much chance of success if it is anything different from what we now have unless it has a wider measure of co-operation and acceptability than that which we now enjoy. I had hoped that if we entered into talks between the majority and minority communities they might enter the talks in a spirit of co-operation. I hope that they still may do so.

Mr. A. E. P. Duffy (Sheffield, Attercliffe): Is the Prime Minister aware that the current violence on the streets of northern England which arises from the miners' strike and the long-standing violence on the streets of Northern Ireland which arises from the existence of the border are both the consequences of policies which she could change, but the imperious and callous manner of her dismissal of every model for change in the New Ireland Forum report, as set out in her press statement yesterday, is not only an affront to those who continue to suffer in Northern Ireland but an insult to the authors of the report and all those who have worked for it, both in Ireland and in this country?

Picking up the challenge of my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick), I ask the right hon. Lady whether she really believes that her negativism today can do anything but undermine constitutional nationalism?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman's hearing is very partial. First, the New Ireland Forum report and its three proposals were rejected in a statement in this House on 4 July by my right hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Mr. Prior), who was then the Secretary of State. They were rejected clearly and decisively on that date. There is nothing new in that attitude. The majority of people in Northern Ireland would have been deeply offended if those solutions had not been rejected, and I hope that the hon. Gentleman still believes that majorities should have some considerable standing in deciding the future of the Province of Northern Ireland.

Secondly, violence is totally and utterly wrong and is to be condemned. Changes should come about through the ballot box. Every person in Northern Ireland has a vote, just like everyone else.

Mr. Tim Yeo (Suffolk, South): The problems of Northern Ireland are a matter of concern not only to the communities in the Province but to people in the United Kingdom as a whole. Is my right hon. Friend aware of the widespread concern about the increasingly large financial bill which the British taxpayer has to meet in order to deal with what sometimes appear from the mainland to be the self-imposed problems of Ulster?

The Prime Minister: Yes, the financial bill is large, but that is not the fault of those who are the victims of terrorism. The people of Northern Ireland are as much entitled to be defended against terrorism as are the people of any other parts of the United Kingdom.

Miss Joan Maynard (Sheffield, Brightside): The Prime Minister said that it is not possible to impose a solution, but I remind her that we divided Ireland. We imposed that solution. If the Prime Minister persists in saying that the guarantee to the Unionists must remain, how can we help the minority population to have any democratic rights? Is not the terrorism caused by the fact that the minority do not have democratic rights? Is it not the case that the only way of achieving lasting peace is to work positively for a united Ireland?

The Prime Minister: The guarantee is enshrined in legislation passed in this House. That is what gives confidence to the majority in Northern Ireland, and, on the basis of that confidence, I hope that we can enter into talks which fully respect the rights of minorities. Yes, minorities are, and will probably continue for many years to be, minorities, and, yes, they have rights, as in all democratic societies. We are asking for more co-operation between the political parties to try to reach something more acceptable to both.

On the question of the imposition of solutions, we had to impose direct rule because there was no agreement on anything else, and, if there is no agreement on anything else, direct rule must continue. I had hoped that we could enter into talks in good heart and in a spirit of good will. We shall have to wait and see whether that is so.

Mr. Eric Forth (Mid-Worcestershire): In the context of the Irish presidency of the EEC, did my right hon. Friend and the Irish Prime Minister consider the implications of the negotiations on the enlargement of the Community in regard to getting those negotiations right and ensuring that we deal adequately with the problems of wine, agricultural surpluses and Gibraltar rather than be too obsessed with bringing Spain into the EEC on 1 January 1986 on any terms?

The Prime Minister: I believe that it is advisable for us to bring Spain and Portugal into the EEC at the expected time. One of the problems that is giving cause for concern is wine, as my hon. Friend is aware. With regard to Gibraltar, Spain is very much aware that she cannot enter the Community unless the barriers are fully up. I have reason to believe that we shall reach some satisfactory agreement on that. Many problems are by definition difficult and will take time to solve, but we should like to solve them in time for Spain and Portugal to come in on 1 January 1986.

Ms. Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood): After all the fanfare in the build-up to the summit, does the Prime Minister agree that her statement shows that there has been no progress and that the misery, killing and death in

[Ms. Clare Short]

Northern Ireland will continue? Will she face up to the fact that the majority of the people of Ireland were always and still are against the partition of Ireland? Does she agree that there is mounting evidence that the majority of the people of Britain are against our presence in Ireland and wish to withdraw? For how long can one small intransigent minority, which has treated the nationalist community unjustly, continue to dictate to all of us that there can be no solution to this dreadful problem?

The Prime Minister: There is a guarantee given by legislation passed by this House to the majority of people in Northern Ireland. Most of us stand by that guarantee but also believe in human rights for each and every citizen of Northern Ireland and try to uphold them.

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): With regard to the European element of the talks, was there any discussion of reform of the CAP? Did my right hon. Friend take the opportunity to convey to the Taoiseach the view that is widely held in Britain that it would be grossly unfair for Irish agriculture to have further increases in its quota of milk when our farmers are suffering severe cuts in production?

The Prime Minister: We did not spend much time on the reform of the CAP. My hon. Friend will be aware that, under the strict financial guidelines that have been agreed, the gross of the expenditure on the CAP should be much more constrained than hitherto. That will bring about a reduction in and, I hope, eventually the abolition of surpluses. I know how strongly some people feel about quotas for the Republic.

Mr. Alfred Dubs (Battersea): Is the Prime Minister aware that many people in Ireland and in Britain will feel that a real opportunity has been missed? Is she further aware that her out-and-out rejection of any of the proposals in the New Ireland Forum report does not lie four square with the tentative comments of the previous Secretary of State when the report was first published? That will also be seen as a slap in the face for the many people who believed that there was some way forward. Would it not have been possible at least to use the ideas in that report for joint authority as a basis for making some progress? That would have not have flown in the face of the guarantee, which I reject. Moreover, that would have allowed for some sense of Irishness to be given to the nationalist population on Northern Ireland. In the absence of any positive comment, what hope is there for the people of Ireland?

The Prime Minister: Co-operation yes, joint authority no. Joint authority is a derogation from sovereignty, and the hon. Gentleman must understand that. We seek greater co-operation. The opportunity will be missed if the political parties do not try to come together to get something more acceptable to them all than the arrangement which we now have. That will be the missing of opportunities, but it is not in my hands.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I shall call the four Conservative Members who have been rising if they were here at the beginning of the statement.

Mr. K. Harvey Proctor (Billericay): Will my right hon. Friend describe how the new political framework differs from the system of parliamentary democracy which serves the rest of the kingdom so well?

The Prime Minister: As my hon. Friend knows, Northern Ireland has for many years had a system of devolved government. It no longer has that system. There are questions as to whether it should be fully integrated into the United Kingdom under the ordinary United Kingdom pattern or whether there should be a different model of devolved government and what that model should consist of. We cannot put forward any particular proposals unless we are certain that they will meet a reasonable measure of acceptance among all parties. That is why, although people expect us to pull rabbits out of hats, there is no point in doing so unless we get more widespread co-operation from all parties.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (Norfolk, North-West): Although I agree with my right hon. Friend that the key to the future of the Assembly is participation by the SDLP, did she suggest to the Taoiseach that he should put pressure on the SDLP to join the Assembly?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend would not expect me to give exactly the details of the matters that the Taoiseach and I discussed. I stand by the words in the communiqué.

Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Does my right hon. Friend accept that we all agree that discussions should go on between all people who believe that a peaceful solution to any problem should be found? Does she further agree that many of us are perplexed when people go on as though co-citizens of the United Kingdom are somehow for sale if terrorists make it hard enough? People who live in Northern Ireland are as much citizens of the United Kingdom as are people from Birmingham, London or Crewe. The sooner those who wish to bomb us into submission realise that, the sooner we shall have a peaceful solution to the problem of Northern and Southern Ireland.

The Prime Minister: I agree with most of what my hon. Friend has said. We are seeking a peaceful and stable solution which gives the people of Northern Ireland confidence that that stable solution can continue for the foreseeable future.

Mr. Eldon Griffiths (Bury St. Edmunds): Was my right hon. Friend able to bring to the attention of Garret FitzGerald the six principles which were agreed at the London economic summit in respect of international responses to terrorism? As much of the practical problem of dealing with security depends on better cross-border co-operation between the Garda and the Royal Ulster Constabulary, was she able to congratulate him on the fact that his Government have given greater help than their predecessors?

The Prime Minister: Yes. The Taoiseach is as much against terrorism as we are north of the border. He has been adamant in his condemnation of it and very forthright and swift. We appreciate that very much. He is aware of the London economic summit declaration against terrorism and of the need for greater co-operation. We secure co-operation from the Taoiseach.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. During the questions and answers arising out

of the Prime Minister's statement, there has been some bewilderment about why, for the first time when a Prime Minister has made a statement, the leaders of the Social Democratic party and the Liberal party have not felt it necessary to catch your eye.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I cannot see that there is any point of order in this for me.

Mr. Skinner: I am coming to it. We think that it would not be a bad idea if you, Mr. Speaker, could help us check the record to see whether that is the case, as we should like to establish whether they were colluding on the Bench, whether they were having another row or whether, to use common parliamentary parlance, the Prime Minister's statement was what was known as a no-win situation and the two of them chucked in the sponge.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member is quite able to do his own homework.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Ordered,

That the Health and Social Security (Northern Ireland) Order 1984 (S.I. 1984, No. 1158) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Durant.]*

Orders of the Day

New Towns and Urban Development Corporations Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

4.9 pm

The Minister for Housing and Construction (Mr. Ian Gow): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Before I turn to the Bill—and the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) will not misunderstand me—we on the Conservative Benches want to make it clear how much, on personal grounds, we regret the departure from the Opposition Front Bench of the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer). Though we disagree strongly with him about major issues of policy, my right hon. and hon. Friends respect his deep knowledge of the construction industry and the fierce, often passionate, sincerity which he brought to our proceedings. We know that housing and the construction industry will continue to be of deep concern to him.

I also congratulate the hon. Member for Perry Barr on his promotion as Shadow Housing Minister. I give him a particular welcome because he has recently announced his conversion, along with that of Dengxiao Ping, to one of the most fundamental elements of the Government's housing policy—the right for tenants of local authorities and of new towns to buy their own homes.

As the House knows, I am an avid reader of *Labour Weekly*. I read with particular interest an article by the hon. Gentleman in the edition of 21 September, but with just 16 pages the publication is rather overpriced at 40p. I commend to the hon. Member for Walton and to his hon. Friends below the Gangway the final paragraph of the section on housing, in which the hon. Member for Perry Barr wrote:

> "It is inconceivable that we shall enter the next general election pledged to remove the existing right to buy. Such a pledge would not meet the needs of the situation we shall face either in the election or afterwards."

It is perfectly true that at the time when the hon. Gentleman wrote that article he was not the official Opposition spokesman on housing. Nevertheless, I shall gladly give way to him so that he can confirm that what he then wrote is indeed the official policy of the Labour party.

Mr. Michael Cocks (Bristol, South): That is out of order.

Mr. Gow: I say to the former Patronage Secretary—I almost described him as my right hon. Friend—that if anything I have so far said in an interesting preamble has been out of order Mr. Speaker would have rebuked me.

I have not quite finished with my preamble, because I also wish to extend a particular welcome to the hon. Member for Tyne Bridge (Mr. Cowans). I look forward with mounting impatience to his winding-up speech.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): The Minister has emphasised the wish of people to buy their homes. He knows that the Labour party has always been keen on owner-occupation, hence our reason in the 1960s for introducing the option mortgage scheme and leasehold reform to make it easier for people who would otherwise

[Mr. David Winnick]

be unable to do so. If, as the hon. Gentleman constantly argues, it is right for those in the public sector to buy, why not be generous and say today, or when the Cabinet can agree, that private tenants should also be able to do so? In many instances do not private tenants need such protection far more than public sector tenants because of the neglect by private landlords?

Mr. Gow: I must conclude that the hon. Gentleman's question was in order, otherwise he would not have been allowed to put it. My response is the same as the one I have given him on many occasions. I do not want to be guilty of repetition, but I must again tell him that, where the state has funded the building of houses, in our opinion it is perfectly legitimate for the state to decide on what terms those houses should be sold. Indeed that view is apparently held by the hon. Member for Perry Barr. However, where the houses and flats have been built by the private sector, it is up to the private sector to decide the terms on which they should be sold.

New towns Bills are familiar to the House. The Second Reading of the first New Towns Bill was moved on 8 May 1946 by the then Minister for Town and Country Planning, whose son is a distinguished right hon. Member of this House. That Bill was not opposed by the Conservative party.

This Bill is the 17th whose title begins with the words "New Towns", but it is novel in two respects. It is the first to link in its short title new towns and urban development corporations, and it is the first to provide for the winding up of the Commission for the New Towns. For urban development corporations the Bill authorises additional finance and gives Parliament an opportunity to review their progress.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): The Bill proposes to increase the borrowing powers of the urban development corporations from £400 million to £800 million. Is that not a distinctive part of the Bill and would not that discussion best be taken at a later stage when all hon. Members representing areas with urban development corporations can be present on the Floor of the House?

Mr. Gow: It is for the House to decide whether any part of this Bill should be taken on the Floor. As the hon. Gentleman knows, a motion can be tabled to have the Committee stage taken on the Floor. In both our experiences there have been attempts to do that, but in my view it is perfectly proper for the Committee stage of this Bill to be taken upstairs in the usual way.

Mr. Spearing: Will the Minister allow me?

Mr. Gow: Yes, with reluctance.

Mr. Spearing: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman because this might save time later on. I hoped that the Minister would agree with my thesis that a Report stage would be the most appropriate and effective time for his wishes to be fulfilled.

Mr. Gow: I misunderstood the hon. Gentleman and I apologise. I thought that he was suggesting that we should take part of the Committee stage on the Floor. I shall, of course, consider what he said.

For the new towns, the Bill is necessary to bring the programme to its completion. Our policy is to enable the new towns to become self-sufficient communities and to disengage from special public sector involvement. The first purpose of the Bill is to facilitate the completion and subsequent winding up of the new towns programme in England and Wales.

As the House will remember, that programme was designed to bring about urban development of a high standard. Most of the first generation of new towns, designated between 1946 and 1950, were intended to reduce the population pressure in London and to promote economic growth elsewhere. The promotion of economic growth was predominant in the second generation towns designated between 1960 and 1964, and even more so in the third generation towns designated between 1967 and 1970.

On the whole, the new towns built under successive Governments have been a success story. They provide homes for 2 million people and, with few exceptions, those homes are of a high standard. Their surroundings are among the most attractive examples of modern British development. Firms that have set up business in the new towns have grown and prospered. The new towns have made and are making a most important contribution to the economic and social well-being of Britain.

The new towns around London are now self-sufficient communities and, with the exception of Basildon, their development corporations have been wound up. Successive expansions have made Basildon one of the largest new town developments in the country. It is not surprising that it will be the last of the London ring of new towns to reach the stage where its development corporation can be wound up. We hope that the Commission for the New Towns will be able to assume responsibility in Basildon on 30 June 1985.

At Northampton, Redditch, Skelmersdale and Central Lancashire the development corporations have almost completed their tasks. The Commission for the New Towns is discussing with those four corporations the transfer of their remaining assets and liabilities next year. That does not mean that the commission's approach will be a carbon copy of what it is doing in the home counties.

Mr. Eric Forth (Mid-Worcestershire): Will my hon. Friend the Minister confirm that, if it were possible for development corporations to sell their commercial and industrial assets before the date when the Commission for the New Towns comes into effect, it would do away with the necessity for the commission's involvement in such a new town?

Mr. Gow: I agree with my hon. Friend for Redditch, we estimate that the task will have been completed on 2 April 1985.

Each town has its own special circumstances, and I know that the commission under the chairmanship of Sir Neil Shields will respond accordingly. The three new towns in the north-east of England are held in special regard by those who live and work there. We promised to review their role before deciding whether to keep our proposed target date — 31 December 1985. We have almost completed that review, and I shall make an announcement as soon as possible.

In the other English new towns — Milton Keynes, Peterborough, Runcorn, Telford and Warrington—much remains to be done. They are still expanding. We shall keep under review the extent to which the development

corporations continue to be required. At the appropriate moment we shall discuss the outstanding tasks with local authorities. Indeed, in some cases this process has begun.

Within four years the work of the Cwmbran development corporation should have been completed. On that basis my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales has announced that the development corporation will be wound up on 31 March 1988.

Dr. Brian Mawhinney (Peterborough): As my hon. Friend the Minister, said, Peterborough has not yet received a winding-up date from the Department. Does my hon. Friend accept that those of us in Peterborough—I think that I speak on behalf of the local authorities and the corporation as well as my constituents—feel that a period of about three years would be an adequate time frame within which to wind up the development corporation. We hope that the Minister will give us that length of notice before making a completion date for the development corporation's existence.

Mr. Gow: My hon. Friend knows that my right hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine), now the Secretary of State for Defence, announced in 1981 that the winding up of the new town corporation represented by my hon. Friend would be completed in the late 1980s. I cannot go further than that this afternoon. It goes without saying, however, that I shall be happy to discuss the matter further with my hon. Friend.

In Scotland the five new town development corporations will be with us for some years. The Bill makes only one substantial provision about Scotland, to which I shall return later.

The Bill provides for the eventual disengagement of the public sector from its special role in new towns. Lord Reith and his committee, the masterminds behind the New Towns Act 1946, were divided as to what should happen to the assets of the development corporation once its task had been completed. A minority believed that the assets should pass to the local authority. A majority did not like the combination of the powers of landlord and the powers of local authority in the same hands. The 1946 Act allowed a wide range of options. The development corporation could be kept in being to manage the assets, or the assets could be transferred to the local authority, or a liquidator could be appointed to dispose of them.

By 1959 the issue had become less theoretical, and more urgent. The Act of that year set up the Commission for the New Towns as a continuing body to hold and manage the assets of new towns whose development corporations had completed their work. But that was not envisaged as a permanent solution. In 1976, the then Government, supported but not adorned by the hon. Member for Perry Barr, provided for the transfer of rented housing to district councils. That was not opposed by my right hon. and hon. Friends.

However, the Government have always made it clear that new towns should not be distinguished from others by the continuing presence of a dominant public sector landlord. We believe that when new towns reach substantial completion they should have thriving property and not only a thriving property market. That will introduce the magic of the market place. Frequently, that is not understood by Opposition Members, nor even the official spokesman for the Liberal party. We shall introduce the magic of the market place in a way which will benefit a new town.

Mr. Derek Foster (Bishop Auckland): By the magic of the market place, does the Minister mean that rents will be so high that people who own shops in the present town centres will not be able to afford them?

Mr. Gow: The hon. Gentleman knows that the rents which are fixed for commercial and industrial premises will be fixed in the normal way by the market subject to certain protections which are given to industrial and commercial tenants.

The changes introduced by the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980 allowed disposals on a substantial scale to encourage private sector participation. Nevertheless, there remained a dichotomy between the stated purpose of the commission to hold, manage and turn to account the property which it held, and the disposals programme which the Act authorised.

Clause 1 resolves that dilemma. It makes it clear that the commission's primary task is to disengage from its role as commercial and industrial landlord. The commission must have due regard to the welfare of the town and to financial prudence. There will be no forced sales and no disposals will take place contrary to the best professional advice. Those undertakings were given by my predecessor in 1980, and I repeat them now.

As the House knows, the commission has transferred almost all of its housing stock already. Tenants of development corporations have the same rights to buy their homes under the 1980 and 1984 Acts as local authority tenants. We believe that it is right to continue the policy of the 1976 Act by transferring the remainder of the rented housing owned by development corporations to the local housing authority. I hope that at least four such transfers will take place on 1 April. In some towns it may be appropriate to transfer the housing to housing associations. We hope to reach satisfactory arrangements with local authorities about open spaces, museums and community centres.

Clause 2 gives my right hon. Friend power to wind up the commission when its purposes have been achieved substantially. Such action will need the approval of both Houses of Parliament. The commission assumes at present, and will continue to assume in future, the responsibilities of development corporations when they are wound up. When the commission itself is wound up, the obligations will by then have been discharged, or some other public body will take them over, or the Secretary of State himself will do so.

The second main purpose of the Bill is finance.

Mr. W. Benyon (Milton Keynes): My hon. Friend skated rather quickly over community-related facilities, which in previous new towns were always transferred with income-producing assets so that the position was broadly neutral for the new authorities. Will that be the case after the sale of those income-producing assets?

Mr. Gow: I hope so.

Since 1946, new towns have been financed — *[Interruption.]* Is my hon. Friend dissatisfied?

Mr. Benyon: Not at all, if I understood my hon. Friend correctly. Is he saying that the new borough authority which takes over those assets will be in the same position as before—in a neutral position?

Mr. Gow: I hope so. However temporarily a Minister may be upon the scene, I hope that when he says that he hopes that something will happen, it will.

[Mr. Gow]

Since 1946, new towns have been financed mainly by borrowing. The only significant exception has been housing subsidy on the same basis as local authorities. If current expenditure could not be covered from revenue, the deficit was capitalised and met by further borrowing. It was always envisaged that this capitalisation of revenue deficits would be needed in the early years. In the case of the first generation of new towns the expected turnround was achieved, and since 1960 most have been meeting their debt charges and running costs and producing a surplus.

The development surplus arises from the new town corporation buying land at the price that it would fetch if there had been no new town, and selling it with the benefit of infrastructure and development. The surplus is at its greatest in respect of greenfield sites.

The system had worked well for the first generation and was adopted for the second and third generations. However, unlike the first generation, most second and third generation new towns are expansions of existing towns. Land was acquired at values which reflected the hope of development and consequently development surpluses were lower.

Many second and third generation new towns had sites which required substantial reclamation. That increased the amount of non-remunerative expenditure. The most extreme case was Telford where more than a quarter of the designated area was derelict, and more than 4,000 disused mine shafts had to be made safe. But Telford was not alone. Even first generation Basildon was given the secondary task of reclaiming and redeveloping the plotlands. Washington, Warrington and Central Lancashire have also had substantial reclamation expenditure. Second and third generation new towns have had to finance more infrastructures.

In the mid-1970s decisions were taken which, with the benefit of hindsight, we can see worsened the financial position of the new town corporations. Those problems were compounded by a less favourable economic climate. The second and third generation new towns were founded not during the boom of the 1950s and early 1960s, but against the gathering economic difficulties of the late 1960s and the 1970s. Interest rates were high and economic growth was low. The result was that the development corporations had large deficits to be capitalised by borrowing at high rates of interest. The loan charges worsened the revenue deficits, and the deficits spiralled.

In November 1982, my predecessor explained that legislation would be required to deal with this problem. As an interim measure, power to suspend temporarily some new towns' debt was taken in last year's Finance Act. Clauses 6 and 8 provide the solution envisaged by my right hon. Friend.

For the development corporations which still have a substantial development task, clause 8 gives to the Secretary of State power to write off sufficient debt to give a capital structure which is capable of being serviced by the assets which the corporations hold. Clause 6 allows grants towards the capital cost of some amenities and infrastructure. The development corporations will borrow only when there is a clear commercial basis for doing so. The essential infrastructure which cannot be financed by borrowing will be provided by grant.

For the development corporations which are to be wound up shortly, and for the commission, clause 8 gives to my right hon. Friend power to suspend sufficient of their debt to enable them to break even. The commission will continue with the process of realising assets. If investment is needed, it will be met from receipts. The surplus will be used to redeem debt. In this way, the assets of the new towns will be realised as quickly as practicable for the benefit of the taxpayer, who, after all, has financed the development. Clause 8 provides that write-off shall be by order subject to affirmative resolution of the House.

I turn next to clause 5. The House will remember that on 28 April 1982 my right hon. Friend the then Secretary of State for the Environment wrote to the chairman of the New Towns Whitley Council explaining that the Government had decided to withdraw the Crombie code compensation terms in relation to future statutory reorganisation in the public service. My right hon. Friend the present Secretary of State for Defence wrote as follows:

"This decision was reached because Crombie terms have been increasingly difficult to justify. The Code was introduced at a time when redundancy benefits were far less widespread than at present and long before the introduction of the country-wide scheme of statutory redundancy payments. It is now anomalous and unfair to have a separate code of compensation solely for redundancies resulting from statutory re-organisations."

He went on:

"I have now decided that Crombie terms should be withdrawn from staff affected by future housing transfers. I intend to seek the first suitable legislative opportunity to repeal section 54(4) of the Act of 1981 and thereby remove the regulation-making requirement. Staff made redundant as a result of housing tranfers would then be entitled to the normal day-to-day terms which apply to all other staff. Staff entitled to compensation as a result of earlier housing transfers will, of course, continue to have the benefit of the Crombie terms under the existing regulations."

Clause 5 gives effect, and in every respect, to the undertakings given two and a half years ago by my right hon. Friend — undertakings which, for the water industry, were implemented by schedule 3 of the Water Act 1983. To ensure that clause 5 applies to all the housing transfers in the present round, and in accordance with the former Secretary of State's undertaking, its provisions are made retrospective to the introduction of the Bill.

I promised to say a further word about Scotland. Clause 10 is similar to the power which the Government took for England and Wales in 1980. Its main purpose is to put beyond doubt the power of the five Scottish development corporations to dispose of land no longer intended for development.

The fourth and final purpose of the Bill is the increase in the financial limits for the urban development corporations. Most of their activities are financed by grants, a small amount by loans from the National Loans Fund. The current limit on grants and loans is £400 million. By the end of the next financial year Merseyside will have received £120 million and London Docklands £240 million. The limit must be increased before additional provision for grants can be sought from the House. Clause 12 increases that limit from £400 million to £600 million immediately and authorises the figure to be increased to £800 million by affirmative resolution of the House.

I welcome this opportunity to report on the achievements of our two urban development corporations. On Merseyside we have seen the success of the international garden festival, visited by more than three

and a quarter million people. Before the festival, the 125-acre site was derelict. Those hon. Members who have visited the festival will testify to the remarkable achievements of the corporation. I pay tribute to those achievements. About 45 acres will be retained for parkland and recreation. About 80 acres will be developed for housing and industry.

The garden festival is not the corporation's only success. The most important current projects are the restoration of the Albert dock warehouses—a splendid complex of 19th century buildings listed as Grade I—and the restoration of the South docks.

In London docklands, an intensive civil engineering programme in the Isle of Dogs enterprise zone is nearly complete; £25 million has been spent on roads, drainage, and mains services. Commitments by the private sector have been secured for investment of more than £140 million in the enterprise zone. The projects include factories and offices, television studios, new headquarters for an international communications and media group, and — this will be of special satisfaction to Opposition Members—a building for the new printing works for *The Daily Telegraph*. Conversion of a former warehouse to establish the docklands arena will begin shortly. There will be a major indoor sports centre which will cost about £8 million to be funded jointly by the private and public sectors. A contract for the £77 million docklands light railway has just been placed. The railway is due to open in the middle of 1987. One thousand five hundred houses have been completed and sites are being developed which will provide for another 2,600 houses.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey) *rose*——

Mr. Gow: I give way to the Liberal party.

Mr. Hughes: I am happy to say, not all of it represented here.

As the Minister knows from a delegation which went to see him last week, one of the results of the development in the urban development corporations, particularly in the London docklands, is an increase in the price of land. It is of great concern to local communities that what is done by Government agency will not price local communities out of the market for land, housing and jobs in the areas to which they have first claim. Can we be assured that that will always be a consideration and requirement of the policies of the urban development corporations, both in London and on Merseyside?

Mr. Gow: That is a legitimate consideration and it was one which, as the hon. Gentleman rightly says, we discussed at a meeting last week.

Mr. Robert Atkins (South Ribble): Will my hon. Friend say a word about the proposed STOLport? I am sure that he is aware that many hon. Members are keen to see that in operation as soon as possible.

Mr. Gow: Yes, decisions will be taken as soon as possible.

A start has been made on two major areas — Greenland dock and Surrey quays. Nearly 4,000 jobs have been created in docklands——

Mr. Spearing: What?

Mr. Gow: Yes, nearly 4,000 new jobs have been created in docklands.

Mr. Simon Hughes *rose*——

Mr. Gow: No, I shall not give way. I have been extremely kind to the solitary representative of the Liberal party. The hon. Gentleman has had his intervention and I shall not give way again. I shall gladly give way to the hon. Member for Perry Barr but I shall not give way to the alliance party which makes extravagant claims in the House and which is represented, not very well, by the hon. Gentleman.

The taxpayer is getting good value from the money allocated to the two corporations. At 31 March 1984, £500 million of private sector investment had been committed in the urban development areas. For every £1 invested by the taxpayer, the private sector produced £2·50. Although excellent progress has been made, substantial work remains. On present forecasts, the £600 million limit in the Bill will be reached in 1989. The £800 million limit to which that total can be raised by affirmative resolution would be reached in 1991.

The Bill recognises the success of development corporations, both in new towns and in urban development areas. It represents a considerable step forward in the success story of both. I commend the Bill to the House.

4.43 pm

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): I thank the Minister most sincerely for his warm tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer). We know that it was meant in a personal, not a party, sense. Nevertheless, we are grateful for his kind words.

With regard to the Minister's avid reading of *Labour Weekly*, I hope that he pays for his copy and does not have a free one. He used the term "recent conversion". I suggest that the civil servants have not done their homework, but I have no doubt that they will do so before our debates in the House on housing policy. They will see that the term "recent" should not have been applied to what I wrote in *Labour Weekly*. I look forward to our debates on housing policy, but that is not what we are discussing now.

Mr. Gow: Did the hon. Gentleman support the Labour party's policy as set out in its 1983 election manifesto? Did he vote in favour of the Housing and Building Control Bill, which was before the House earlier in the year?

Mr. Rooker: We lost the last election. The Government constantly point out that they lost the election at which the promise was made to abolish the rates when we ask why they have not abolished them. Questions about the Labour party's last election manifesto are somewhat irrelevant. The hon. Gentleman asked me a straight question earlier. I stand by what I wrote and every speech that I have ever made in the House on housing. That is not a point of argument between us. It is there as a matter of record.

I respond today on behalf of the Opposition to the New Towns and Urban Development Corporations Bill. That Bill was not referred to in the Queen's speech. It was one of those measures referred to at the end in the sentence:

"Other measures will be laid before you."

I accept at the outset that the contents of the Bill have been forecast and promised by Ministers for several years, certainly since as far back as 1979. I think that it was in 1982 that the then Secretary of State gave a commitment that the commission would not be wound up before the end of 1984. To that extent, the legislation has been on the books for some time.

[Mr. Rooker]

The Minister gave us a historical rundown on the new towns policy. I do not intend to go over that. I agree with much of what he said. By any standards the operation and development of new towns—some 32—in the United Kingdom has been a success.

Anything that I or anyone might say by way of criticism of the tidying up or closing down or of parts of the Bill to which we might object is not in any way a criticism of those who have run the new towns or of those who have started up and run the corporations and guided them to the success that they enjoy today. No one can complain about 400,000 new dwellings, 700 new schools, 5,000 new shops and a massive transfer of population. About 1 million people moved to the new towns originally and they now have a population of over 2 million. By any standards that is a monument to the best traditions of central economic and environmental planning and the massive contribution that the public sector in Britain has to make to our infrastructure. That cannot be denied.

The private sector could never have tackled such a programme, guided as it is by the profit motive. Nobody ever said it could tackle it—*[Interruption]*. Does the hon. Member for South Ribble (Mr. Atkins) want to intervene?

Mr. Robert Atkins: I should be interested to know who the hon. Gentleman thinks built many of the houses and shops if it was not private industry.

Mr. Rooker: That is not the point. The designation, the money, the guarantees, the loans and the organisation were due to the public sector. Of course the building industry built the new towns with bricks and mortar and all the other materials. I am talking about the financial enterprise. It could not have been contemplated, organised or seen through to the end by the private sector on its own.

The evidence of that today is the setting up of the urban development corporations. Clearly the private sector on its own could not tackle the problems of decay in the two areas of Merseyside and the docklands where we have the urban development corporations on which the Minister has given us an interim report. I am not that familiar with the docklands, but during the recess I spent a few days of my holiday with some friends in Liverpool. I spent some time looking round the Royal Albert dock, the other developments along the dockside and, of course, the garden centre. There is no doubt that considerable effort has gone into making those developments a success.

In the short time available to me since discovering that I had to speak in the debate I have read some speeches on the subject. They were commendably short; much shorter, indeed, than the Minister's speech today. My speech will be no exception, unlike the Minister's, to the short speeches that have been made over the years on new towns. In the past Conservative Members have clamoured to sell off public assets virtually irrespective of the return on the investment. It was always thought that new towns would be converted into ordinary towns, and we take no exception to that, but we object to some of the Bill's provisions and we shall, accordingly, seek to divide the House later.

In clause 1 the commission becomes, in effect, a realisation agency. That term is not in the Bill, but I believe that it is used by the Government in their notes on clauses. Indeed, the phrase "realisation agency" could well apply to the Government as a whole. One Treasury Minister is reported to have said that if the Prime Minister ever got a third term of office the only thing left would be the Treasury. I thought that I heard a "Hear, hear" from the Government Benches. The point is that the commission's role has been completely changed into that of a clearance warehouse which will move from town to town, piling the assets up high and selling them cheap. The buyer is being told in advance that everything must go.

By statute a biased market is deliberately being created, although it is morally wrong to set up such a market when dealing with large public assets. Instead of holding, and turning to account, the assets of the new town development corporations so that they can be brought to maturity in the public interest, the commission is required to sell them when expedient. As the Bill states, and as the Minister made clear, the requirement to continue to have consideration for the welfare of those residing, working or carrying on business in the new towns and to try to maintain and enhance the value of the assets is a complete sham when there are orders to dispose of them as soon as is expedient. The term "expedient" can, after all, mean the use of a contrivance or device. The Minister said that the assets would be sold only on professional advice, but that is not contained in the Bill. When the assets come up for sale, we shall check—the Minister said, after all, that Ministers' words should mean something—that what the Minister said at the Dispatch Box comes to pass.

Part of the reason for our concern is clearly stated on page 6 of the latest annual report of the Commission for the New Towns, House of Commons paper 611. That passage makes it quite clear that the commission is already exceeding the Government's selling targets even though the property market is "weak". Once the Bill is enacted, the buyers will know the remit. When will the property market ever be other than weak if assets are to be sold? In those circumstances, it will never become strong. Consequently, public assets will go on being sold off more cheaply than would otherwise be the case.

Clause 1 also appears to give a substantial increase in Ministers' powers compared with the 1981 Act. Indeed, that Act is considerably amended by the clause. Ministers are obtaining new powers over the acquisition of land, the making of loans and advances, and the giving of guarantees. However, there is a power which I do not fully understand, and which perhaps can be explored in Committee.

I accept that Ministers already have powers over the making of gifts, but that power is apparently extended to include the disposal of assets for a consideration which is less than the best reasonably available. If that is so, Ministers would appear to be taking powers to ensure that assets are sold too cheaply. However, judging by the way that that part of the Bill is worded, it can be taken two ways. It has been implied that it would suit the social structures and the balance of the communities in the new towns if certain assets were packaged together in a way that might not necessarily conform with the immediate demands of private profit. On the other hand, the simple wholesale selling of assets to one buyer in a block, as proposed at Redditch, might result not only in the creation of a company town but in obtaining less cash than if the assets were sold in parcels rather than in one block.

I shall return shortly to the situation at Redditch, but why is it necessary to take more powers? Ministers already have power over the transfer and development of land, and

I assume that they have proved adequate. Do the new powers imply criticism of the commission or the corporations? Has the commission done a good job, or not? I do not understand why the new powers are necessary.

Mr. Forth: Is the hon. Gentleman implying that there is something inherently wicked about the private ownership of assets in towns such as Redditch, which is in my constituency? Or is he saying that, to be above criticism, assets in Redditch and anywhere else must be owned only in some sense publicly?

Mr. Rooker: I am not saying that. I shall come shortly to the position at Redditch.

Clause 1 will inevitably lead to what looks like the forced sale of the new town assets of land and factories, which were planned with structures of balance based primarily on the needs of the community. Selling assets in that way is like selling the seedcorn. They are being sold too soon, before the public have gained from the maturing process. That is what will happen once the Bill is enacted, but it is slightly different from the present position. Although the commission is under instructions to sell, the position will be different after the passage of the Bill.

I shall deal briefly with Redditch, which is the only new town on which I want to touch in any detail. It happens to be the nearest new town to my constituency. The development corporation is to be wound up, I understand, in April 1985. Since designation in 1964 the population of Redditch grew from 32,000 to well over 68,000 by 1983, and is probably even higher today. The present assets of the development corporation consist of about one third of Redditch's land, including undeveloped land and leasehold factories. I believe that in July 1984 they were all offered for sale in a job lot.

I understand that there were five or six serious bidders but that the number has been whittled down to two, with whom negotiations are currently taking place. One bidder is a group led by Tarmac, and the other is a group led by an American company. Neither group is prepared to talk to the elected borough council of Redditch. It is no good the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Forth) shaking his head. Last night I was informed by the chairman of the planning committee that that was so. The bidders are not required by legislation to talk to the council. There is nothing in the Bill to require any consultation, or at least to require potential buyers of assets to talk to elected local authorities. We believe that there should be some communication between the elected council and potential large buyers of property in the borough.

I understand that recently the Secretary of State visited Redditch and had a 30-minute meeting with the council. I also understand that he promised that the sale would not go through on the nod. I do not know what can stop it going through on the nod. The buyers obviously want to be big people in Redditch town, because they want to buy up one third of the land, so I hope that before the Bill is enacted they will at least have the courtesy to talk to the council.

I understand that Redditch does not want to become a company town——

Mr. Forth *rose*——

Mr. Rooker: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman in a moment, although I suspect that he will want to make a speech if he seeks to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

We do not, in the 1980s, want to sell public assets and create company towns. I cannot imagine any Conservative Members wanting that to happen in their constituencies.

Mr. Forth: If I catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I shall make just that point. I have no connection with either of the companies mentioned by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker). I have always understood that anyone in a position to bid for assets in Redditch would be more than prepared to talk to elected local authority members. I know of no refusal to do that.

Mr. Rooker: If that is so, perhaps the matter can easily be sorted out.

One third of the land of the town of Redditch is up for sale to one buyer. Is that the best way to obtain the most money for the taxpayer? The hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire might think that it is. Some buyers wanting to buy parcels would not enter into the bidding for a job lot. Selling something in a job lot is wholly different from selling it in parcels.

I use Redditch as an illustration of what might happen in other new towns. The selling of some new towns might be appropriate, although I would find that difficult to believe. However, in many circumstances that would not be the case. I should not want large owners of capital to think that they can walk into Britain and buy our towns.

Dr. Oonagh McDonald (Thurrock): Is my hon. Friend not surprised at the ease with which Conservative Members accept the lack of competition in the case that he has described?

Mr. Rooker: There is no competition, because private discussions are taking place between two buyers. No one has opened any bids in sealed envelopes. We may never know whether Redditch has been sold so that the taxpayer, about whom the Minister spoke, gets the best return for the investment made over the years. The Minister said that he did not want dominant public sector landlords. We do not want dominant private sector landlords. That is the danger in Redditch.

Hon. Members will be pleased to know that I do not intend to go through each clause of the Bill. I shall refer to only four clauses in detail.

Having set up the commission in clause 1 as a clearance warehouse, clause 2 gives the Minister the power to close down the commission. No one expects the commission to last for ever. It was not established to last for ever, and none of us calls for that. Before it was born in 1961, some people thought that development corporation assets could be handed over, with resources, to local authorities. That view was not shared by everyone.

An argument put forward then was that local authorities were too small to cope with the scale of some of the assets, but following the Conservative Government's reform of local government in April 1974 that argument no longer stood, because the size of local authorities was considerably increased. Therefore, why have the Government not sought to give a greater role to elected local authorities? It shows the Government's abiding distrust of local democracy, which we shall see in other Bills introduced this Session.

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the local authorities which he believes should take over the industrial sectors of any new town are singularly ill equipped to do so because of the role that they play and because of the need to administer a service to take over, for example, 500,000 sq ft of factory space in Skelmersdale?

Mr. Rooker: That may be true, but surely the hon. Gentleman is not arguing that there is no role for local authorities when the assets are distributed.

Clause 2 inserts a new paragraph into schedule 9 to the 1981 Act. Paragraph 7(1)*(b)* provides that when the Minister wishes to wind up the commission he can vest in himself or any other Minister of the Crown the assets which remain with the commission. He could also vest those assets in any other accountable public body. That is a nice phrase. I do not suppose that it is a new phrase—it might appear in other legislation.

I thought that an accountable public body might be a democratically elected local authority, but I turned the page and read:

"In this paragraph 'accountable public authority' means any statutory corporation a majority of the members of which are appointed by a Minister of the Crown."

That is an accountable public body. If that phrase is used only so that the Welsh Development Agency and the English Industrial Estates Corporation can be included in the Bill, why were they not written into the Bill as such? Why seek to use a definition of an accountable public body which rules out, lock, stock and barrel, any involvement by an elected local authority? It only adds to my earlier argument about the Government's distrust of local authorities.

Clause 4 is acceptable to the Opposition, but I wish to ask the Minister a question, which I hope he will answer when he replies to the debate. In the making of grants for defective dwellings the Government take the power—I think that it is a new power, but I am not sure—to have grants returned if the local authority receives any payment in respect of defects that give rise to work. I understand that to mean that building contractors or designers of defective dwellings either are paying or will pay for designing and building defective homes. Can the Minister give the House an example of that? There appears to be no reason to include the power for the Government to take back any grants to local authorities if compensation is obtained as a result of suing the builder or designer.

I dub clause 8 the British Airways clause. It is complex, and I cannot deal with it in detail as it runs to three pages. It is included to make the sale of public assets more appetising to private profit motives. If we read that clause in conjunction with clause 7, it is clear that a write-off of public assets of up to £650 million is envisaged before the selling of the assets. That is shown by the difference between the borrowing limit in the Bill of £5·25 billion and its reduced figure from September 1986 of £4·6 billion due to write-offs.

I understand some of the Minister's arguments about the problems of the new towns during the early years of the Government led by the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath), when the present Prime Minister sat in the Cabinet, and when there were record inflation and interest rates which caused problems in the early years of some of the third generation new towns, but clause 8 is clearly designed to whet the appetite of the private profit motive. That cannot be denied.

The Bill does not tell us how the 32 new towns can be prevented from becoming company towns. It does not allow the public purse to realise the full mature value of its investment over a period of nearly 30 years. Indeed, it allows what appear to be forced sales at what will be less than the market value. Why does it do that? The market concept in a statutory buyers' market is meaningless. There can be no magic of the market when the buyer knows that the seller must sell. It is appalling that that has to be spelt out from the Opposition Benches to a monetarist Minister for Housing and Construction.

For the reasons that I have outlined, the Opposition will oppose the Second Reading of the Bill.

5.10 pm

Mr. W. Benyon (Milton Keynes): I do not know how the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) can find in clause 8 something which militates against the sale of an asset in the private sector, but no doubt we shall hear more about it later. For the hon. Gentleman's benefit, I should like him to know that I represent Milton Keynes, which is the largest and most successful new town development anywhere in western Europe.

In the short space of 11 years Milton Keynes, which was once the subject of music hall jokes—a place to which one sent one's mother-in-law—has moved to a place in the forefront of technological advance in Britain. We are very proud of it and of the system which has enabled it to achieve such a position. Therefore, I strongly support and welcome the Bill. As the hon. Gentleman said, it was not referred to in the Queen's Speech. Nobody was more surprised than I was to see the Bill. Nevertheless, it is most welcome.

I suppose that the winding up of the Commission for the New Towns is inevitable. My hon. Friend will not be surprised to hear me say that I regret its happening. Ever since I have been in this House I have expressed my hope that the commission would be an embryo "Great Britain (Property) Ltd", which would sell the assets as they reached maturity and then roll over those sums of money into further developments in the new towns or, much more important, into inner-city renovation. However, that is not to be, and one must accept that. I think the reason is that that principle—which could often be used in regard to other parts of public expenditure and play an enormous part in the continual renewal of the worst developed parts of Britain—is anathema to the Treasury. There is an insistence that the money be paid back to the Treasury, and then expenditure is authorised by Parliament each year. We know all the difficulties involved.

The real success of the new towns legislation has been in its role in pump-priming. The Government should not own things, and I am in favour of their getting rid of assets, but today there is an enormous role for the Government in pump-priming. We have seen the success of that role in my own new town.

I particularly welcome clause 8, to which the hon. Gentleman referred at the end of his speech. Its provisions have nothing to do with selling assets to the private sector. It provides for the financial reconstruction which is needed, not only in Milton Keynes, but in other new towns, and particularly in the future in the urban corporations. I notice my hon. Friends nodding in agreement. Clause 8 fulfils a promise, and it is always

pleasant to see Governments fulfilling promises. The promise was made in 1983. It is a necessary tidying up. It is a businesslike development and we welcome it.

For the first time in new town finance, under clause 6, grants, as opposed to loans, are being given. That is a very good and reasonable development, but I hope that the provision will be used sensibly. If the Minister in his reply says, "I hope so," I shall not quite know what to say. In reading the notes which were so kindly sent to us explaining this complicated piece of legislation, I noted the word "essential". In "Yes Minister" parlance, "essential" means "never", as everybody knows. I hope that the word "essential" will be read, not in the sense of "never", but in the sense of "beneficial". If it is, that part of the Bill will be welcomed in Milton Keynes, just as we welcome the other parts of the measure.

5.15 pm

Mr. Norman Hogg (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth): I am pleased to have caught your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am conscious of the fact that it is not very often that the Opposition Deputy Chief Whip makes a speech from the Back Benches. Therefore, I shall be brief.

I have two principal interests in the Bill. First, I have a constituency interest, as I represent the new town of Cumbernauld. Secondly, I have an interest as a former official of the National and Local Government Officers Association and parliamentary consultant to that union.

The Bill is one more piece of legislation which will encourage and allow further sales of public land and public assets at bargain basement prices, and I agree with the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker). The Bill does nothing to tackle the very real problems of unemployment or the urgent need to regenerate industry.

New towns, despite their acknowledged deficiencies, have shown themselves in the post-war period to be one of the most efficient agencies for the creation of jobs and the attraction of inward investment. That is certainly true north of the border. It is an act of the utmost folly to disband specialist teams of staff at a time when the need for them has never been greater. NALGO and the TUC have recognised that in the past the role of the new towns and their lack of clear accountability to their local communities has been less than satisfactory. I shall not go into the issues that I have raised regularly in that respect on the Floor of the House.

There is no doubt that, given a change of brief towards industrial regeneration, and working in close co-operation with local authorities, the new towns could well be the catalyst for growth in many of the depressed regions.

There are two staffing implications in the Bill, and the Minister referred to one of them. Clause 3 makes optional certain requirements for housing transfer schemes under part III of the New Towns Act 1981, rather than the present mandatory requirements. Effectively, section 44(7)*(d)* of the New Towns Act 1981 requires that the Secretary of State should be provided with the basic facts about staff, both manual and non-manual, affected by a transfer scheme. That provision was built into the original Act at the request of the trade unions and after consultation with the local authorities and the New Towns Association.

The intention of the clause was to ensure that the Secretary of State was convinced that he could form a broad assessment of whether the staffing establishment of the new housing department had been drawn up in such a way as to enable the district council to pursue sound management policies, and also to satisfy himself that the staffing protection arrangements agreed by the staff commission were correctly followed. The alteration in the Bill means that no longer will the Secretary of State have to be provided with those basic staffing facts, and therefore no longer will he have to satisfy himself on the adequacy of the staffing arrangements for the management of the housing assets.

The buck will be passed to the local joint consultative committee and the staff commission and, effectively, the Secretary of State will have no accountability to Parliament for the staffing arrangements. Whereas in the past we in the trade unions were able to make representations to the Secretary of State about any inadequacy in the proposed staffing structure of a revised housing establishment, in future the Secretary of State will be able to disclaim any responsibility for what is proposed.

Clause 5 removes the obligation on the Secretary of State to make regulations providing compensation for those staff who suffer a loss or diminution of emolument because of a housing transfer scheme. Clause 5 also revokes existing regulations. Essentially, the clause removes the protection of Crombie code terms of redundancy and compensation to staff affected by the transfer of housing schemes. Notice of this withdrawal was given some time ago and the public sector unions raised objections, but to no avail. I spoke in the House on the subject.

The unfairness created by this withdrawal in mid-programme means that some staff in the first and second round of housing transfers will have received this protection, while in the future others will not and will receive lesser terms of protection and compensation. In the past staff have received assurances that when statutory reorganisations take place and legislation is introduced for that purpose they will receive Crombie code terms of protection. Those assurances are now to be negated.

I draw the attention of the House, and particularly of the Minister for Housing and Construction, to those specific objections to what is proposed. I hope that the Minister will consider again the representations that have been made by the trade unions and will feel able to give a more positive response than we have had to date.

I appreciate the fact that Scotland does not figure largely in the Bill, but the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland—the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) — is present, and I suppose that he must justify his salary somehow. Clause 10 refers to the designated area of new towns. I hope that this provision will not in any way alter the present arrangements for a new town in Scotland to add to its designated area if it chooses. I hope to make representations to the Scottish Office to extend in one small respect the new town which I represent. I have good reasons for doing so and I shall deal direct with the Minister on that matter.

If I may stretch your good nature, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I shall refer to something which is not in the Bill and ask for it to be included. The Bill is deficient in a number of ways, including its failure to include powers to enable the Commissioner for Local Administration in Scotland to investigate complaints of maladministration from tenants of houses owned by the new town development corporations. Why is that so, when the Secretary of State for Scotland in a press statement issued by New St.

[Mr. Norman Hogg]

Andrew's house on 16 July 1983 gave a categorical promise that such a provision would be made as soon as possible?

The press release was brief and to the point. It said:

"Mr. George Younger MP Secretary of State for Scotland, has decided to extend the jurisdiction of the Commissioner for Local Administration in Scotland (the Local Government Ombudsman) to enable him to investigate complaints of maladministration from tenants of housing owned by New Town Development Corporations and the Scottish Special Housing Association.

The Secretary of State's decision is conveyed to the Commissioner in a letter from the Scottish Development Department.

The changes will require legislation and will be made when an appropriate legislative opportunity arises."

This is an appropriate occasion to bring forward that legislation. It would not tax the Scottish Office too much to come up with a new clause which would meet the promise in the statement of 16 July 1983. I hope that the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, the hon. Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young), will tell me on this occasion—usually when replying to a debate in which I participate the hon. Gentleman turns down every proposal that I make—that a new clause will emanate from the Scottish Office to deal with the points that have been made and to fulfil the promise given last July by the Secretary of State for Scotland.

For some time we have been promised a report from the Scottish Office dealing with the transfer of housing to other public authorities. I think I am right in describing it as the new towns report on the transfer of housing assets. I do not know when the report is expected to be published, but it is widely believed in Scotland that it is being held up.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Allan Stewart): It is at the printers.

Mr. Hogg: The hon. Gentleman says that it is at the printers, but it has been there so long that one wonders what the hold-up is. I can only assume that the Government have sent the report to privatised printers. If we could have some indication of when that report will come out, the development corporations and the local authorities in Scotland would be grateful. I hope that the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment will be able to tell me something about these matters. I hope that on this occasion he will find it possible to give a positive response.

5.26 pm

Mr. Warren Hawksley (The Wrekin): I welcome the Bill as it stands, although I hope to suggest a few improvements for the Committee to make. I believe that it is right to put pressure on the commission to dispose of its property and to push that action towards its final stage. It is interesting to note that it took a change of chairman — the replacement of Lord Northfield who was the previous chairman — to move the commission in the right direction. I wish that the same treatment had been given to the Telford development corporation when the chairmanship came up for renewal.

The Bill is correct not only for suggesting what will happen to the commission and moving it in the direction we wish, but for clarifying what we all now accept—that the third generation new towns are the last generation and also that the problems created in the inner cities have been worsened by the policies introduced in previous generations. We should put on record the fact that the Government have thought it right to complete the work of those third generation new towns. At the last election, people put around the rumour that a Conservative Government would not complete the necessary duties and work of third generation new towns. It was pleasing to hear my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Construction mention Telford development corporation as one that still has much work to do.

It is interesting to recount the work that the Government have done—not necessarily always by virtue of the new town legislation—by providing motorways to Telford, a hospital and enterprise zones. It is important that the Government should carry on supporting new town areas with help through other agencies. Such help probably does more than the actual work of the new town corporation. With the likely announcement next week of the new development areas, I make a localised appeal: if the west midlands, as has been rumoured, is to receive a different status of aid, Shropshire on the edge of the west midlands area should be included.

It is because of the help that the Government have given to the new town of Telford that I welcome—I regret to see that he is not in his place—the challenge made by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) about high unemployment in Conservative-held seats. In The Wrekin constituency, which is at the top of his so-called hit list, there are 7,287 males unemployed. This is tragic. He seems to think that that is good news for him, but we had high unemployment in Telford at the last general election and yet the electorate wisely decided that it wanted to retain not just a Conservative Member of Parliament, but a Conservative Government. It knew that even in areas of high unemployment the Conservatives were offering the best alternative and it was looking for the commitment that we had made for new towns such as Telford.

I suggest that there is still more scope for encouraging sales of assets, because my electors want to buy their own homes and my industrialists want to buy their own factories. I hope that we shall be able to push and persuade the Telford development corporation to sell even more of its assets, but I hope that those sales will be at a true valuation, less, in the case of tenants, the discounts to which they are rightly entitled. I say that because of a problem that we have had.

Three three-bedroomed houses have been sold by the Telford development corporation for less than £2,000 each. I admit that they were not in a good condition, and that my figure might be slightly inaccurate because the corporation has refused, even in confidence, to confirm the price at which it has sold them. The fact that the corporation admits that it is that sort of figure and the fact that the houses were sold not to prospective householders but to an Indian property developer from the west midlands cause me some anxiety. They were sold cheaply and they were not advertised, nor was the district valuer asked to comment on whether the valuation was fair. Many of my constituents would have liked to purchase those houses at that sort of price.

I hope that Lord Northfield, the chairman of the development corporation, will be instructed, possibly using the district valuer, to ensure that a true and fair

valuation is obtained for the assets that he is selling in future. That is important, and I regret having to raise the point today.

I welcome clause 4, which provides the powers for the Secretary of State to pay grant for the remedial work to be done on the defects in the housing transfers which took place before April 1981. This point may well apply in other new towns, but why does it relate to housing defects? A problem arises where the local authority has taken over from the development corporation responsibility for paths and pavements.

This may be only a small point, but on three estates involved—Woodside, Brookeside and Sutton Hill—poor workmanship when the Telford development corporation put in the footpaths not many years ago has resulted in a total bill of £500,000 for repair work. Those footpaths are described by the local authority as dangerous and in need of urgent work. I hope that consideration will be given to including for grant all works that have been handed to the local authority where abnormal costs are being heaped on to the local authority. Although we may be critical of the local authorities' expenditure plans in some cases, expenditure of this nature on footpaths should not come out of the rates or the rate support grant. That is important.

I should like to deal with the part of the Bill which relates to new towns' accounts, and particularly clause 9 which amends the New Towns Act 1981. I hope that consideration could be given to going a bit further in relation to the accounts of new towns. I want to give three examples which have caused me anxiety about the lack of accountability and lack of knowledge that my constituents and I have about the problems and expenditure of new town corporations.

I raise, first, the point about expenditure involved in commercial expertise used in pushing and driving for business abroad. We often see that our chairman and general manager are in Japan, Taiwan and America. That is all very well, but some people would like assurances that it is necessary for them and other members of the staff to go to such places and would like to know what money is being spent. I should be interested to know what is being spent on that aspect of the corporation's work.

The second aspect of expenditure which causes me anxiety and about which I have been unable to obtain a proper answer from the Telford development corporation is the expenditure that it has entered into for a report from the Henley Centre for Forecasting. I suggest that the report has little value because it is studying unemployment forecasts for 25 years hence. It is a highly political report.

I have asked three times how much the report will cost the corporation. I have made clear what information I want. The answer I have received is that the corporation hopes that enough copies will be sold to cover the costs. Each copy sold by the Henley institute costs £85. I wonder how many copies are being bought by private individuals and how many by public bodies! Perhaps other new towns are purchasing copies to justify this expenditure.

I believe that the corporation would not have entered into such expenditure without knowing its maximum liability. It is unfortunate that Telford corporation cannot or will not tell me what the maximum cost to it will be if it sells no copies of that expensive report.

The third example of the lack of financial control and lack of accountability is that of a company—I have referred the matter to the Secretary of State—that wished to come to Telford. We have heard from the hon. Member for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth (Mr. Hogg) a suggestion about ombudsmen. I had hoped that the Bill would contain a provision to allow the public into all corporation meetings so that the press could report them. All local councils have to allow the press into meetings unless they have part II agenda items.

Mr. Norman Hogg: The hon. Gentleman will know that I have persistently endeavoured to persuade the Scottish Office, and to a lesser extent the Department of the Environment, to take that suggestion on board. I have singularly failed on the argument that commercial considerations had to be taken into account and that therefore the press and public could not be allowed into meetings. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is ludicrous that organisations which spend a great deal of taxpayers' money are not openly accountable to the communities that they represent?

Mr. Hawksley: I entirely accept the hon. Gentleman's point. I go further and support the view that I believe that the Ombudsman should be able to investigate complaints as well. That was the point to which I was coming. It is important that people involved in new towns should have the same rights as council tenants and others.

It is important that the public should see what is happening because this third case that I wish to raise is about a company that wanted to come to Telford and create hundreds of jobs there. It first went to the corporation and tried to make a deal. The company tried to arrange terms on which it would go on to Telford development corporation land. The company was not happy with the offer that was made so it went to agents. The agents went to Telford development corporation again. The agents gave honest details and honest answers to questions but did not give the name of the company involved. It is interesting that the agents were offered a better deal than the company had been offered previously. At the last moment, when the corporation suddenly realised which company it was, it plainly decided that the company's face did not fit, because without any justification the corporation and its chairman decided to withdraw the offer that had been made. It is a tragedy that two sets of terms were offered to the same company, depending on whether the corporation knew the name of the company or not.

Those three examples suggest that the Bill should include more public accountability and public awareness of what a corporation is doing. A corporation should also be more helpful in the information that it gives to its Member of Parliament. I hope that the Bill will insist that there is more public participation because Members of Parliament, need to know answers to questions such as the three that I have raised.

I finish as I started, by welcoming the principles behind the Bill. It is right that the Conservative philosophy on which we were elected in June last year should be brought into matters concerning new towns. It is right that that philosophy should carry through to the sale of the assets and the final winding up of the Commission for the New Towns. That is what the public want. They want to buy their own homes and they want to see private enterprise working. That is why so many Conservative Members now represent new towns. The implementation of the legislation will make sure that at the next election, in spite of the efforts of the hon. Member for Perry Barr, not only will The Wrekin stay a Conservative seat, but every new town will be won by Conservative candidates.

5.41 pm

Mr. Gordon Oakes (Halton): Like the hon. Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Hawksley), I represent a new town —Runcorn. It is a second generation new town, created in 1964. In 1981 it was merged with Warrington, which is a partnership new town. Thus some difficulties were created because of the difference in category of the two new towns. Unlike the hon. Gentleman, I do not welcome the Bill because it is a completely empty Bill. It will not do anything to alleviate the problems faced by local authorities when taking over new town property. None of the clauses will assist the local authorities.

Like the hon. Gentleman, I agree that there should be much greater public accountability. Like me, he must find that the following problem arises. People who live in or want to acquire new town houses go in the first instance to their local councillor. That is right and proper. They assume that their councillor, being a councillor, has some control over the situation; but he has not, and the public do not realise that. So either the councillor or the member of the public then comes to the Member of Parliament. I have no control over the situation either. Councillors and I write to new towns, which can be helpful, and I am not criticising new towns such as Warrington because they try to be helpful on many occasions. However, that is not the same as the democratic control that one has with an elected local authority.

Mr. Forth: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that one of the reasons for the great success of the development corporations, in the dynamism that they have been able to give to the new towns, is that they can make decisions quickly, sharply and effectively without being burdened with the accoutrements of accountability that local authorities have had to put up with?

Mr. Oakes: I agree with the hon. Gentleman on the macro scale, but I am talking about the individual scale —the individual tenant—and the individual has to be shaped to the policy rather than the policy shaped to the individual. The hon. Gentleman is right about the overall scheme. The development corporations have had tremendous success.

The opening lines of the explanatory and financial memorandum state:

"This Bill contains provisions to facilitate the completion and subsequent winding-up of the new towns programme in England and Wales".

That means that housing assets go to the local authorities concerned. They are extremely worried about the implications of that programme, and the Bill does nothing to alleviate their worries. Under the New Towns Act 1981, let alone the 1946 Act or the 1982 Act, there was no rate capping and there were no penalty clauses. Now local authorities are harassed and worried to death about rate capping and penalty clauses. The ultimate objective of the Bill is to transfer assets to the local authorities—to give local authorities something. Virgil talks about bearing gifts in the "Aeneid". I especially fear the Greeks when they are bearing gifts. These gifts have a new significance for local authorities. If gifts are given to local authorities, they may have to pay dearly; they may be penalised and rate capped.

I hope that the Minister will be forthcoming about the transfer of housing assets—although the Bill is not—to alleviate the worries of Halton authority. I am certain that that applies to all other local authorities in England and Wales that will take over assets from the new town corporations. Warrington and Runcorn corporation receives about £9·6 million of annual subsidy in the housing account from the Government. When the local authority takes over the houses, will that subsidy be reduced? Will the local authority get that subsidy? If it does not, there will be a tremendous differential between the rents of local authority houses and those of new town houses, both of which will be administered by the same authority.

Where will the money come from for the repairs of additional housing stock? I know that clause 4 refers to expenditure on repairs by local authorities, but local authorities are worried about when they take over system-built houses in future. I invite the Minister to go to Southgate or Palace Fields in Runcorn, where system-built houses were erected in the late 1960s and mid-1970s. He would see the magic of the market place there. One cannot get tenants in, never mind owner-occupiers. Nobody wants to live there and those who do want to get out as fast as possible. The local authority will have to take over and spend money on those system-built houses.

In the jargon of the Department of the Environment, in which I was once a Minister, I should like to ask the Minister how the allocation of E7 grants will apply. The block grant has various formulas, and one is E7. As far as I know, it takes no account of the acquisition by a local authority of other properties. How will the block grant of local authorities be affected — those special local authorities that take over assets from development corporations?

That is an important point for Halton. Nearly 30 per cent. of the housing stock in the borough of Halton is comprised of new town houses. Therefore, one third of its housing stock will be taken over. Unless something is done about the E7 formula in the block grant, it will be disastrous for the local authority. It will be more than rate capped. There are enormous implications. Why does not the Bill deal with such major considerations? It seems to skirt around the periphery. I hoped that the Minister would at least mention some of the difficulties faced by local authorities when they take over development corporation assets. Warrington and Runcorn now contains an excellent social development office which is well staffed and which has been paid for by the taxpayer and central Government. Halton could not afford to staff and maintain such an office.

Then there is the problem of general maintenance of all new towns, and in particular of landscaping and all the things that make new towns something special. Local authorities cannot take over the maintenance side of what development corporations are doing unless the Government are prepared to pay for it. The staff of Warrington and Runcorn new town includes 143 people working in estates and promotion, and Halton council has one. Where will those 143 people go? Will they come to Halton council or will they be sacked? There is silence on points such as these. The local authorities, the development corporations and such employees need to know what will happen.

On manpower needs, the Bill shows that 5,000 people who work for development corporations are likely to lose their jobs as a result of the Bill. Some of them will go into the public sector in the local authorities, but local authorities, rate capped and penalised as they are, will be reluctant to increase staff and will be penalised by the

Department of the Environment if they take on such people. Some employees may go into the private sector, but many will become out of work.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth (Mr. Hogg) drew special attention to clause 5, which will create an appalling mess. It says that the abolition of Crombie applies to certain categories of workers, but the continuation of Crombie applies to others. That is what the Government are doing with the employees of local authorities.

In my new town, landscaping was taken over by private enterprise, which is not doing a bad job. However, what will happen now? The Association of District Councils informed me at a meeting some time ago that the Department of the Environment is worried about the amount of money that new towns are spending on landscaping. Landscaping is an essential and important ingredient of new towns and in making them a pleasant and proper environment in which to live.

This is not a good Bill. it is an empty Bill and does nothing to allay the fears of local authorities. It wills the end that housing assets should eventually come under the democratic control of local authorities, and I agree with that. However, the Bill does nothing to assist those local authorities to finance what is being given to them. In Committee, the Government will have to be far more forthcoming on grants, aid, assistance and answers to many of the fears of local authorities, which will be the recipients of this dubious gift from central Government.

5.53 pm

Mr. Christopher Murphy (Welwyn Hatfield): Having long campaigned for the abolition of the Commission for the New Towns, I welcome this measure, which might be described as the Government's second paving Bill this Parliament — paving the way, as it does, for the commission's eventual dissolution.

Since my election in 1979 as Member of Parliament for the only constituency with two new towns — Welwyn Garden City and Hatfield—I have consistently supported the more realistic approach adopted by this Government to the new towns programme. At the same time, I have also consistently advocated the withdrawal of the Commission for the New Towns from those towns where its role is nearing completion.

For the new towns, today is, if not a red letter day, then certainly a blue letter day. Today marks the coming of age of the new towns, with the recognition of the maturity of the movement. Today sees the start of the end for a quango and the end of the start for the new towns. Soon they can be simply towns.

In 1980 I recalled in a debate in the House the Reith committee report, which said that the purpose of new towns is:

> "To plan and design and carry into execution for the benefit of coming generations the means for a happy and gracious way of life."

It is a tribute to new towns that, for many, such a way of life has been secured.

In 1981, in a book entitled "New Life for Old Cities", prepared by my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen), 50 colleagues, myself included, put their names to a statement that looked forward to the regeneration of the inner cities, in part learning from the experiences of the new towns. That statement spelt out that:

> "The Government needs to be seen to be taking a fresh initiative, adopting an approach which in the long term will result in less dependency on Government, less public intervention, with more opportunities for private enterprise, more scope for private investment and with far greater reliance placed on each individual."

It is of particular significance that the Bill is addressed also to the future work of the urban development corporations, but I have to admit to certain reservations at continual increases in the overall financial limits, bearing in mind my attachment to the importance of private enterprise

In 1982, when debating the measure that became the New Towns Act of that year, I drew the attention of the House to the assessment of Taylor and Chave regarding new towns. I shall repeat the assessment, which is that:

> "Its families have good homes. Its children have good schools. Work is varied and close at hand. Working conditions are good. There are wide facilities for active recreation. The strains of industrial life are reduced to a degree not achieved in unplanned communities."

It is a matter of considerable satisfaction for those involved with new towns to be able to learn of such views.

In 1983, I promoted my own Commission for the New Towns (Abolition) Bill which, regretfully, did not enjoy sufficient parliamentary time but which did enjoy certain parliamentary support. I hope that, in some way, it contributed towards the Government-sponsored measure that we have before us today.

In March 1984, I took the opportunity of a motion on the new towns to bring to the attention of hon. Members the conclusion drawn by Schaffer in his book "The New Town Story" that:

> "In the national context the achievement of the new towns must be judged by the collective contribution they have made to the problems of overcrowding, the progress they have made in the science of 'building for living', and the lessons they point for the future."

That is further evidence of the value of the new town movement in providing lessons for the future, and the creation of the urban development corporations is proof of this.

Many new towns are now old towns. The time has come for the Commission for the New Towns to become a part of their history. The prologue to these towns was the development corporation, the main theme of the drama has been the commission, and the epilogue should be the attainment of normality. Such normalisation is long overdue.

The original role of the Commission for the New Towns was that it should take over from the development corporation the property responsibilities, and then transfer to normal town status, with local authorities assuming the usual responsibilities to facilitate this. However, it has to be recognised that it became increasingly evident that if the quango element of the new towns was to be ended a policy of positive disengagement was necessary. This meant the transfer of housing assets as well as community-related facilities to the respective district council, and the realisation of its commercial and industrial property assets so that private enterprise was permitted full involvement with the town, and the taxpayer permitted a return on his investment.

It would be appropriate to mention with appreciation the part played in this process by Sir Neil Shields and his colleagues. I must admit that I have not always been in perfect accord with the commission on the speed of asset disposal or the extent to which local people and local firms have been given preferential treatment, but my right hon.

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and hon. Friends on the Treasury Bench have been subjected to similar pressure from me on behalf of my constituents.

Despite my welcome for the Bill, I must enter two caveats. An end date for commission involvement in each new town, which I have previously sought, is surely a necessary addition which would provide a spur to final completion of the process of disengagement. I have also previously sought an extension of the powers of the Parliamentary Commissioner to investigate action by the Commission for the New Towns. That, too, might be advantageous in achieving a satisfactory conclusion to the sale of assets.

The original concept of the new town lay in the use of private capital prepared to invest in an exciting and timely venture. This was the basis of the garden city idea, of which Ebenezer Howard was the creator. Among the most eminent town planners associated with its development was Sir Frederic Osborn who said of the document, "Garden Cities of Tomorrow", that it was a case of

"reconciling public interest with freedom of choice and enterprise".

Howard and Osborn are inextricably linked with my constituency. So, too, is the Commission for the New Towns. For the goals of both founders to be attained, the Bill must become an Act. The opportunity will then be provided for the fulfilment of that

"freedom of choice and enterprise".

6.1 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I detect that the tide is all going in the same direction and that, albeit with reservations and some hesitation, people generally accept that the task embarked on some 40 years ago in establishing new communities in new towns is now on its way to completion and that the balance of urgency means that we should now take our investment elsewhere, to regenerate communities particularly in the inner cities rather than the greenfield sites on which the new towns were mostly built.

Perhaps I may allow myself a responsorial prelude, as the Minister himself indulged in one. I am sorry that he is so touchy about questions from the alliance Benches. He even used a somewhat uncharacteristic phrase in suggesting that my representation might be inadequate. That may be because he knows that in the urban development corporations' areas of Merseyside and docklands his own party has long since ceased to have any representation. In the last election it received 3 per cent. of the votes in Southwark and Bermondsey and that has been par for the course in the past couple of years. He may also be feeling a little tender in view of the rising tide of Liberalism around his south coast resort constituency of Eastbourne. Nevertheless, I hope that he will accept my comments on behalf of colleagues who represent urban and rural areas and, in part, new town constituencies and that our points will be taken on board as the Bill goes into Committee so that we can improve a measure that we support in principle.

The new towns are no longer new. The population of our country is stabilising. The planning goals that were aimed at have in large measure been achieved and we must turn our attention urgently to other areas. We hope that the Government's expected announcement next week of their plans for regional aid will include plans to allow accountable representatives, a phrase picked out of the Bill by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker), in the regions of England, and in Wales and in Scotland to make decisions about regional investment in housing stock and major new development. We hope, too, that, as in other legislation expected later this week in relation to the metropolitan counties and Greater London, the Government will see the wisdom of handing over more and more of the decisions previously taken in the new towns by non-elected representatives — by non-democratically accountable boards, as the right hon. Member for Halton (Mr. Oakes) said—to accountable bodies so that people concerned about their housing, their jobs, their communities and their environment have people to whom they can turn and whom they can reproach electorally if need be.

No one denies that the new towns have generally been a success. Like other hon. Members, I have had the pleasure and privilege of visiting many new towns, including most recently Livingston in Scotland which I found to be an interesting, exciting and generally successful place although not without certain problems. New towns such as those in the north-east have had severe economic problems. Such problems are concentrated where there is no intrinsic employment, and so there has also been some sadness in new towns such as Washington.

Mr. Harry Cowans (Tyne Bridge): What in the Bill leads the hon. Gentleman to believe that the powers in the new towns will go to democratically elected bodies? I certainly have not found any provision to that effect.

Mr. Hughes: The hon. Gentleman well knows, as we have shared long nights of debate on another Bill, that the Government are reluctant to give any powers to democratically elected bodies. This will be one of a series of measures containing provisions which might have allowed powers to be passed more fulsomely to democratic bodies but do not actually do that. The hon. Member for Perry Barr referred to a phrase in clause 2 which gives hope to the democrat that once the commission is dissolved the Minister might

"vest in himself, any other Minister of the Crown or any accountable public authority",

the powers being taken from the commission. Over the page, however, one finds the amazing new Tory definition that

"'accountable public authority' means any statutory corporation a majority of the members of which are appointed by a Minister of the Crown."

That is a fundamental matter of principle to which we object wherever it occurs.

Nevertheless, under the Bill the development corporations will also hand over to district councils responsibilities and powers that the district councils ought in principle to have. That principle is right and we welcome that move. It means that for those communities life becomes normalised, as the hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Murphy) put it. They cease to be new towns or special category towns and become proper towns. In that exercise, however, the Government must not allow the unacceptable face of capitalism to run away down the proper constitutional course. The hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield expressed concern at the willingness in the past of department corporations to give in to temptation and to prevent individual local households, occupiers or

business people from buying their own property while selling it en bloc to large property or investment companies. I believe that in Cwmbran there is grave concern that shopping facilities may be sold over the heads of the existing shopkeepers and pass out of their control, which is the opposite direction from that in which legislation of this kind should go.

Mr. Forth: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that if a parcel of property is sold to a large developer there is nothing to stop individuals subsequently purchasing from the developer?

Mr. Hughes: As the hon. Gentleman knows, many of us share the objection of his hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield that the initital sale is at relatively knock-down prices, but the individual does not have the benefit of that when the property is resold. I am sure that all hon. Members with an interest in the new towns will accept that the advantage too often goes to those best placed to profit from it rather than to those with relatively small assets, to whom the benefit should go if the theory and philosophy of the new towns is to be truly fulfilled. The assets of the new towns were intended to be handed over not to the banks and the insurance companies but to the communities which had moved out there to populate those green field sites. Not to recognise this is the great flaw in the Bill. Hon. Members on both sides of the House clearly share the view that the new towns should be handed back to the people. I fear that that idea will be perverted as the unacceptable face of capitalism allows the exploitation of what had been public assets to the disadvantage of the people living there.

It is right that the Bill gives some discretion and flexibility in the timetable for winding up the commission. Questions of unemployment and of the proper realisation of assets may mean that it is appropriate for the anticipated timetable to be extended. I implore the Government not to rush helter-skelter into giving the commission encouragements and incentives to get rid of assets as quickly as possible. These sales must take place only when the time is ripe and when the communities are able to stand on their own feet economically.

There are financial concerns which are not addressed in the Bill but to which I hope that the Government will nevertheless address themselves. If they do not do so, the Bill will to that extent be hollow. First, it is right that when there has been a large measure of public investment, the Government should be able to recoup some of the profits into the national coffers. But, as the right hon. Member for Halton (Mr. Oakes) has pointed out, one must not hand over liabilities to local authorities without also giving them the resources to enable them to sustain programmes of public housing repair and renovation, public works, and incentives to industry and employment. Under the present Government, local authorities are very short of money. Tory authorities as much as Labour ones have been screaming because they are pinched too hard. The Government must realise that although those who live and work in the new towns—Milton Keynes is an obvious example—have been very grateful in the past to have benefited from Treasury cash directly, they do not want suddenly to find that in return for greater democracy they lose any guarantee of being properly funded when they need the money.

Many examples give me cause for concern. The Minister has told us that he hopes that there will be a net balance between the loss-making assets such as community centres and sports centres and the profitable assets such as industrial plant, factories and warehouses. That phrase will linger with us as the Committee stage begins. I would be very happy to hear him also say that he will not tell his Department to ensure that the sale of the assets forces a hard deal on the local authorities. I am told, for instance, that Skelmersdale is being pushed into a very tight bargain which gives it little scope for manoeuvre and little reserve for the future.

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): As the representative of Skelmersdale, I should like to suggest that the hon. Gentleman examines very closely all the provisions of the settlement between Skelmersdale development corporation and West Lancashire district council. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister will confirm that he is looking closely and favourably at many of the submissions made by the district council. The hon. Gentleman may find that he is wrong to suggest that Skelmersdale has been subjected to tight financial limits.

Mr. Hughes: The case certainly deserves close scrutiny. I understand that the Department of the Environment, which influences the Minister in arriving at his conclusions, is looking closely over the shoulder of the new town development corporation in Skelmersdale to make sure that the deal that is arrived at with the local authority has stringent conditions. I am sure that if the hon. Gentleman is able to help his constituents to get a better deal, they will be well pleased. I encourage him to try to do so. I hope that we have learnt the lesson that, whichever party is in Government, we must be wary of Government's desire to impose their will and interests on authorities far away from Whitehall.

To take another example, Milton Keynes has been developing as a new town should. Every year, therefore, the rateable value has increased and the services provided have been expanded. Under their local government finance policy, the Government set targets and supply money to help to meet the cost of the expenditure incurred by Milton Keynes. Milton Keynes cannot spend all the money that it acquires every year, when every year the rateable value and the income from rates increases, because the targets do not keep pace and if the town was to spend its whole income it would incur penalties. The new town fears that it will soon be obliged to abide by the Government's rules on grant-related expenditure. It would then discover—as other new towns have discovered—that it is spending more than the rules permit, and it would be penalised even more heavily. I ask the Minister to assure us that, when the new towns hand over, they will know that the local authorities which take over will not incur Government-imposed penalties for continuing to develop in the direction in which the Government and their predecessors have encouraged them to go.

In general, the Bill also gives little impression that the people of the new towns will have any say in their efforts. In Central Lancashire new town, the three district councils carried out an opinion poll amongst residents to discover whether they would prefer their property to be transferred to the local authority or to the housing associations. Faced with that simple question, people opted in large measure for the housing association. That option has some advantages. However, in all cases where public assets are to be handed over, there should be proper consultation

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about the whole range of tenure that is available—co-operative ownership, shared equity ownership, housing association ownership and council ownership. There should also be a guarantee that those who opt to remain in the public sector will not get the worst of the deal. There is a great danger that that might happen, and in Central Lancashire new town there is currently a keen sense of that danger.

There is equal concern about consultation with the business community. Will the Minister reassure us that shopkeepers or tenants of industrial sites will have a chance to acquire the assets that they have helped to build up? Those assets are the vibrant core of the new towns. They will prevent new towns from becoming ghost towns, and make them a success.

I have already alluded to the unsatisfactory definition of an accountable body. I hope that during the passage of the Bill the Minister will revise that definition. I am also somewhat concerned to know why the new town development corporations will continue to have nomination rights long after they have handed over domestic property. That is inappropriate. If the property is in the hands of the local authority, that should be the context within which decisions about its occupancy are made. The legislation is supposed to be marking the end of an era of greater paternalism.

One matter of grave concern is the fact that whereas clause 4 enables money to be given to pay for repairs to defects in the property being handed over—whether it is system-built or just ageing—there is no guarantee that money will be forthcoming. We have read in the press today that we now have the worst housing stock of any of the nations in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. We spend a minuscule amount compared with France and Germany—I believe only 2·1 per cent. of gross domestic product. When we have such a crisis we cannot hand assets over to local authorities without assuring them that they will get the money to ensure that the inhabitants will have a decent home.

In one particular respect the Bill is a muddle, although I suppose that there is a contrived logic for its form. The muddle arises because we are including in the proposals for new towns other proposals for increasing the powers of investment of the two urban development corporations. They came into existence only in 1981. The Government have now discovered that they may need more money. I and other hon. Members who represent dockland constituencies intend to request that the Leader of the House provides an opportunity to debate their progress before Christmas.

It is not enough to increase the possibilities of investing from the public purse without ensuring that the anxieties of local people are considered. It is inaccurate to suggest that more than 4,000 jobs have been created in the docklands. Many of the jobs are not new but relocated. Moreover, many jobs have been driven out. A good example of that is the haulage firm WBS, which operates from Surrey docks in Rotherhithe. It has to relocate because of a scheme to develop a marina and yacht basin and other wholly inappropriate things for that part of a working community. Jobs in Southampton for WBS employees are not much good when their families live in Bermondsey and Rotherhithe. It is also inappropriate that the result of increased investment is the raising of property prices to the point at which the Government's hopes of meeting people's aspirations are dashed. Down the river from where I live riverside flats are being sold at £225,000. Until a couple of years ago that area was meant to be run down. It is no consolation to prospective local purchasers that if they can afford £225,000 for a flat they will get the furniture thrown in.

It is no use using public investment to inflate the cost of land when we are not using public assets to support people who want to remain and work in their communities. I hope that, rather than talk as the Government often do about cash limits and the dogmatic principles of privatising, they will begin to address themselves to the economic circumstances of men and women and their children who live in new towns and urban development corporation areas. The Government should ensure that when the Bill reaches the statute book it is worthy of the aspirations of the people who, 40 years ago, planned those new town communities and gave many people hope. We are not far from realising those ambitions but, if they are not careful, the Government may squander these valuable assets by their dogmatic commitment to monetarist and capitalistic principles.

6.23 pm

Mr. Den Dover (Chorley): It gives me great pleasure to be able to support the Bill and to review progress in the Central Lancashire development corporation area. I was glad that the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) said that residents in Preston, Chorley and Leyland were asked by the new town whether they would like to stay in the public sector, perhaps under a local authority system of management, or whether they would like to go to a housing association. I am delighted to say that in all three areas 80 per cent. favoured going to a housing association.

Clause 3 deals with what will happen when housing is transferred from new town corporations to local authorities. Have the Government worked out the details of what will happen when the transfer is to housing associations? If not, is there any need for an addition to the Bill?

The Central Lancashire development corporation has concentrated too much on housing. The original concept of having four houses for sale and one for rent was badly overturned by the Labour Government. When I was elected Member of Parliament in 1979 65 per cent. was rented housing and only one third of it was for sale. In other words, the equation had been reversed. We had to have a Conservative Government and a severe policy of no further housing for rent in Central Lancashire to redress the balance. I praise Ministers on their achievement in that regard. Housing sales are now going well. We also have the introduction of shared ownership.

There has been so much concentration on housing, especially rented housing, that necessary infrastructure such as roads and sewers has not been carried through. Moreover, the golden rule of new towns has not been obeyed. The golden rule is that houses must be taken with jobs. If there are too many houses, there are too many people and insufficient jobs for them. Conversely, if there are too many factories, there will be a shortage of workers. Central Lancashire's natural unemployment rates have been heightened by the concentration on rented housing and the failure to develop infrastructure.

Mr. Hind: Does my hon. Friend agree that the building of houses and the lack of provision of jobs has caused problems in Skelmersdale just as it has in central Lancashire? We face large-scale unemployment because of that. We must now build up the number of jobs and stop building houses and bring in the private sector to revitalise the industrial sector.

Mr. Dover: I agree with my hon. Friend, who brings me to my next point. There has been an outflow to Kirkby new town from the middle of Liverpool. Housing has been plastered all over green fields. There have been some factories, but there has been a further move to Skelmersdale and then yet another jump into central Lancashire. Public money has been used inefficiently. There have been massive public housing programmes involving 5,000 or 8,000 houses in each of those new towns. There are pleasant green fields around Preston, Leyland and Chorley which people will move into without being forced there. Kirkby has been built up and evacuated in many parts. Vandalism is running riot there. The same has happened to Skelmersdale. I am delighted that West Lancashire council is doing something about that. Moreover, rundown, clapped-out houses have been sold to the private sector at knock-down prices. There have been enormous improvements in that area.

Now there has been further expansion in central Lancashire. We do not want that. What we need now is not the massive new town programmes of the 1960s but a natural population increase. We need natural movements of people around the country in accordance with free market conditions. The Government's entire policy is based on that. When there is an announcement on regional aid in the next couple of weeks, I hope that it encourages people to move to areas where they can find work only if they want to go there. I hope that such movements will not be massively subsidised and that huge numbers of houses for rent are not built in areas where they are not needed.

I am delighted that the Bill includes urban development corporations as well as new towns. Now is the time to turn our attention to the inner cities. There must be a complete rejig of the programme, and I support what the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey said. I praise the efforts of the London Docklands development corporation and the Merseyside development corporation, because in those areas vast changes have taken place at a great rate of knots. That owes much to the vision of the people involved. We should contrast that with Labour-controlled local authorities in those areas, which for the last 10 to 20 years have tried to regenerate the inner cities but have totally failed to do so. That has often been the result of lack of agreement and petty politicking. Only through the efforts of Sir Nigel Broackes in London has there been this forward vision.

Contrary to what the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey said, I welcome the fact that people will pay nearly £250,000 for a flat in docklands.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Some development is to be welcomed. However, because the development corporations are unaccountable, if they hand over land for commercial use which should have been used for a local community use, there is absolutely no possibility in the future of recovering that land to the advantage of the local community. That is the dilemma we face. It is not sufficient for local £70 or £80 a week earners—if people have a job at all—to see the best sites in their riverside communities go to those who can afford £250,000 for what may even be a second home.

Mr. Dover: I entirely agree. Indeed, the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) made that very point. We no longer need development corporations in the new town areas. We ought to be returning control to the elected representatives. However, it is a totally different kettle of fish in the context of third generation new towns such as Central Lancashire, where building is taking place around sizeable towns such as Preston, Chorley and Leyland. In London and Liverpool the areas are so run down that there must be a massive shake up. It is there that we need the unique and powerful responsibilities which such corporations have. However, I would be the first to say that we should return to local democracy and local control.

In Runcorn and Warrington I have seen the rivalry between the development corporations—some of which I have assisted as a management consultant with the National Building Agency — and the locally-elected representatives who feel completely left out. For many years the local authority in Chorley has been unable to make fair and reasonable planning decisions because of the "big brother" new town upsetting the natural balance. The sooner that we can return control and decision making to the locally elected representatives the better.

Will the Minister confirm—this is vital to all those in the Central Lancashire area—that December 1985 will be the winding up date for Central Lancashire? For too long we have been railroaded by a big brother attitude, and green field after green field has been covered. We in that region must know for certain that the new town will end on that date.

I praise the efforts of the Commission for the New Towns under the chairmanship of Sir Neil Shields in winding up the assets of the new town corporations. Contrary to what Labour Members have said, it has sold not at knock-down prices but at the proper market prices for the properties concerned. Naturally it has told the Government, "We cannot attract more than £100 million or £130 million a year because the market will not absorb more." That might be why Ministers have set 1996 as the end date for the Commission for the New Towns. It could be argued that it should go earlier, and it will be able to go earlier if the natural market exists for selling off the assets.

In Telford and Redditch new towns private enterprise has submitted bids for large chunks of land. It is perfectly possible for private developers to bid a high price for large areas of land because they prefer to obtain a co-ordinated lump which suits the size of their operations. A company such as Tarmac needs to obtain large areas to make things worthwhile by operating on a large scale.

I cannot say enough about the need to revitalise our inner cities. We have seen successful exercises in London docklands and Merseyside. Several enterprise zones have been established. Given that dozens of new towns have been created in the last 20 or 30 years, and accepting that there are only two development corporations in London docklands and Merseyside, will other urban development corporations be established? If so, I recommend Manchester, where investment always pays off—as has been proved throughout the industrial revolutions—and

[Mr. Dover]

perhaps the west midlands, where in our second city there are vast acres of dereliction. Another docklands exercise could be undertaken there very profitably.

As in docklands, we must ensure that we get the right gearing rather than merely pumping in public expenditure. When there is three times the amount of private investment compared with public expenditure, there is commitment and a sensible expansion of facilities in line with the wishes of the people rather than the public sector railroading things through. I should like to see further urban development corporations in our major cities. As quickly as possible we should wind up the activities of the older new town corporations and concentrate instead on the efficient service provided by the Commission for the New Towns.

6.37 pm

Mr. Roland Boyes (Houghton and Washington): I have lived in the new town of Peterlee for more than 22 years. My hon. Friend the Member for Easington (Mr. Dormand) will deal later with the problems and possibilities associated with that new town. For a number of years I have also represented the new town of Washington. During that time I have seen the provocative and non-provocative, the good and the bad and the successes and failures.

The Washington development corporation must be put into proper context. I remind Conservative Members, particularly Ministers, that Washington new town is located in the north-east. It is part of the borough of Sunderland and comes under the Tyne and Wear metropolitan county council. The whole area that I represent has been devastated by the Government's policies, and Washington and my constituency have not escaped from the effects. In a moment I shall give statistical data to support my argument.

Mr. Forth: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Boyes: I have only just begun, and I wish to complete this part of my speech before giving way.

The figures that I shall use to illustrate my argument are minimum figures, because, as we all know well, as a result of statistical manipulation, the figures published by the Government and which appear in the press daily do not truly reflect the level and magnitude of unemployment in my area where the situation is now horrendous.

In the Sunderland borough, even on the Government's figures, 24 per cent. of males are unemployed—almost one in four. The chances are that in my constituency one in every three males is out of work.

To take Tyne and Wear as a whole—this will show that Sunderland is not a little black area that is different from the rest of the region—one in four or five people is out of work.

Youth unemployment in Sunderland is one in two or three. Nearly half of our youngsters are out of work. Some of them get into short-term schemes, but many of them, even after completing a short-term scheme, find themselves back on the dole. Long-term unemployment is hitting my area especially hard. Fifty per cent. of the unemployed have been unemployed for more than a year. That is the background to the problems facing the new town of Washington.

I do not wish to bore the House with figures, but they are vital. Conservative Members do not seem to understand the problems of the people whom I and my hon. Friends the Members for Sunderland, South (Mr. Bagier) and for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Brown) represent. It is important that they understand our tremendous problems. The Government post code area levels of unemployment for Washington new town are 16, 16, 22, 35, 31, 26, and 23. Hon. Members must understand that I reflect the bitterness of my constituents. They do not deserve to suffer as they do now. What is worse, they know that their suffering is not a freak act but part and parcel of deliberate Government policy. Conservative Members will not only be remembered for that; they will not be forgiven for it.

Mr. Forth: In spite of what the hon. Gentleman has said, is it not true that his area has recently been in receipt of one of the biggest investment projects in recent years, partly because of our membership of the European Community and partly because of the confidence created by the overall economic policies of the Government? Will he concede that?

Mr. Boyes: No, I will not concede that to the hon. Gentleman, nor to any of his hon. Friends. I have described the magnitude of the problem and the hon. Gentleman cannot get away with silly points of that kind. We would need more money than there is in the whole of Great Britain to solve our unemployment problem. To pretend that a little sum from the EC will solve the problems of 250,000 to 300,000 unemployed people in the north-east is scurrilous and insulting to my constituents.

Mr. Don Dixon (Jarrow): Will my hon. Friend point out that the prime mover of the project which the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Forth) mentioned was Tyne and Wear county council, which the Government intend to abolish? Will he also point out that Washington was first planned as an overflow town for Jarrow, Hebburn, Boldon and South Shields? Male unemployment in Jarrow is 31·3 per cent. The Minister, instead of presenting silly little Bills such as this one, should tell the Secretary of State for Employment to get on his bike, cycle to the areas of massive unemployment and talk to the people who have no future because of the Government's policies. Then he will be concerned about unemployment and will not make silly little snide remarks about the miners' strike.

Mr. Boyes: I welcome my hon. Friend's comments. The passion with which he put his case and the way in which he talked about the town which he represents emphasise that, as I said, hon. Members who represent such areas reflect the passion and bitterness of their constituents.

An objective of pop music is to get into the top 20. The town of Sunderland has managed to get into the top 20, but only in the travel-to-work area unemployment list. We also talk about chart busters when we talk about pop music. Since the list was compiled—it is in the Library—the unemployment level in Sunderland has risen by some percentage points, and we would now undoubtedly be even higher up the list.

If the position were static, Conservative Members could say that the Government were doing something about it and that measures would be introduced to improve

it. But in my constituency jobs in the basic industries, such as shipbuilding, heavy engineering and coal mining, on which we have depended, are disappearing at a fast pace. That is not because of the inability of the workers. My hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon), who worked in the shipbuilding industry, knows better than I do about the skills, craftmanship and quality which went into building the magnificent "Ark Royal", which was launched recently. What will the reward of those workers be? More shipyard workers will hit the dole queue. There will be no reward or thanks for their achievement, but only the dole queue blues.

The north-east is famous for coal mining. What are the plans for the area in the secret document, which we have seen? There is not to be a coalfield in the north-east. We shall be lucky if by the mid-1990s we have four pits left. All those jobs and more will disappear. What about heavy engineering and the royal ordnance factories? I received a letter from the Ministry of Defence in which I was told that 600 more jobs would disappear. Some of my constituents work there.

Ministers do not lay their fingers on any industry in my constituency and in the north-east generally without its leading to further unemployment. My comments must be seen in the context of that gloomy background. We have lost too many jobs because the Government are operating failed, unproved, unscientific monetarist policies. No matter what devastation is caused, they continue to operate the same economic principles. It is vital to maintain job-creating agencies in the north-east. Those that are there are running against a brick wall.

I now turn to the point about employment made by my hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow. Nissan has just been brought to the north-east to create 250 jobs. We must put that in perspective for Conservative Members. We need 1,000 Nissans merely to deal with the current unemployment level and, because unemployment is rising at such a rapid rate, we shall soon need more than 1,000 Nissans. That is the magnitude of the problem. Obviously I am pleased, as are my hon. Friends, that Nissan has come to the north-east. I must point out that the agencies which did the real work to attract Nissan were, as the Government know, the Washington development corporation, Tyne and Wear county council and Sunderland borough council.

Mr. Forth *rose*——

Mr. Boyes: The hon. Gentleman should not jump up so quickly. What are the Government's proposals——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ernest Armstrong): Order. This is a Second Reading debate. The hon. Gentleman must relate his remarks to the Bill.

Mr. Boyes: I am relating my remarks to the Bill, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and if you will give me two more minutes you will see the pattern evolve. I wish to clarify this matter for Conservative Members.

If the Government have their way—I am sure that they will not—Tyne and Wear metropolitan council will be abolished. I believe that the Bills are being introduced this week. Had it not been for a united effort by the councillors, the development corporation and Members of Parliament, the job-creating agency of Washington development corporation would also have disappeard by now. Perhaps the Minister will say something about that when he replies. It is essential to retain as many job-creating agencies as possible in the north-east to try to stem the tide of unemployment. We welcome Nissan, but I want the team that attracted Nissan to be kept together so that Japanese, American and British companies can be persuaded to move to the north-east.

Mr. Forth: I would be the first to concede that in this case the local authority did a splendid job, but I ask the hon. Gentleman to agree that it did it against the background of a stabilised economy, low inflation, improved labour relations in industry and the fact that Britain is a member of the EC. Must not the authority's success in attracting Nissan to its area be seen against that background?

Mr. Boyes: My hon. Friend the Member for Tyne Bridge (Mr. Cowans) will deal more than adequately with the hon. Gentleman's point.

Mr. Cowans: Perhaps my hon. Friend will ask the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Forth), who seems to be making a speech parallel with his, whether we can expect him to vote against the abolition of the metropolitan councils. The hon. Gentleman seems to have been converted suddenly to the value of Tyne and Wear county council and the others.

Mr. Boyes: I have known the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Forth) for several years, and I am afraid to say that what he says with his mouth is not always reflected in his feet. I am sure that later tonight, as usual, he will be in the wrong Lobby.

The people of my area are anxious to know what the Government's plans are. The Minister said earlier that he would let us know as soon as possible the Government's plans for Washington development corporation. The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State has used that phrase to me every month for the past five or six months. Although I hope that the reason why the deliberations have taken some time is that the Government have come to the right conclusion about Washington development corporation, many people are wondering why it has taken so long to determine its future.

What is the Government's response to the discussions in June this year, and what are their suggestions for replacing the development corporation, if they do not agree with the ideas put forward by my colleagues from the council and the corporation? I hope that the Government will take this matter seriously. They must understand that, as the end of December 1985 comes nearer, the staff of the development corporation are becoming tense and nervous since their livelihoods are in the balance.

Clause 5 removes the Secretary of State's obligation under the staff compensation regulations that are known as the Crombie code. Although I accept what the Minister said earlier about the former Secretary of State for the Environment writing a letter of intention, that was two and a half years ago, and until the publication of the Bill the staff were uncertain about what would happen. They now realise that they will not enjoy the benefits of the Crombie code. From talking to officials concerned with this matter, I understand that negotiations began on the basis that the Crombie code would apply to the staff of the corporation. The Bill might be here now, but it had not been published when those negotiations began. That could lead to

[Mr. Boyes]

difficulties for some workers, especially as the proposal will be retrospective. I hope that sympathetic consideration will be given to their anxiety, and that the Under-Secretary of State will deal with this matter when he replies. Too often such difficulties have been minimised.

I am extremely worried for the people I represent, many of whom work for the development corporation. It does not help for the Government to say that there was a letter of intent, because those people live in an area of high unemployment, there is little job security and, in many trades, it is essential that adequate compensation is paid to staff who lose their jobs through no fault of theirs and must accept lower wages. I am especially worried about those on low wages, because a reduction of a few hundred pounds in an annual salary can have a massive effect on some people's living standards.

After consulting the trade unions, my understanding of the position is as follows. If the terms will be better than I have described, I hope that the Minister will intervene and give me an assurance that I can pass to my constituents. Previously, if a person working for the corporation, receiving a salary of £6,000, obtained a job with Sunderland borough council for only £5,000, the Crombie code would have assured protection for the worker until his salary reached a catch-up point. That protection has been withdrawn. If someone was, unfortunately, not offered a job by Sunderland borough council, but had five years' service with the development corporation, he would have been given a proportion of his present salary until he obtained a job. That protection has also been withdrawn.

I hope that the Government will take into consideration the fact that when those people accepted jobs with Washington development corporation, although it could be argued that they knew the corporation would be wound up at some time, before the letter of intent in 1982, their conditions of employment specified that, should they become redundant, they would be compensated under the Crombie code. I understand from my friends in the trade union that some people have accepted jobs in the belief that they will be protected. The Washington development corporation and the Sunderland borough council staff transfer has been handled badly. The Government should have given more consideration to such matters. However, knowing their political philosophy, it does not surprise me that they have not.

I agree with the remarks made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Halton (Mr. Oakes). Sunderland borough council agrees that it should receive the housing. I welcome that aspect in principle, although some safeguards are necessary. I agree that those who administer public sector housing should respond to those who live in it and not to quangos and non-accountable people. Unfortunately, the Government have not shown great interest in the power of the ballot box. I refer particularly to their abolition plans and the abandonment of elections for the Tyne and Wear county council. However, I accept that Washington has now reached a size and stage of development at which it is right and proper that the house transfer should take place.

Clause 3, among other things, allows for the transfer of houses on a day other than 1 April. The council welcomes that, because transfer negotiations are taking much longer than was expected. It welcomes the fact that they will not have to wait a full year if the negotiations go beyond 1 April. However, I am not sure which will come first, Royal Assent or the agreed transfer date and what will happen if negotiations between Washington and Sunderland borough council are so delayed that clause 3 will apply to some future transfer? I hope that the Minister will comment on that.

I understand that Sunderland borough council has asked the Secretary of State for an extension of time for submission of a transfer scheme in order to clarify various outstanding issues. First, following a survey of sample properties, there could be a charge for remedying defects. As my hon. Friend the Member for Easington has mentioned many times, there were several problems after the Easington district council took over housing from the Peterlee development corporation. Secondly, there is the problem of the settlement of outstanding claims against Washington by developers under the building contracts. Thirdly, there must be agreement on financial matters such as subsidy arrangements and the refinancing of debts.

I hope that either this evening or in writing the Minister will reply to those three specific points. The timing of the transfer has become critical to Washington because several staff have already been transferred to the housing department of Sunderland borough council. I hope that the Minister will comment on the safeguards against those problems.

Clause 4 is inequitable to my friends on the Sunderland borough council. Following much debate, the Secretary of State now accepts that defects grants should be awarded for pre-1 April 1981 transfers where councils have found it necessary to carry out remedial work. They can see no reason why that provision should not apply to all councils which take property, irrespective of the date of transfer. Although Sunderland borough council will conduct careful surveys of a sample of the properties in Washington new town, it is possible—in fact it is almost probable—that defects will manifest themselves in properties after the transfer date, either because a defect is not yet apparent or simply because the random survey missed properties with defects.

Sunderland borough council would like to carry out 100 per cent. surveys of all properties, but that is a time-consuming and costly process. That must also be seen against the background of Government cutbacks in capital programmes and the use of capital receipts, coupled with the anticipated burden of housing defects legislation that has already been proposed and for which the Government are making no financial provision. Accordingly, the council will request that defects grants will be allowed to all councils that are about to enter into transfer schemes.

My colleagues from Sunderland borough council met the Minister this morning, but I have not met them myself since then. They came to see him to ensure that Sunderland borough council will not be financially worse off after it has accepted the properties from the Washington development corporation. I hope that the Minister will comment on that matter, but if not perhaps he will do so in writing later.

I shall vote against the Bill tonight. I do not want to repeat the words of my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) on clause 8, but I agree with his arguments and share his anxiety. The Bill reflects the Government's worshipping at the altar of privatisation. I do not trust—I use the words of the Minister — the magic of the market place. Assets,

resources and people's needs should be administered by democratically elected and accountable representatives. The Bill, as other hon. Members have pointed out, will lead in exactly the opposite direction.

7.7 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Mid-Worcestershire): It is always both a pleasure and a challenge to follow the oratorical style of the hon. Member for Houghton and Washington (Mr. Boyes). I shall do my best not to disappoint the House too much. Surely it is not without irony that it falls to a Conservative Government to fulfil the much needed role in our society and economy to review long-standing institutions and to judge whether they are still appropriate, given the basis on which they were originally established.

The Bill provides a good example of just such an exercise. I would put myself among all those who without exception today have praised the role played by the Commission for the New Towns and the development corporations. None of us has any doubt that they were the right institutions for the time and that they have fulfilled a correct, relevant, and valid role over the past 30 or 40 years.

It is the duty of every Government to look closely at the institutions in which they are involved and to judge whether they remain as appropriate for their role as they were when they started. In this case the Government have correctly drawn the conclusion that the commission has fulfilled its role and that it is time for that role to be wound up in an orderly and controlled way so that we may enjoy, as my hon. Friend the Minister put it, the magic and benefits of the market place, and of course that is right and proper.

I can speak on this subject because of a direct involvement. I shall reply to some of the remarks that have been made today, although I regret that the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) is not in the Chamber to hear me. I have the honour to represent the new town of Redditch, which is in my constituency. However, I should immediately add that I also have the honour of representing the town of Droitwich, which is again most ably represented by the Wychavon district council. Today I shall confine my remarks largely to Redditch, as that is covered by the Bill.

Redditch is a very good example of a new town which works and is a success. It was well planned and built and is ideally located in the midlands. With the completion of the M42, it will be even more ideally placed to take advantage of the economic recovery which we now enjoy. The development corporation in Redditch has done wonderful work in creating and developing that new town, but it is acknowledged that its role is coming to an end and that an end date has been set for its existence.

We heard some rather typical shock horror and panic-making comments from the hon. Member for Perry Barr which very much echoed the over-reaction of the Redditch local authority when it was first suggested that the development corporation, in a very bold move, should explore the possibilities of selling the town's commercial and industrial assets to a private developer. That was done quite correctly in a spirit of trying to do what was best for the town and its people, and of realising the best possible sale value for publicly owned assets.

I am glad to say that after an initial period of over-reaction the people of Redditch realise that there is nothing harmful or shameful about selling the assets of a town such as Redditch to a private developer. Indeed, like me, the people fail to see any distinction between the ownership of assets by a reputable private corporation and their ownership or control by a body such as the Commission for the New Towns, which is the present alternative.

When the Commission for the New Towns was the only possibility on the horizon, people often expressed the fear that we would be controlled remotely from London by people who did not necessarily understand our problems. I do not think that that was true of the commission, but nor would it be true of a responsible and reputable private developer. Earlier, the rather horrific label of a "company town" was bandied about, but it is absolutely meaningless. I believe that the majority of Redditch's trades people and citizens think that if a reputable property or other company should make a reasonable offer for Redditch's assets there is no reason why it should not be accepted, in the full knowledge that it would then be in the commercial interests of that company to continue to promote the town and to use and realise its assets in the best possible interests of the company, the town and its people.

For all those reasons, the observations that have been made about Redditch have been completely wide of the mark and without foundation. I look forward to the development corporation making continued efforts in the most responsible way to pursue that solution as an alternative to the commission's involvement in Redditch.

One of the major reasons for the timely winding-up of the commission's involvement is that if it were allowed to continue indefinitely in its historical and present role it would be charged with the very difficult job of allocating resources to the new towns for which it was responsible. That would be a very difficult job, even for those experts now in the commission. However, if we could return the new towns as rapidly as possible to their rightful place in the market as successes—I speak mainly for Redditch, but I believe this to be true of the other new towns—they would then be free to make their own cases in challenging for jobs, employers and so on.

I cannot share the views expressed by Opposition Members, and particularly by the hon. Member for Houghton and Washington, or the assumption that the continuation of bureaucracy is necessarily the best way of guaranteeing employment for the people. There is considerable evidence to show that it is over bureaucratisation—if I may use such a word—which inhibits revival in certain parts of the country and deters employers.

The development of employment must be seen to take place in an overall economic environment that is favourable to it. In the past five years the Government have striven again and again to create that environment. That is why the EEC is the correct context for economic growth, and that is how we can attract companies such as Nissan to the United Kingdom — *[Interruption.]* If it were outside — *[Interruption.]* Does the hon. Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon) wish to intervene?

Mr. Dixon: I cannot intervene from the Front Bench, but if the hon. Gentleman will wait for me to move to the Back Benches I shall do so.

Mr. Forth: It is only within the context of a stable and responsible economic environment that we can possibly hope for full economic recovery and the provision of jobs in areas such as the north-east and the west midlands. The

[Mr. Forth]

fact that Nissan went to Washington demonstrates that an important investor had confidence in the British economy. At the same time, it gained a manufacturing base within the EEC.

Mr. Cowans: If the hon. Gentleman considers that 4 million unemployed is a success, what does he consider to be a failure?

Mr. Forth That may sound a good debating point, but I am not sure that it is relevant to the debate. I am not familiar with the 4 million figure, because earlier today my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment said that the latest unemployment figure was, regrettably —I stress that—about 3·2 million. Of course that figure is far too high, but the answer to the hon. Gentleman's point is that unless we can continue to provide the correct economic environment for companies to be attracted to this country—whether Nissan or anyone else—there is no hope of real job creation. It is no answer for hon. Members to say that they want to employ 3 million people on Sunderland borough council or on the Tyne and Wear metropolitan council.

We must take wealth creation seriously, because the social services, the Health Service and the other services which we need to provide for our people flow from that. Nissan is an example of wealth creation. Computer services, banking and insurance all have a part to play, but they can only do so and flourish in a stable, predictable and confident economic environment. The Government have tried hard to provide that, and I believe that they have substantially succeeded.

Although all that I have said leads only to the conclusion that I welcome the Bill, I have some slight reservations about its tone and direction. For example, the proposed new subsection (1)*(a)* to the 1981 Act, as set out in clause 1(2), contains the phrase

"with a view to its eventual disposal".

The word "eventual" seems to suggest a leisurely and almost casual attitude. I should prefer the word "early" to be substituted for "eventual". That would help to set the tone for what we want to do. It is not that we are going to take our time or are prepared to see developments unfold as they may. There is a sense of urgency about this matter. Although we recognise the job that the commission has done, we feel that it is time that the job was completed and the market place took over in order to benefit the people of the new towns.

A similar comment can be made about new paragraph 7(1) to schedule 9 to the 1981 Act. It says:

"If at any time it appears to the Secretary of State that the purposes for which the Commission exists under this Act have been substantially achieved",

certain things may be done. That should be:

"When it appears to the Secretary of State".

The phrase "If at any time" suggests the countenance of leisurely procedure. I suspect that when my hon. Friend the Minister introduced the Bill he was going in quite the opposite direction. However, the words in the Bill are meaningful, and no doubt the matter will be raised in Committee.

I hesitate to suggest the possibility—but it does exist —that we might consider introducing a finite time limit in the Bill. I recognise the difficulties of that approach, but it would concentrate minds wonderfully and provide a framework of certainty within which people could operate the intentions and aims of the Bill. I hope that my hon. Friend will seriously consider that suggestion.

I support the provisions in clause 3, especially that which introduces a flexibility into the date on which property can be transferred from corporations to councils. I know from Redditch that one of the great difficulties under existing provisions is that there can be only one transfer or one vesting date in a year. That makes the management of change of control or ownership difficult. It would be sensible and reasonable to introduce flexibility.

The measure is timely and appropriate and will benefit the people of the new towns. The Government have always said that they believe — and the Bill is a practical example of that—that bureaucracy may have its place and institutions may have a role to play, but that they are never for ever and their role must inevitably change. It is in recognition of that change of role that the Bill is before the House and is warmly welcomed by Conservative Members.

Mr. Dover: I noted my hon. Friend's remarks in praise of the private sector, yet he mentioned that the housing in his new town is to be transferred to the new authority. Did the new town tenants have an opportunity to say whether they wanted to transfer to a housing association or to the local authority?

Mr. Forth: I regret that that opportunity did not arise. In Redditch the transfer will be made direct from the corporation to the local authority. I and other hon. Members welcome that increase in accountability to the public and the tenants. In spite of the great achievements of development corporations over a long period, there has been a difficulty—as all hon. Members with new towns in their constituencies know — because of the lack of public accountability of development corporations. Inevitably, they must be in a position to press ahead and to make developments briskly, effectively and efficiently.

That reinforces the point that the time must come to make a transition from that development phase to restoring new towns to normality — a word used by one of my hon. Friends. The towns must become ordinary, real towns with a fully accountable local authority and with housing controlled by a democratically elected and accountable body.

Finally, I wish to transmit a message to my hon. Friend the Member for Hove (Mr. Sainsbury)—I volunteer.

7.24 pm

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton (Fife, Central): The Bill is a United Kingdom Bill, but it is largely of immediate interest to English new towns and their representatives. Not for the first time we are discussing a United Kingdom Bill without the benefit of the presence of a Government spokesman from the Scottish Office. That is simply not good enough. Although I recognise that there is only a minor reference to Scotland in the Bill, the Government must get out of the habit of treating United Kingdom Bills as English Bills.

I understand why there is no representative from the Scottish Office on the Treasury Bench—not for the first time, Scottish Ministers have been sleeping partners. Indeed, when they have been on the Treasury Bench, they

have been scarcely able to conceal their boredom as they polished their bottoms on the Bench. Having listened to the Minister today, I cannot blame them for that.

When the Minister introduced the Bill he referred to the Second Reading of the original Bill in May 1946. I presume that he has read the debate on that Bill. I have read it several times during the past 30 or 40 years. It is filled with extravagant and absurd language from Tory Members, including "Shakes" Morrison, who subsequently became Speaker of the House. They used absurd language about Hitlerism being introduced by a wicked, totalitarian Labour Government planning the lives of people — planning their houses, their roads, their schools. I am sure that the Minister enjoyed such extravagant speech. I suggest that my hon. Friends read the debate and recognise the thoughts of Tory Members in the immediate post-war era.

I represent Glenrothes, a new town in Fife, whose development I have watched from the laying of the first brick. It has a population of almost 40,000. It is a supreme and exciting example of what Socialist planning can do with public investment. It is interesting that that exciting Socialist planning for people, combined with the other prime example of Socialist planning, the National Health Service—both of which are marvellous examples of the principles for which the Labour party stands—makes the Tory Government want to pass them back to private profiteering hands.

Mr. Hind *rose*——

Mr. Hamilton: If the hon. Gentleman persists in interrupting hon. Members' speeches, he will have less chance to make his own speech.

So successful has been the experiment throughout Britain that people have come from all over the world to see the Socialist-planned new towns. The latest annual report from the Glenrothes development corporation shows that visits were made during the past year by people from Bangladesh, Denmark, France, West Germany, Holland, Hong Kong, Japan and Malawi. People came to see what a Socialist Government did for Britain in the post-war years.

I admit that, from the outset, there was great opposition to the development corporation from local land-owning interests. I have said before, and it is worth repeating, that Lady Balfour—a great landowner living in a great big house with massive estates — said to me, "Mr. Hamilton, why are you taking good agricultural land for houses when you could put people in high rise blocks of flats?" I said, "You live in a high rise block and I will attach some credence to your views. On this land we will produce not oats and barley but good crops of children." That is what we have produced in Glenrothes and in the other new towns.

Every school is new, every college is new, every house is new and every road is new. If I had to choose anywhere to live in the United Kingdom apart from where I now live, I would choose Glenrothes. There is provision for nursery education, primary education, secondary education and technical college education. There are also six or seven universities within spitting distance of Glenrothes new town. We in the Labour party are very proud of the exciting and imaginative project that we initiated.

It is interesting that the Tory party, with its ideological absurdities, is saying that new towns such as Glenrothes are so exciting and so successful that there is great scope for handing them over to their friends for private profiteering. That was what the Minister meant when he talked about the magic of the market. I call it the squalor of the market, and I shall develop that point shortly.

There are great fears in Glenrothes and other new towns, especially in Scotland, about the serious consequences for their future development following the imminent announcement of the Government's new regional aid policies. It is true that the winding up of the development corporations in Scotland is not imminent. In an answer to an inspired — planted — question on 14 November, the Secretary of State for Scotland announced that none of the new town corporations in Scotland would be wound up before 1990. But there are grave reservations about the Government's intentions with regard to development up to that time, and I shall give one or two examples.

The Glenrothes new town development corporation is now prevented—and has been for the last few years—from building houses for rent at all. I have here the 35th annual report of the Glenrothes development corporation, which has just been published. Dealing with "House Management", the report says in paragraph 33:

"The Corporation wishes to draw your attention specifically to the increasing problems which it faces in providing sufficient suitable dwellings for the single person and for the single parent family. 185 of the former and 108 of the latter were accommodated during the year, a figure representing over a third of the total lets. Young people wish to leave home at an earlier age and aspire earlier to have their own home. Because of home circumstances, many are able to present themselves as homeless: the waiting list for single people therefore continues to grow."

In the introduction to the report, in paragraph 2, it says:

"The abandonment of the general mainstream housing programme has been a disappointment to the Corporation who felt that the maintenance of even a small programme was important to demonstrate the quality of the Government's commitment to the Scottish New Towns."

In other words, the Government are saying, "If you cannot afford to buy, you are on your own. There is no house for renting in a Scottish new town."

Earlier in paragraph 2, the report said:

"Inadequate road communications are perhaps the most serious obstacle to the Town's success and the Corporation was disappointed that this failed to achieve recognition in the Fife Regional Council Structure Plan. There are signs that the two local authorities are finding it increasingly difficult to finance the essential infrastructure required for the Town to continue to progress."

Glenrothes development corporation is operating in the midst of predominantly Labour authorities — the Dunfermline district council, the Kirkcaldy district council and the Fife regional council. They are all Labour-controlled but have not the resources to develop the infrastructure that is vital to the continued success of the Glenrothes development corporation.

I quoted what the corporation said about the housing problem. There is an associated problem, and that is the proposed modification of the Building Standards Regulations (Scotland) 1981 and 1982. The modification of those regulations will be a green light for rabbit-hutch builders such as Barratts. Barratts has been let loose on Scotland and, as I have said before in this House and repeat with as much force as I can, it is building the slums of tomorrow.

Mr. Boyes: Very expensive slums.

Mr. Hamilton: Yes, they are very expensive slums. One could not swing a cat in the living room of those

[Mr. Hamilton]

houses. The Government are saying that the building regulations in Scotland are to be modified so as to fit exactly the greed and profiteering ambitions of people such as Barratts. That is the magic of the market that the Minister talked about.

In principle, the extension of democratic control in the new towns is unanswerable. There has long been a feeling in Glenrothes—and I imagine elsewhere—that there is a bureaucracy which is unanswerable to the people. I was not in the Chamber when my hon. Friend the Member for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth (Mr. Hogg) spoke, but I am sure that he has been campaigning for long for the meetings of new town corporations to be held in public. There is a long-standing grievance in that respect which should be remedied, whatever might be the prospects for the corporations.

It is the practice of the Government to fill the corporations with their own Tory nominees. In areas with massive Labour support, the Government put Tories in charge, and often they pursue policies that run counter to the wishes of the people. The same policy applies to health boards. It is a great concern of local people that, generally speaking, the corporation does not represent the wishes of the people in the town, and still less the wishes of the people round about. I take a less dogmatic view than the Government on these matters, because I see nothing wrong in having a proper mix of local democratic government and elements of private commercial and industrial enterprise, just as in any other town. But I suspect that that is not the motive of the Government.

Clause 10 makes sinister references to the availability of land for the Government to sell to their friends in private business. No Scottish Member can expect to receive replies to questions such as these. It is a waste of time asking them. There will be a Scottish Minister sitting on the Government Front Bench, but it will be the hon. Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young) who will try to reply to questions about Glenrothes and about clause 10.

I hope that we shall have from the Scottish Office an explanation of clause 10 and what it means when it says that the Secretary of State will have power to take over land and sell it to private enterprise where the new town does not have a need for it. Why is that clause in the Bill, specifically relating to Scotland and not to the new towns in England? I hope that the Minister will reply to that question.

I shall vote against the Bill because I suspect the Government's motives. I suspect that they see this as another area in which they can reward their friends in the private sector by making available profit-making enterprises which have been built up with massive public investment over the past 40 years or so.

Mr. Gow: Which of the two official Opposition spokesmen on the Front Bench is a Scotsman?

Mr. Hamilton: The Labour party has an adequate number of speakers on the Back Benches to speak on behalf of Scotland. I do not think—I may be wrong—that one Scottish Tory Back Bencher or a Scottish Tory Front Bencher has taken part in this debate. This United Kingdom debate is an insult to the Scottish people. I suspect that, once again, the Government have written off Scotland, because they do not represent Scotland. They have no mandate to do this or any other thing on behalf of the Scottish people.

7.40 pm

Mr. David Amess (Basildon): It is extremely difficult to know how to follow the speech of the hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. Hamilton), but I shall attempt to do so. I enjoyed his speech.

I warmly welcome the Bill and the assistance that it will give to the Basildon development corporation and, most importantly, to my constituents. Privileged as I am to represent the largest of the new towns, the Bill affords me an opportunity to pay a warm tribute to the development corporation's chairman, Dame Elizabeth Coker. We are most fortunate to have such a person in control of that body. I pay tribute also to the general manager, Douglas Galloway, and all the staff who go about their duties in such a diligent fashion. That group of people, who have served through the terms of Governments of both persuasions, have created a town of which we can be truly proud. Basildon is one of the most exciting places in which to live. It has every conceivable amenity to offer people and is an extremely happy community, full of friendly East Enders and native Basildonians.

Not everyone thinks that the development corporation has done a marvellous job. Some people cannot wait to see it go. Some feel that Basildon has matured sufficiently for it no longer to be termed a new town and are anxious for the development corporation to be wound up. I have considerable sympathy for those whose properties and businesses are being compulsorily purchased as the pressure mounts on the development corporation to complete its land acquisition. Sometimes I wish that there could be considerably more flexibility in the implementation of the structure plan.

I understand the resentment felt by long-established residents about, as they see it, having a new town imposed on them. People in Basildon care passionately about their green belt. They are eagerly awaiting the time when the Minister defines it locally and are extremely worried about the erosion of any further open spaces. My hon. Friend is already familiar with my view on this matter. He might remember my asking him in an Adjournment debate whether, with the present rate of building, the Government intended rehousing the whole of the United Kingdom within my constituency.

In some respects, perhaps, the Bill concentrates the mind on just how much the development corporation has achieved in its task of building facilities in Basildon. I am not sure how widely that aspect is understood. The local authority is certainly extremely good at blurring the edges of responsibility. It is adept at taking the credit for the provision of services and facilities, which, more often than not, emanate from the Government, Essex county council and/or the development corporation. The blame, however, for anything that is wrong in the town is usually levelled at me, the Minister or one of the aforementioned bodies.

These matters have most recently come to light in "The House Magazine" which, last week, contained a full page advertisement, placed by the district authority at the ratepayers' expense, which contained a lie and this week contains another advertisement which is profoundly inaccurate. It would be nice if the district authority stopped its constant attack on Basildon. I am proud of my constituency and I am tired of people running it down.

I especially welcome clause 3, which changes the vesting date to quarterly dates, thus making the timing of housing transfer more flexible.

I am a little worried about clause 4 and its seeming non-appliance to Basildon. It is excellent news that grants will be paid to district councils for remedial works on defects in new town houses transferred to the district councils before 1 April 1981, but what about stock which is transferred at a later date? That is what worries me in dealing with my constituency. Basildon has a number of housing estates which face difficult problems, particularly in Langdon Hills and in the Laindon area. These properties are pleasantly designed inside, although one might easily criticise the layout of some of the estates. There is a need for a number of these properties to be underpinned because of the clay heave brought on by the drought in Essex a number of years ago. Underpinning is a costly exercise and causes tremendous problems to families when dwellings have to be decanted.

Many of my constituents are eager to buy their properties. They feel deprived of their rights when they are unable to get a mortgage because insurance companies will not risk such properties. The cost of underpinning properties can be prohibitive, and psychologically some tenants are reluctant to return to them, even after remedial work has been carried out. The circumstances which I have described—many constituents have contacted me about these matters—seriously undermined the whole thrust of Government policy in this area. We urgently need to rectify housing deficiencies in Basildon, and this need must be treated as a priority.

There are some interesting house designs in Basildon, but only this year I have been contacted by the Felmore heating action group, which is anxious about the district heating system, believing it to be expensive and inefficient. Thousands of my constituents are affected and many have expressed a preference for individual gas-fired central heating. It could be argued that a capital injection under clause 4, which deals with defects grants, will obviate the need for continuous grants in the future.

The development corporation still has a number of extremely important tasks to complete, not least the town centre. It intends putting a roof over the shopping area, which will mean that Basildon will have the largest covered shopping precinct not just in this country but in Europe. Tomorrow evening a public meeting will take place to discuss these proposals. Traders in the town centre have made it clear that the roof is essential to the well-being of our shopping centre. I hope, however, that the views of the residents in Brooke house — the only residential block in the centre — will be considered carefully before construction works are carried out.

Following the Minister's announcement that the development corporation will be wound up on 30 June 1985, all sorts of questions arise. I hope that development corporation employees will be treated fairly and well when the corporation is wound up. They have made a substantial contribution to the development of Basildon, and we must consider their job prospects. I am interested to know how and when the housing stock will be transferred. It is essential that my constituents who rent development corporation property are not inconvenienced through any transfer of this stock.

I am interested also in the manner and progress of the disposal of the development corporation's assets, particularly those of an industrial nature. In short, I hope that I shall be provided with details of exactly what the change of status will mean for Basildon and my constituents. I trust that, when the detail becomes available, I shall be able to allay any anxieties that people may have.

I am delighted with the measures in the Bill which affect the development of docklands. Many hon. Members will be aware that I was born in the London borough of Newham and lived there for many years. It is ironic, and I find it amazing, that although the local authorities have been in control of the dockland area for a number of years, it is the London Docklands Development Corporation which is succeeding where other authorities have failed.

It has been an enormous task to develop the largest new town in the country. I am proud to live in Basildon. Its achievements are many. It can rightly be used as a model for others to follow. The Bill will enable the development corporation to complete the original task that it was given. I willingly support the Bill.

7.50 pm

Mr. Derek Foster (Bishop Auckland): The hon. Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess) said what a marvellous place Basildon was in which to live. I am sure that we all agree with that. I also live in a new town—the new town of Washington which is so ably represented by my hon. Friend the Member for Houghton and Washington (Mr. Boyes). I represent another new town—Newton Aycliffe. Although the hon. Member for Basildon said that everything that the development corporation had done was not to everyone's liking, in his glowing praise he forgot to give credit where it belongs — to those visionary people who started the new towns movement so many years ago.

Mr. Amess *rose*——

Mr. Foster: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman wishes to rectify that.

Mr. Amess: I was not born when the Labour Government decided to embark on this scheme, so some of the hon. Member's remarks should not be directed towards me. I praise the vision that that Labour Government had, and I am delighted that the scheme has been a success.

Mr. Foster: The hon. Member is generous. I only wish that his hon. Friends and Ministers would listen more carefully to what he has to say.

I was delighted to hear my hon. Friend the Member for Fife, Central (Mr. Hamilton) remind us about those early debates when the first new towns were being brought into being. I reiterate his remarks that the new towns have been a glowing example of Socialist planning. That is what galls so many Conservative Members. They now say that those glowing examples of Socialist planning must be given back to whom they rightly belong. I could hardly believe my ears when the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Forth) said that the assets should go back to whom they rightly belonged.

Mr. Cowans: The people.

Mr. Foster: The hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire did not mean the people; he meant the private sector. This investment has been completely underpinned by the public sector—the taxpayers. However, the hon. Member said that, despite all the investment, dedication, vision, energy

[Mr. Foster]

and commitment of the staff of development corporations and the people who live in those areas, the assets should be given back to where they rightly belong. In his contention, they should be stuffing pound notes in the pockets of his private-sector friends. We reject that philosophy completely and say that it is an insult to all that dedicated work which has gone on over the past 40 years and which continues.

I found it difficult to understand the Minister, who is not in his seat at the moment, when he was singing the praises of the "magic of the market place", because new towns were brought into being through the imperfections and madness of the market place.

The only signs that in the north-east we have seen of the magic of the market place has been the great job disappearance act and the sleight of hand of the "quick buck" merchants, and that is the kind of magic of the market place that we can do without.

Mr. Boyes: I can, perhaps, emphasise that point, because the noble Lord Bellwin, speaking at a new town conference in Barcelona, said:

"As the Corporations provide the infrastructure so the private sector comes in behind."

In other words, when we have done all the planning to have the new town ready for our people, in comes the private sector. The hard work has been done, as my hon. Friend the Member for Fife, Central said, and the private sector gets the pound notes by putting up the shoddy houses. The whole philosophy was epitomised in one sentence by one of the former Ministers of the Department of the Environment.

Mr. Foster: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. When he reads *Hansard* in the morning he will see that I have already referred to the fact that I live in the constituency which he so ably represents. He makes my point for me. The exciting new town development would not have taken place without public investment underpinning everything that the private sector was able to do. The private sector would not have come into these new towns without that infrastructure and investment.

I have poured scorn on what the Minister calls the magic of the market place. I regard that as an insult to the people of the north-east. I am worried about the new towns of the north-east; they were brought into being because of the inadequacies of the market place and were to become economic growth points. They would not have been necessary if the magic had been working, as the Minister tried to pretend. They were brought in to attract new jobs to the north-east which has suffered unemployment for so long.

Unemployment is as severe, nay, much more severe in the north-east than when the first new towns were brought there. We wish that we had the unemployment rates of the early 1960s, and which brought the noble Lord Hailsham up with his cap and bell to pretend that the Tory party felt compassion and care for the people of the north-east. We wish that we could return to those employment rates.

The development that has gone on in the north-east towns has been a source of great pride to us. The development corporations have been the outstanding job-hunting agencies of the north-east. What disturbs us so much at the moment is that the Government are still considering doing away with those successful job-hunting agencies. The paper that the Government put up filled us with fear that they were expecting to put in the place of development corporations something that was completely inadequate.

We have nothing against the English Industrial Estates Corporation. We have a high regard for it but those of us who represent north-east new towns were clear that it could not provide the type of dynamism and successful job hunting which had been done by the development corporations for so long. We were not just proud of the development corporations' job-hunting success; we were proud of the comprehensive planning for the people of the new towns, the way jobs were brought in, and new houses, schools, community centres and a whole range of social and recreational facilities were built for the people who lived in the new towns.

We were proud of the way in which Washington blazed the trail of environmental improvement in the whole of the north-east. The landscaping of both industrial and housing estates in Washington was a great example to all the local authorities of the modern environment in which people wanted to live. On top of that, we were proud of the community development that went into the successful planning of the new towns.

I was working on new towns about 12 years ago, not in the private or public sector, but in the voluntary sector, right at the heart of the attempt to achieve the community development that is absolutely essential if a new town is to take on a life of its own and to grow organically in the way that older towns have done and still do. There was a dedicated effort by scores of people who set up voluntary organisations. They got people to relate to one another when the first new houses were built. They identified the need for play groups, youth groups, over-60s clubs and a whole range of social facilities. The dedication of people in the public and the voluntary sectors made the new towns live.

All that effort has gone into the new towns, as well as the underpinning investment of the public sector, and energy and initiative have brought in the private sector, but the Bill is giving back the assets to where the Government think they belong—into the hands of the private sector. We completely reject that philosophy. We want those assets to remain where they really belong, in the possession not of a few of the people, but of all.

The Minister spoke of the taxpayer getting a return for all that investment. That seems a plausible argument. All that investment has been made in the past 30 or 40 years, so is it not about time that the taxpayer got some return? The Government are obsessed with the sale of assets. They know all about selling assets to make a return. We might accept the argument if the people of the area benefited, for example the people of Newton Aycliffe. Their housing proved defective because of building and design faults. If some of that return from the investment paid the £16 million bill facing the local authority because of housing defects, that would be a good thing. If the taxpayers and ratepayers of Newton Aycliffe were to enjoy some of the benefits from the sale of those assets, we might be persuaded that it was a good thing. However, the taxpayers will not benefit. Indeed, the ratepayers will foot the bill. They will be caned because of the measure. People will not gain as taxpayers and will be caned as ratepayers.

I should like to ask the Minister whether it is just and proper for the local authority to have to bear the bill of £16 million when it has a grant of £3·25 million or £3·75

million. Is there anything in the Bill to help that local authority or any of those people, some of whom have bought their own houses? One would think that the Government had some sympathy for them. Having bought their houses, only now are they discovering the defects, but do they receive any sympathy from the Government? They are told that there will be no grant for them. Does the Minister intend to include powers in the legislation to give back something to those people, to compensate them for the bills that they are now having to meet? It is not their own fault; the problems were caused by building and design defects when the houses were built many years ago. I hope that the Minister will give me an answer.

When the Minister for Housing and Construction referred to the magic of the market place, I wondered what he meant. Many people in Newton Aycliffe would have liked to buy their shops. They put together a cogent case and a feasible deal so that they could do so. However, they were unsuccessful and the Minister has left them to the magic of the market place. Will the Minister tell us whether those long-suffering tenants who have rented their shops for many years and made a great contribution not just to the commercial but to the social life of the town will be forced out of their shops, perhaps even forced out of business, because the caring merchant who takes over the new town will push up the rents so much that they can no longer afford to trade? The Minister should bear that in mind when he romanticises and dreams at night about his marvellous expression "the magic of the market place".

Mr. Boyes: It is a Saatchi and Saatchi job.

Mr. Foster: That is right.

What will the Minister do to preserve the total investment of the development corporations, the private sector, voluntary agencies and local authorities? How will he do so now that in new towns he is giving over a substantial part of it to private companies that may have a vested interest in the prosperity of the town, but have no interest in its social and recreational life? How will he preserve the comprehensive planning for people in the new towns that was right at the heart of the philosophy of the new town movement? Will the Under-Secretary tell us tonight when he will finish considering the review of the three north-east new towns? We have waited some four months and more to be told what will happen to those new towns.

If we thought that great consideration was going on in the Department, that people were racking their brains to discover a new, imaginative solution that would assist us to solve the problem of unemployment in our new towns, we might be a little more patient with the Minister. However, we suspect that the Government are trying to shrink from the only sensible solution to the problem, which is to retain the job-hunting function for the new town development corporations.

We are asking for a fairly limited number of staff. We are not asking for the continuation of a vast bureaucracy, but if we do not act soon those people will move elsewhere. Indeed, some have already gone. Who is to blame them for doing so with such uncertainty hanging over the corporations for such a long time? Even dedicated people must look after their own futures. The time when the Minister should have been making clear his intentions has long gone. If he cannot tell us tonight what they are, he must at least tell us when an announcement will be made. He must not delay it for long because already skilled and knowledgeable people are leaving. They are going away from their areas, and they will be lost to the urgent task of winning new jobs to our area.

The future of those employees who are already in new town development corporations is a problem to which my hon. Friend the Member for Houghton and Washington has already referred. It looks as though they will have unfavourable terms of resettlement or redundancy. That is breaking faith with those long-serving public servants.

I know that Conservative Members look down on people who work in the public sector. They regard them as second-class citizens, as inferior persons who, if only they were better, would get a job in the private sector. We reject that philosophy. The Conservative party has proved time and again in the way that it denigrates the people in the education service, the Civil Service and local authorities that that is its philosophy. It may not be the philosophy of this Minister, but it is certainly that of the Prime Minister and leading members of the Government. However, that is no excuse for taking vengeance on people in the public sector, whose colleagues who left two or three years ago went under different circumstances. They should have the same conditions and terms of redundancy or resettlement. I plead with the Minister to rethink that aspect.

Perhaps the Minister will concede that the new town movement was a visionary one, and a triumph for Socialist planning. Even at this late stage, perhaps he will change his mind and understand that those assets should go back to where they belong. They belong not to his friends in the private sector and not to a few specialists or developers, but to the people. It is those people who have created the throbbing life of those new towns, and it is they who deserve to benefit from those assets, and to own them.

8.12 pm

Mr. Derek Conway (Shrewsbury and Atcham): I am grateful for being called to take part in this debate, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I view with mixed blessings the opportunity to follow the hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster). I may not agree with what he says, but he always makes positive contributions to our debates. Should he end up serving in Committee, his experience as a former chairman of the North of England Development Council, and his ideas about how he views that in the light of his subsequent experience of new towns, particularly of Newton Aycliffe and Washington, will be of interest to hon. Members. However, my view is coloured by the fact that when he was given the appointment of Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Leader of the Opposition his local press reported that Derek Conway had been appointed as PPS to the Leader of the Opposition. That was not a good start to my career in the House.

It is of particular importance to me that I am able to take part in the debate because before my election I served on the board of the Washington development corporation, and I am named in the report, which I am sure that many hon. Members will have read before the debate. It makes interesting reading, with the exception of the part that refers to me. In addition to my connections with the Washington development corporation as a member of its board, the managing director whom we appointed to Washington came from Telford corporation, which adjoins my constituency. The general manager of the Telford corporation is a constituent of mine.

[Mr. Derek Conway]

In the debate there has been much reference to the effectiveness of the value of the new towns programme, and on that all hon. Members are agreed. The new towns have made a positive contribution to employment, town planning and job attraction.

When I was appointed to the Washington development corporation board I was surprised at the level of commitment of those serving on the board. Much reference has been made today to the secrecy surrounding development corporations, and some relevant points were made. I believe in open government, but there are limits to everything, and I urge hon. Members who say that the deliberations of development corporations should be thrown open to think again. If the deliberations of the development corporation boards were to be made generally open to the public, it would have a marked effect on the business attraction. Many sensitive decisions and discussions have to take place that should not be made available to the serried ranks of the media. If we are concerned about the employment creation potential of the new town corporations, wherever they may be located, we must tread with great caution concerning the amount of public exposure that is given, particularly to industrial deliberations.

The hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. Hamilton) spoke about the method of appointment to development corporation boards. Hon. Members with intimate experience of development corporations will know that the hon. Gentleman made purely partisan points, because it is a matter of record that Labour Governments have appointed Conservative members and Conservative Governments have appointed Socialist members to boards, as have this Government, which have continued to appoint card-carrying members of the Labour party to development corporation boards. Therefore, such boards have not become one-party animals, and that is quite right.

I found of great interest the comparison between those members of the board who were lay members — what one might call the "housewife" members — and those who were there to represent business interests. The honing of the board's view on a policy was considerable, and lay members made a positive contribution to the development, in particular, of the social side of new town corporations. It was right of Governments of both political persuasions to ensure that such boards did not become a business man's preserve. I do not think that new towns could have prospered had that been the case.

Having moved from a local authority, I was equally impressed with the flexibility of the new towns' paid officers. The hon. Member for Bishop Auckland spoke about the view of Conservative Members on public servants, but he will accept that that view is not held by all in the Conservative party, although it may be held by some. I am sure that the officials of the development corporation in which I served, whom I can claim to know well, were far from typical of local government officers —whatever a typical local government officer may be— but were certainly known for their commitment to the cause and for their flexibility and effectiveness.

It is difficult to make progress, but the Government are right to grasp the nettle in bringing forward this Bill. Progress has to be made because more and more new town corporations are concerned with the wind-up date and the effect that it will have on staff morale. Some staff may decide that they will need to look elsewhere for employment, as the hon. Member for Bishop Auckland said. The running-down effect on new town corporations is a problem that must be grasped, and a financial decision has to be made. In that, the Bill meets the demand.

Of particular concern, as was said by the hon. Member for Houghton and Washington (Mr. Boyes), are clauses 4 and 14, which will affect the housing transfer. That was a thorny problem during my time on the board in Washington, and it has continued to be the case. I understand the reluctance of any local authority to assume responsibility for an asset that it may find dubious. It is right that the Government, in clauses 4 and 14, should be addressing this problem.

Later in the debate the hon. Member for Tyne Bridge (Mr. Cowans) will be making his first appearance at the Dispatch Box. I welcome that, as he and I are old debating partners, and I am sure that he will speak effectively for the Opposition. I urge my hon. Friends, especially those who subsequently serve on the Committee, to be wary of the hon. Member for Tyne Bridge especially on the housing clauses. He was chairman of the housing committee of a borough council on which I was opposition spokesman and I warn my hon. Friends as gently as possible to treat him with great care.

The Telford development corporation area is in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Hawksley) rather than my own but many of my constituents are employed there. After 21 years, the corporation can be said to have come of age and it is certainly very effective, having been set up initially to cope with the west midlands overspill. Since I have had the privilege to represent Shrewsbury and Atcham, however, I have become something of a gamekeeper turned poacher. Despite my great admiration for the work of development corporations, I have found that the interests of Telford do not always coincide with those of Shrewsbury. If the corporation concentrated on the environmental task of dealing with the overspill and on the job-hunting task, it would find no greater supporter, but it has tended to try to establish Telford as the county centre and in that I am its enemy. Its development of shopping attractions is certainly greeted with great concern in the more established and, in my view, far better shopping centre of Shrewsbury.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin that the Ombudsman should be able to intervene in the work of the new town development corporations and the commission. I believe that that is a very good idea. It has been suggested by Members on both sides and I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will comment favourably on it today.

The hon. Members for Houghton and Washington and for Bishop Auckland well illustrated the employment situation. The annual report before the House shows that the development corporation on which I served has increased the number of jobs achieved directly by the corporation or under its aegis from 15,259 on 31 March 1983 to 15,549 on 31 March 1984—an increase of 290 jobs in the Washington development corporation area. The effects of the Nissan project have yet to come on stream. Telford has increased its total from 38,852 to 39,037— an increase of 185 jobs in an area sadly afflicted by 20 per cent. unemployment, which is more than twice the rate in my constituency. In addition, the effects of the enterprise zone agreed in January this year have yet to come on

stream. I am sure that that will provide many valuable jobs not only for the constituents of my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin but for my constituents. As page 302 of the report shows, the proposal is to establish a 275-acre site. The infrastructure for the enterprise zone is already well advanced and includes the Telford business park. I wish that project speedy success in its job-hunting potential.

The job-hunting role of the development corporations concerns Members in all parts of the House. The new towns have developed considerable expertise in job hunting. I have had experience both of a metropolitan county council and of a development corporation and it is clear to me that development corporations have a flexibility that local authorities cannot match. That is not a criticism of the individuals involved in local authorities. It is in the nature of the beast.

I am also concerned about the effect of the proposals to abolish the metropolitan counties. Regional officers of the Department of Trade and Industry have been able to use bodies such as the new towns and some of the economic development corporations set up to promote various special development areas as a kind of expense account with which the normal Civil Service routine cannot cope.

I was somewhat concerned and more than a little surprised to see the Department's regional director on television one Sunday contributing to a political debate on the future of economic development agencies in the north. I am surprised that a civil servant should publicly take part in such a debate and I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to make inquiries about that. The debate itself was interesting, although rather specialised. The civil servant in question said that with the winding up of the new towns and the metropolitan counties some kind of job-hunting agency would need to continue in development areas. I do not know whether this is Government policy, but he espoused the view that a body not unlike the existing North of England Development Council, which is somewhat unwieldy at the best of times, should exist to handle the problems of that special development area. That may not be the Government's policy, but it was certainly expounded on their behalf by a very senior civil servant in the region, and I view that with great concern.

That does not mean that the Government should not tell the House how they envisage the job-finding role being handled once the new town corporations reach the end of their life. The figures that I have quoted show that worth of the new towns in job hunting is well established and of great merit, as I believe hon. Members on both sides recognise.

I believe that a date should be fixed for completion of the work of the commission as well as the development corporation. The development corporation boards should understand that they have served their time and done the country very well indeed. Their job has been appreciated not just by the people fortunate enough to live in their areas but by the country at large due to their positive contribution to economic development in very difficult times. Nevertheless, the time has come to move on. The Bill makes definite progress in that direction and should be welcomed by all involved.

8.27 pm

Mr. Jack Dormand (Easington): I appreciate the reasons for the absence of the Minister of State, but I hope that the Under-Secretary of State will apologise to him for my absence during his speech. No discourtesy was intended. It was impossible for me to be in the Chamber at that time. I also apologise for the fact that I may touch on points dealt with earlier by the Minister of State.

Like so many other measures these days—I had the privilege of speaking on another yesterday—the Bill epitomises the deep political and philosophical divide between the Tory party and the Labour party. The Government cannot wait to get rid of anything involving even a glimmer of public enterprise. Most people agree that the new towns have a great success story to tell. In a debate on 17 January on new town borrowing the Under-Secretary of State said that the staff and boards of the new towns had achieved

"results that have made the British new towns world leaders in town planning and development."

There is not much reservation or equivocation there, yet the Government cannot bear continuing success in public enterprise. They have to put a stop to it—hence the Bill now before us.

I can certainly speak for the achievements of the new towns of the north-east. I shudder to think what that part of the country would have been without Peterlee, Newton Aycliffe and Washington. Much has already been said by my hon. Friends about the achievements of those new towns. Later in my speech I shall say something about my own new town of Peterlee.

The Government pride themselves on being a pragmatic Administration, but all the evidence that has accumulated since 1979 shows that they are the most doctrinaire Government of modern times. If they really believe that they consider issues on their merits, they should re-examine the concept—not just the practice—of new towns. If they did so in a non-partisan fashion they would conclude that instead of winding up the new towns programme they should set up more new towns.

If the Government were to do that they would, apart from anything else, enable the new towns' excellent record in creating jobs to be maintained. I was delighted that the hon. Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Mr. Conway) devoted part of his speech to that record. Such praise from a Conservative Member was very welcome. The House need not take my word for it. I shall quote again the words of the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State in the same debate earlier this year, when he said:

"I should like to pay tribute to the continuing achievement of the new towns in creating employment. Over the past few years they have sustained the remarkable performance of creating 20,000 or so new jobs a year—a vital contribution to the welfare of their own communities and to their regions".—[*Official Report*, 17 January 1984; Vol. 52, c. 278-91.]

That is high praise indeed. We are entitled to ask why, if that is so, the development corporations should ever be abolished.

The Minister will expect me to refer to the proposed winding-up of Peterlee corporation. As he knows, I have campaigned on the matter for three years—ever since the announcement was first made. I have tried to change the Government's decision to abolish the corporation on 31 December 1985. Like many areas of the north-east, my constituency has a high rate of unemployment. The rate is approaching 20 per cent. My constituency depends to a large extent on coal mining, and we all know that the Government and the National Coal Board are determined to close pits which do not pay their way.

[Mr. Jack Dormand]

I know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that you are a most tolerant man. I am tempted to devote some time to the dispute in the coal mining industry. The Under-Secretary of State shakes his head, but he must realise that if pits close in an area such as mine—where whole communities depend on them—they must be replaced by something else.

There are 12,000 miners in my constituency and I fully support their struggle against the Government and the NCB. Obviously, closures could occur in my area. In those circumstances, one might expect the Government to remember that there is a very successful job-finding agency in the Peterlee development corporation, which could continue to attract jobs to the area. That would soften the blow of closures. What lunacy has persuaded the Government to propose closing down that agency next year? The reason is simple. As I said at the beginning of my speech, it is a matter of pure dogma.

No fewer than 628 new jobs have been created in Peterlee since January this year. There are now 6,069 people employed in the town's industrial estates. This success has been made possible by a combination of the corporation's expertise and dedication, the skill and adaptability of the work force, and—I know because I visit factories there regularly — enlightened managements. The managements and work forces have received splendid co-operation from Peterlee development corporation. The corporation has attracted not onlyBritish firms but has some of the best known international firms, such as Fisher-Price and NSK. Those are the successes which the Government propose to sweep away by this doctrinaire measure.

I know that the Secretary of State is now reconsidering the proposal to wind up the Peterlee development corporation next year. It is unbelievable that it should have taken the concerted efforts of everyone in my constituency to persuade the Government even to reconsider that preposterous idea. I hope that the Minister will not simply go through the motions of consultation and reconsideration. Extending the life of the corporation is vital to the people of my area. Some 18 months ago the Under-Secretary took the trouble to visit my area. I welcomed his visit and I am sure that the experience was valuable to him.

My main criticism of the Government in bringing forward the Bill is that they have shown a complete lack of flexibility in dealing with new towns. That is an essential feature of their doctrinaire approach. In my view, the circumstances of each town—social life, industry, jobs, leisure facilities and all the other aspects which make for a full life—should be considered individually. It is wrong to take a blanket approach to the whole matter.

Some of my hon. Friends agree with me—although I know that I have not persuaded all of them—that the new towns should become a permanent feature of our normal life. We believe that they are a good example of Socialist practice and deliberate, enlightened planning. That is not something that we expect the present Government to provide, but I hope that a future Labour Government will incorporate in future legislation the best features, at least, of new town life.

Clause 4 authorises the Secretary of State to pay grants to district councils for remedial works on defects in new town housing transferred to him before 1 April 1988. I welcome that provision in principle, but—and it is a big but — we need to know in greater detail what the payments are to be and how they are to be made. I was glad to hear that my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) also takes this view. I hope that no one will underestimate the importance of the matter to thousands of people in the new towns, at least those in Peterlee. At least one Minister has conceded that there is more defective housing in Peterlee than in any other new town.

I have several questions about new clause 4, which I hope the Minister will answer. First, does the financial assistance apply to privately owned houses which have been bought from the corporation or the district council? Secondly, what is the significance of 1 April 1981 as a qualifying date? Thirdly, are there any circumstances in which houses which were purchased or rented after that date could be considered? Fourthly, does the Secretary of State propose to have a ceiling on the amount of grant to be paid to district councils, or will the amount be determined by the number of houses which qualify for assistance? I should have thought that the latter would be the case. I hope it will be, as there will be much dissatisfaction and unfairness if some people qualify for grant and others do not.

Fifthly, will grants be assessed and administered entirely separately from the HIP allocation? If not, I do not see that we can make much progress on a matter that is of critical importance to some residents of new towns. That could lead to long delays in carrying out major repairs, which means considerable inconvenience and discomfort and, in the case of owner-occupiers, could involve large sums of money which they might find it impossible to raise.

The file that I have in my hand shows the number of cases with which I am dealing. I am sure that many other hon. Members deal with a similar number. The issue has become so important in my constituency that an organisation has been set up by people who are affected. I have regular meetings with them and have visited their homes. It is not an exaggeration to say that some of the circumstances are quite tragic.

Dr. M. S. Miller (East Kilbride): Perhaps I could relate the experience of East Kilbride new town, which makes a handsome profit each year. One of the problems associated with system-built housing of the 1960s is dampness. They also suffer from rain penetration and involve high heating costs. The Secretary of State for Scotland would not allow the new town to devote some of its large profits to correcting those deficiencies. It took an enormous amount of pressure to get him to allow the new town to do that. I am not sure whether the same circumstances apply in English new towns, but, if they do, I advise my hon. Friend to put pressure on the Minister to ensure that some of the money made by new towns is spent on housing.

Mr. Dormand: That is an excellent intervention and is entirely relevant to what I was saying. The Minister will have heard my hon. Friend. I hope that clause 4 makes such provision.

It is amazing how many detailed problems crop up during meetings with constituents. Unless the Government give these issues careful and close attention, many people will be treated unfairly.

The Opposition are right to be chary about the Bill. With regard to new towns, the Government have given us

promises, half promises, broken promises and half-hearted measures, all of which have been well and truly mixed with a liberal helping of doctrinaire dogma. The mix has caused confusion among many people who deserve better from the original concept, which was eloquently stated by my hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster.)

I shall give the Minister the kiss of death. He is one of the more enlightened Members of the Government. He secretly believes that new towns have been and remain a success and that there is a place for them. On the many occasions on which I have raised new town matters, whether at Question Time, in speeches or at informal or formal meetings, he has been patient and genuinely interested in the problems that I have raised. For those and other reasons I am sure that, behind the scenes, he is doing everything possible to extend the life of Peterlee development corporation.

The Opposition are not suggesting that everything is perfect in the new towns. Far from it, but tonight we are debating the principle of new towns and their development. Hatred of public enterprise has been expressed in almost every speech from Conservative Members. When it is clear that public enterprise is successful—and it undoubtedly is in the case of new towns—Conservative Members can hardly disguise their venom.

When we first heard about the abolition of new town corporations, we thought that the Government would produce the whitest of white rabbits from the hat. Even we thought that the new proposals might be worth listening to and examining, but we have here a gallimaufry of a solution. There are bits and pieces from all over the place. Functions are to be divided between local authorities, the North of England Development Council, the English Industrial Estates Corporation and other bodies. My hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland is the distinguished chairman of the North of England Development Council. We have no criticism of those bodies—they have an important role to play. The point is that the thrust and dynamism of the new town corporations will be diffused and destroyed. The dedicated work of new town staffs should be put on record once again. The Opposition oppose completely the Government's theories and dogmatism and I welcome the opportunity to vote against a Bill which epitomises the divisions between us.

8.48 pm

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): Perhaps I might begin where the hon. Member for Easington (Mr. Dormand) ended. His conclusions completely misunderstand the point of the Bill. We have been told today that new towns were a triumph of Socialist planning. When, as I hope, he comes to the north-west, with other hon. Members who have used that expression, and visits my constituency—where in the new town of Skelmersdale 5,000 people are unemployed and the unemployment rate is 30 per cent.—I urge him to bear in mind that triumph of Socialist planning.

Although some towns are succeeding—sadly, mainly in the south—many in the north have not been as successful as we would have wished. The root cause of that failure, particularly on Merseyside, was the desire in 1945 to rehouse the victims of the blitz in well built, modern houses away from the urban cores. As a consequence, areas such as Skelmersdale were built which a number of years later were designated new towns. The houses were built, but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Chorley (Mr. Dover) remarked, the jobs required for the occupants were never placed. Skelmersdale is a typical example. The burden of that decision and the designation must rest firmly with the Labour party.

I welcome the Bill as a realistic recognition of the situation. Areas such as Skelmersdale require jobs. Only today, I and council representatives from west Lancashire, including Skelmersdale, were due to visit my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary to discuss the transfer of the assets. The Labour party has failed to understand that the dissolution of the development corporations will purely and simply return essential community assets—housing, and community and leisure facilities—to the democratic representatives who are elected to represent those communities.

One of the main problems in Skelmersdale is that the assets are controlled by people who are not elected by the local communities. Consequently, they are not representatives of the communities and are therefore not subject to the same democratic response as those who are elected. For that reason it is cant and rubbish to suggest any possible enlargement of development corporations once they have done the magnificant job—I pay tribute to them for doing so—of creating the new towns. Those assets must be returned to the democratic process, and that is the most important feature of certain parts of the Bill.

Mr. Dormand: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hind: Normally I would, but several other hon. Members are still waiting to speak.

Those faced with the dissolution of the development corporations particularly welcome the intervention of the Commission for the New Towns. It will bring a fresh mind and new dynamism to the problem of attracting jobs to the new towns. In Skelmersdale 250,000 sq ft of empty factory space belongs to the development corporations. That amounts to a sixth of the factory space in the town. There is a need for a new drive and a new dynamic image for the town, and that can be created by the Commission for the New Towns, 30 of whose employees will work in Skelmersdale while 50 others will be working regionally.

The Minister must ensure that the resources are available for the Commission for the New Towns to promote the town of Skelmersdale. I am sure that all hon. Members will appreciate the worldwide contact and promotion undertaken by the commission to bring jobs to these new areas.

The district councils will inherit the problems associated with taking over the assets, and the Minister should bear in mind the number of problems that will be faced. Those councils will not have the carpet of money which is centrally provided to the development corporations, even though they will have to take over all the loose ends. The Minister will be aware of the representations made by the west Lancashire district council on that point.

We must first look at social amenities. The vast expansion of services in the town has grown faster than the development of community services. At the moment, the social development offices of the development corporation have four employees who will have to be replaced by the voluntary sector. Despite the burden that will fall on those

[Mr. Hind]

organisations, they willingly take on the responsibility. The Minister should ensure that they are given adequate resources from the community package.

The second major problem is housing. Over the last two years roughly £9 million has been spent by the Government through the development corporation to improve the 8,000 houses owned by the corporation in Skelmersdale. Regrettably, the standard of maintenance of those houses does not compare well with the standard achieved by the West Lancashire district council. There is a 12 per cent. turnover on new town houses compared with 1 per cent. on houses owned by the district council. There is also vandalism of empty houses. Empty houses are at present being renovated to be made ready for habitation, but, even when that programme is complete, 200 houses are likely to remain empty. For that reason, the Minister should consider more generous rules on the transfer of balances.

In particular, he should look carefully at the HIP allowance for West Lancashire district council and other such authorities to deal with their future housing needs. Those authorities will face increased planning and staffing costs, and an increase in the rate support grant targets for the district councils which take over the development corporations will be absolutely essential, especially regarding the maintenance of community-related assets and landscaping. I am sure that the Minister will consider the factor E calculation for district, shire and county authorities. If it is invoked in 1985-86 I hope that he will neutralise its effects so that it will not penalise those authorities.

There are other problems. The other services block allocation will cause great expense to district councils. I invite the Minister to consider those factors in detail when he works out the position of district councils.

The end of the development corporations and their transfer to district councils is a logical step. It is a return to normality. The sale of factory units to private enterprises is also a return to normality. Those of us who know how industry in new towns has taken advantage of grants—often manufacturing subsidiaries of companies based elsewhere—know that it is essential that they buy into new towns. Purchases mean commitment and an expansion of the industry in the town concerned. Therefore, that factor is extremely important.

The Bill is a logical step in the development of new towns. Hon. Members who have experience of new towns will realise that there are limitations to green field sites. I take issue with Opposition Members in that if in future there is to be special development we should look for it in the inner city areas. Major developments should take place in that urban core. A reason for Liverpool's problems is that it is ringed with many new towns that since their construction have sucked the life blood and jobs from the urban core. In future the life blood must return to the urban core. The Bill is an important step towards achieving that, and I welcome it.

9.1 pm

Dr. Oonagh McDonald (Thurrock): I am glad to have caught your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker. My hon. Friends have rightly spoken of the success of new towns as an example of Socialist planning in the immediate post-war period which has been extremely beneficial. The Government's decision during the last Parliament to sell the assets of new towns is a kind of tribute, albeit perverted by Tory ideology, to the success of the far-sightedness of Socialist policy.

In his opening speech the Minister said that the purpose of the sale of assets was to allow the magic of the market to operate. My ears pricked up at that, because for a moment I thought that the Minister was about to announce a new Government policy. As their present policies are a manifest failure, I thought that he was telling the House that the Government were to resort to magic. We would have welcomed that, because anything would be better than what we have now. However, I realised that we were to have more of the same old stuff—their belief in competition.

That is all very well if the Government truly believe in competition. My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) drew attention to what happened in Redditch, from which it appears that competition over the sale of assets can be limited. In large town centres, large property companies, developers and institutions, such as the Norwich Union in Basildon new town, can take up what the Government are offering them. The smaller shopkeepers and companies find it difficult to get into town centres. The possibility of acquiring off-centre shopping may be open to them. The competition about which the Minister spoke so grandly is all too often limited in a way which applies not only to the sale of assets of new towns, but generally in our country, where many industries are dominated by a few large companies.

My constituency does not have a new town, but there are several in Essex. The decision to build new towns in that county, and especially the decision to build the new town of Basildon, which neighbours my constituency, was extremely beneficial to Essex. New towns have provided social services, in that they have enabled people to move from overcrowded slums, especially in east London, to the Essex countryside. They have also brought jobs. Many of my constituents work—or used to work—in industries in Basildon, but opportunities for employment here have dwindled during the past five years, as they have dwindled in my constituency. Basildon no longer offers a range of exciting jobs, as it once did, in new industries such as telecommunications. The new towns have also brought good housing, although Basildon has not been without its housing problems, and welcome wealth to Essex. For those reasons, it is in order for me to refer to Basildon as an example of what the Government's policy means.

The transfer of houses from the new town corporation to Basildon city council is continuing, and Government representatives have met Basildon councillors to discuss the transfer and the extent to which the problems involved in taking over housing should be understood. Basildon councillors have argued that housing takeover and rate-capping should be considered together. They are unwilling to take over the housing assets if that is likely to give rise to additional penalties.

The problems with rates and rate-capping in Basildon became well known after the Secretary of State for the Environment referred to it as "Moscow down the Thames". The councillors have little to do with Moscow, and I understand why they believed it necessary to discuss rate-capping with the Government. In the past, the Government have shown them little sympathy and they have had to hammer home the problems which they will encounter as a result of the transfer of more properties to

the council, on top of the problems which they already have because the Department of the Environment refuses to understand the difficulties in new towns such as Basildon, Harlow, Crawley, Stevenage and Thamesdown.

The problems occur because council housing is newer in those towns and because they cannot balance their housing accounts by matching the profit from renting older houses with the losses incurred on newer estates. That, with other problems such as an increasing elderly population, has put a strain on Basildon's rates, which have increased, and that is why Basildon is anxious that the Government should take due account of the additional problems of transferring housing from the corporation to the city council.

Instead of vilifying Basildon council, it is high time that the Secretary of State and other Ministers from the Department of the Environment paused for an instant and considered sympathetically the problems raised by their pursuit of ideology which affect the human beings who live in new towns which were once the proud assets of the state.

9.9 pm

Mr. Neil Thorne (Ilford, South): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak briefly. I am sorry that Labour Members, particularly the hon. Member for Easington (Mr. Dormand), should say that new towns are a Socialist idea. The hon. Gentleman told my hon. Friend the Minister that he would give him the kiss of death and then went on to praise him. His claim that new towns are a Socialist invention is equally a kiss of death for new towns if taken seriously by my hon. Friends. I do not believe that they are, because they have had a positive role to play. New towns, like New Palace Yard, do not always remain new. Inevitably, we must realise that new circumstances apply and new arrangements must be made for looking after the future.

I had the pleasure of serving on the Joint Docklands Development Board some years ago. It made little progress. Therefore, I am delighted to see that provision is made in the Bill for further financial resources for the London Docklands Development Corporation which has replaced the joint board.

When I was chairman of the central area board of the GLC I had the pleasure of purchasing St. Katharine's dock from the Port of London Authority, conducting a competition and choosing some developers to proceed with the rehabilitation and the new development that now exists. I was able to purchase the land from the PLA and let it on a long lease to developers producing 10 per cent. return—which is a good return for a ground rent. I hope that eventually that property will be sold, because that was the original intention. The leasehold was kept initially to ensure that the development took place in accordance with the wishes of the local authority which had acquired the freehold in that case. That seems to be an ideal positive planning measure and its success was the reason that I was invited to join the joint board.

However, I found that body to be a waste of time because it produces interminable arguments between the nominees of the various authorities who thought that they could do better by having offices or shops in their parts of the dockland area rather than the open space which would not yield them much rateable value.

I am delighted that the London Docklands Development Corporation was set up and that it is already a success. I am sure that it will continue to be a resounding success in the future. I am sure that there is nothing Socialist about the way in which it has been created. It would be wrong for Labour Members to claim that it was a Socialist invention. Clearly it was not.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Will the hon. Gentleman conclude from what he said a moment ago that the joint board, which has nominees from groups of authorities put together, ought not to be followed in any form of Government planning in future? We shall no doubt be embarking on some discussion of that issue. It is important that he gives his Front Bench the benefit of his experience and advises his right hon. and hon. Friends in the weeks ahead.

Mr. Thorne: It depends on who is invited to serve on the joint board. My experience of the local authorities which formed part of the joint docklands board was unsatisfactory. I hope that if any joint boards are to be set up they will be set up on a wider basis and introduce a lot more business acumen than was present on that joint board, because that was a disaster.

Some new towns have proved extremely worth while. However, in other cases they seem to have been set up for the benefit of the designing architects and planners rather than for anyone else. My constituency experience is that architects and planners are not always the best people for producing a satisfactory answer. Some of the biggest disasters won prizes when they were built. Those buildings and areas that my constituents cannot wait to leave were often developments that won prizes 10 or 15 years ago. I very much hope that in future we shall get away from that, and introduce a much sounder and more satisfactory commercial element.

I also hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will get on quickly with the Bill. I represent a constituency that has suffered because it has been deprived of finance with which to regenerate its town centre. The money spent on new towns has been taken away from constituencies such as mine, which should have had the opportunity many years ago to regenerate their centres. I sincerely hope that now that our town centre is at last being redeveloped this will not be allowed to happen again, and that the old areas will be given priority for regeneration over any new towns that might be under consideration in the future.

9.15 pm

Mr. Harry Cowans (Tyne Bridge): It gives me great pleasure to conclude the debate. Unfortunately, however, I do not take great pleasure in the Bill. But first I apologise on behalf of my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker), who has already passed a note to the Minister. He is unavoidably delayed outside the House and cannot be here. I also thank the Minister for his earlier kind remarks. He and I are old Committee Room opponents from the days before he went to the exalted atmosphere of No. 10 and then went on to higher things——

Dr. McDonald: Lower things.

Mr. Cowans: I said that deliberately. But I look forward to the hon. Gentleman and I crossing swords again in Committee.

The Minister rightly said that the new towns were a success story. Indeed, I think that all hon. Members would agree with that, although some Opposition Members might

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have said that the success story would have been much greater if the Government had not filched public assets. I had to smile a little when the Minister used a phrase that I have heard many times in Committee and referred to the magic of the market place. He may have forgotten, but I have told him before that magicians have many tricks, of which one is sleight of hand. That usually means that they make other people's property disappear. If that is what he means by the magic of the market, we are both in full agreement, because that is exactly what the Bill does.

I am sorry that the hon. Member for Lancashire, West (Mr. Hind) has left, because perhaps he should have made his speech from the Opposition Benches. He asked for a return to democratic control, but he obviously has not read the Bill. He did not know what he was asking to be returned to democratic control. He cannot have read the Bill, because under it there is very little to be returned. Many Conservative Members say that they support the Bill but then make special pleas for their areas. It is remarkable how it clarifies the mind if one's own area is affected.

The hon. Member for Lancashire, West was no exception to that rule. He obviously has not yet discovered that the Bill winds up the Commission for the New Towns, because he pleaded with the Minister for it to help his cause. I cannot quite see how something that has been wound up can help a cause, but that is what he asked for. After he has supported the Bill in Committee night and day, through thick and thin, and come hell or high water, he will probably ask the Minister whether the Commission for the New Towns can help him. Then he will find that it has been voted out and wound up. But perhaps, before the Division, it will cross his mind to stumble through at least the first few pages of the Bill. He will then find that he should be with us in the Lobby if he wants the Commission for the New Towns to help him.

It should come as no surprise to Conservative Members that the Opposition oppose the Bill. Quite apart from the reasons given by my hon. Friend the Member for Perry Barr, the Labour party always oppose and will always oppose what the Conservatives call privatisation, but what I call filching public assets from the people.

There is no difference between the Opposition and the Government on the fact that, at some time in the future, the new towns will have completed their work and something will have to replace them. However, that is not what the Bill states. The Opposition are concerned with the how, with the when and with what will replace them. Nothing in the Bill answers those questions.

My hon. Friend the Member for Easington (Mr. Dormand) has been a doughty fighter for our cause. He has on a number of occasions spoken about consultation procedures. I agree that there has been consultation with some local authorities. However, the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Forth) did not appear to know anything about a company town. My area has bitter experience of a company town—it is a town dominated by one employer, with the community having to dance to his tune. That is why a provision should be written into the Bill that all local authorities must be consulted not only about the small part that is unsaleable, but about the parts that are sold. Otherwise, the community will have a bad deal.

The common denominator in Conservative speeches was the need for speed, speed, speed—why cannot the Minister go faster; why cannot there be a finite date for the winding up? Conservative Members cannot wait to get their greedy little fingers on the people's assets.

I wondered why Tory Members wanted such speed. Was it only their wish for the assets? Being a gentle hearted man, I looked for another reason. When the Minister leaned on the Dispatch Box, he said that one of the development corporations has a printing press for the *Daily Telegraph*. Being such a friendly chap, I obtained a copy of the *Daily Telegraph*—and having read a copy, I wonder whether its statement was the reason for speed. If it continues to print such statements, I shall continue to buy it. It said about the corporations:

"in the light of evidence that they cannot raise enough money from the sale of assets to service and repay their debts."

The hon. Member for Milton Keynes (Mr. Benyon) may wish to speak to Mr. John Walker, the corporation's director of planning, who said:

"Government policies had forced the Corporation to sell 'immature assets' before they had reached their full market potential."

Will the taxpayers get a good deal? I do not think so.

If the Minister wants to prove a case, he should tell the House and the country the original cost to the taxpayer of any assets sold and the amount realised from the sale. As one hon. Member pointed out, one three-bedroomed house was being sold for £2,000 — and not to the sitting tenant. Is that a good deal for the taxpayer? I do not think very much of it. It would be interesting to see the difference between the figures before and after the Bill.

I am a very suspicious person. When the Government talk about writing off loans and giving grants, I sincerely believe that they are not writing off £650 million because they like somebody. I think that, having got rid of some of the goodies, they are left with the items on which the loans are accumulating, and to make them attractive to buyers they will have to underwrite them with the taxpayers' money.

There has been no reference in the debate to the substantial number of houses now requiring repair that were built by the magic of the market to which the Minister referred. It is the taxpayer who is being asked to underwrite the magic of the market. That must be a real embarrassment to the Government, and I would not want to cause them very much more embarrassment.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State was asked a question by my hon. Friend the Member for Houghton and Washington (Mr. Boyes). Will the Minister now reiterate a statement that he made to the House? He said:

"The corporation want to ensure that there is no costly legacy for local authorities when the corporation has completed its task and is wound up."—[*Official Report*, 16 January 1984; Vol. 52, c. 132.]

Will the Minister go further and write it into the Bill? Will he also ensure that no "costly legacy" falls upon the local authorities? No wonder we are suspicious. The Government are very keen to rate-cap and to impose financial limits on the public sector, yet the legacy to which I have referred is very likely to arise.

It is easy to look up the Parliamentary Under-Secretary's speeches. They are quite prolific. On another occasion he said:

"So, we are pressing on as fast as we can".

That is not because it is good for the taxpayer; it is because he is being pressed by his hon. Friends, so that some of the assets can be realised.

"A major element in moving towards winding-up is the sales programme. This has three aims. First, it raises capital, which

can be ploughed back into the new towns for essential public sector investment."—[*Official Report*, 25 February 1983; Vol. 37, c. 1213.]

Perhaps the Minister will tell us how much has been ploughed back. He said that the second reason was to reduce the public sector borrowing requirement. If so, what about the £600 million and the £1,750 million that we are now having to pump in? In two out of the three, the Minister scored no more than one out of 10. In the third case, he did very well. That was when he referred to transferring public assets into the private sector. I will give him 10 out of 10 for that, but I should like him to state the cost of it to the taxpayer. As I said, I am a very suspicious person, and it is the taxpayer who is suffering. The infrastructure of the new town is supplied by the taxpayer, and the private sector is moving into that area. If we take the price of the infrastructure and add it to the realisable assets, we have a completely different set of figures.

At best, clause 1 makes the Commission for the New Towns a eunuch; at worst, it makes it a stockbroker of the Secretary of State. I had hoped that someone on the Government Benches would mention that, under the Government's policies, many of the new towns have turned into job-seeking and job-providing agencies. That view is supported not only on the Labour Benches but by Conservative Members and, indeed, by the Minister.

I can do no worse than quote the speeches of some Conservative Members. If the Under-Secretary of State will not listen to me, perhaps he will listen to them. Deep anxiety is felt in areas such as mine where job-seeking is a major industry and there is a high number of unemployed. Perhaps the Under-Secretary of State will listen to the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Fallon) who said:

"They are now essentially job-seeking organisations, having divested themselves of other functions. Secondly, if they disappear at the end of next year, they should not do so without Ministers giving further thought to the gap that will be created in attracting fresh investment to the north-east. . . but in an area of high unemployment we should be careful to ensure that what we end up with is at least as good, if not better, than that which existed hitherto."—[*Official Report*, 17 January 1984; Vol. 52, c. 281-82.]

Those are not my words; they are the words of a Conservative Member. Yet there has been not one jot of thought about what will take the place of those organisations. The Under-Secretary of State and my hon. Friends the Members for Easington and for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster), to name but two, have made an important point. About new towns, the Under-Secretary of State said:

"Over the past few years they have sustained the remarkable performance of creating 20,000 or so new jobs a year".—[*Official Report*, 17 January 1984; Vol. 52, c. 278.]

What might the development corporations have done if they had been widened, brought under democratic control and given more resources? If one takes one set of figures, 3 million people are unemployed; if one takes the real set of figures, 4 million people are unemployed. The figure of 20,000 is a drop in the ocean, yet even those jobs are to be done away with.

My hon. Friend the Member for Houghton and Washington talked about the great measure for the north-east—the advent of Nissan. That project was a joint venture between the Washington development corporation, the Tyne and Wear development corporation and—I am not frightened to say it—the Government. Does any hon. Member realise that, if it had been some time since legislation such as this was passed, that type of operation would have been impossible? In all probability, under this dogmatic approach, the land would have been sold off to the private sector. Where would Nissan have gone? It would probably have gone to France or Germany. How many jobs would have been lost from the north-east? That is the type of nonsense perpetrated by the Bill.

While the Government shed crocodile tears about unemployment—we watch them here every day and on television and, if one is gullible, one could believe them—they are in a position to do something by retaining these new towns where the job-seeking agencies are so important. The Government decided, however, to do away with the new towns quickly. That will happen on a statutory date selected by the Secretary of State.

The Government have made a blatant decision to get the staff off the Government payroll and put them on to the payroll of local authorities. Once that happens, the Government will rate-cap the local authorities and accuse them of profligate spending. What will happen to all the expertise and experience gathered over the years in job seeking and job providing? Sometimes it is bitter experience, but hard lessons have been learnt. Is that experience to be wasted? Would it not be better, as my hon. Friend the Member for Easington suggested, to widen the net and give the development corporations the opportunity to provide jobs rather than waste completely the experience gathered over the years?

The difference between the Government and the Opposition is clear. The Government clearly believe that development corporations have reached the end of their life. The Opposition have grave doubts that that is the case. They have even graver doubts because nothing is to be put in their place. Instead of allowing the development corporations to continue their good work, they are to be wound up and abolished. The Government had two options. They could have transferred the services and resources to the local authorities or widened the functions of the new towns.

The Government are obsessed with abolition and the public sector. They do not set out to create anything; they pull things down. They do not plan for the long-term; they chase the fast and easy buck in the short term, and for those reasons the Opposition will oppose the Bill.

9.35 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Sir George Young): I know that I speak on behalf of both sides of the House when I congratulate the hon. Member for Tyne Bridge (Mr. Cowans) on his maiden speech from the Dispatch Box. Many of us have enjoyed his interventions in Committee, particularly on the Rates Bill 1984, when he spoke frequently and without restraint. He was good enough to give advice on racing form to those who were rash enough to take it. It might have been difficult for the Opposition environment team to replace someone of the stature of the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer), but they have succeeded in so doing.

After listening to the closing remarks of the hon. Member for Tyne Bridge, when he criticised us for attacking the public sector, one would not have thought that we were debating a Bill which increases the borrowing

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powers of new towns and urban development corporations and enables the Government to invest more resources in those bodies.

I shall try to deal with the points raised during the debate, but if I do not get round to them all I am sure that they will be raised in Committee.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) for agreeing with the bulk of what my hon. Friend said when he moved the Second Reading. The hon. Gentleman marked out a great deal of common ground between the parties on the Bill, particularly with his recognition that the Commission for the New Towns could not last for ever.

In the interval between last Thursday, when the hon. Member for Perry Barr was clearly under the impression that new towns were not part of his new portfolio, and today, he has informed himself well, as one would expect of him, but he has misread the Government's intentions when he sees the Bill as a green light for disposing of public assets at knockdown prices. The commission will rightly have a remit to sell, but the hon. Gentleman will see from clause 1(2) that we have deliberately preserved the obligation on the commission to have regard, when pursuing that remit, to the convenience and welfare of people living, working or having businesses in its towns. There is no suggestion of sales at any price. We have promised that there will be no forced sales or sales contrary to best professional advice, and we stand by that. We are looking for a sensibly based disengagement and one which achieves a fair deal for the taxpayer and those who live in the new towns. The Bill sets out the right framework for that.

The hon. Gentleman was suspicious about the powers to dispose of assets at less than the best price. There is nothing sinister about that. It enables the commission to help the voluntary sector or amenity groups by passing over buildings or community halls at less than the full market price which it might obtain if it disposed of them in the open market.

I believe that the hon. Gentleman has misunderstood clause 8, which I believe he described as the "British Airways" clause. He thought that it was to enable us to write off debts to make the assets more attractive to buyers. The financial status of the new towns, which is what the clause is about, is irrelevant to the price that is paid for any piece of property. The commission will have to obtain the best price. Whether or not there are to be sales, and whatever the price at which they are to take place, the financial position of the corporations as a whole will have to be stabilised and improved. That is the purport of clause 8.

The hon. Gentleman and some of his hon. Friends spoke much about company towns and expressed disquiet about some of the new towns being sold en bloc to one purchaser. As I think everyone knows, that has not happened in the wind-up so far, and if it were suggested, there are several safeguards for which Ministers would look before they gave their consent. For example, existing tenants of industrial and commercial property would want to continue to have good opportunities to buy their premises. We would insist on that. We would want to look at the resources of the prospective purchaser to make sure that there were no problems, such as the likelihood of his getting into financial straits. We would want to see a demonstrably good record of managing property of that type and on that scale. We would seek the safeguards which Opposition Members would want.

My hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes (Mr. Benyon) welcomed clause 8 and understood its purpose correctly. He described it as a sensible, business-like tidying up exercise. That is exactly what it is. I hope that it will put an end to some of the more sensational and misleading comments about Milton Keynes development corporation by some of the Liberals on the local council there.

My hon. Friend asked about the third generation local authorities and whether they would be in the same position on community-related assets as earlier generation towns. The answer is yes. I can give my hon. Friend that assurance. However, we would expect the local authorities, as in the earlier new towns, to play their part in building up the facilities which are usually provided by local authorities.

The right hon. Member for Halton (Mr. Oakes) was rightly concerned about the impact of the transfer on local authority finances and, particularly, on housing stock. As I think he knows, most local authorities are anxious to take over the housing stock of the development corporations, which, by and large, is housing of good quality and also offers the opportunity of worthwhile gains when it is sold under the right-to-buy provisions. The local authorities can benefit from the capital receipts. There is no question of any local authority being rate-capped as a result of taking over housing stock.

I am happy to repeat an assurance which I gave to Councillor Mrs. Lawrence, chairman of the Association of District Councils new towns committee, when I wrote to her on 1 August saying:

> "Taking first the E7 factor, as you know our overriding objective is that housing transfer should be financially neutral in its effect on a district council and this includes its effect on the council's RSG position. I can confirm that a council's RSG position will not be worsened by housing transfer."

We have a dialogue with the ADC on those points, and I hope that we can reassure it that the position of its ratepayers will not be disadvantaged by a transfer.

The right hon. Gentleman said that the Bill did nothing about providing help for local authorities taking over the housing stock. It does not need to, because we have already made clear the terms for housing transfer. The local authorities will get the same assistance as the new town corporations would have received and, by and large, the local authorities are happy with those proposals. Discussions are now taking place about transfer next year.

The hon. Member for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth (Mr. Hogg) asked about the report of the housing working party. I am assured by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland that it will be available in the next few days. Printing delays have held it up, but copies will be sent to Scottish Members representing new towns and local authorities.

The hon. Gentleman also raised a point about the ombudsman, which was raised by several hon. Members on both sides of the House. I am not sure whether it comes within the scope of the Bill, but if it does no doubt an amendment will be tabled and dealt with in Committee.

The hon. Gentleman asked whether designated areas could be extended. The answer is yes, as long as the case is made to the Secretary of State for Scotland.

My hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Murphy) spoke in the debate. I call him the new town philosopher. He made a thoughtful and forthright contribution welcoming the powers to wind up the commission and rightly reminding us of the success of the new towns. He criticised us for going too slowly. Opposition Members criticised us for going too fast. So perhaps we have got it about right.

My hon. Friend expressed concern about increases in the limits in the Bill for the urban development corporations. The development corporations in docklands and Merseyside have to put in the infrastructure. They have to invest in the area before one can get the private sector interested and investing afterwards. That is why we have to put quite a lot of money up front—there is a pump-priming role for the development corporations—to reverse the decades of decline in those areas. It is customary to set short-term limits on such public bodies to provide the opportunity to debate progress when they have to be increased. The fact that the limits are being increased is not a criticism but is to give the House a regular opportunity to debate the matter.

The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) expressed a number of concerns, such as that the activities of the development corporation should not price out the local people. I understand that, and my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Construction and I attended a meeting between Southwark councillors and the London Docklands Development Corporation in which we were able to get agreement that a site should pass from the LDDC to Southwark. I think that he will know that a high proportion—over 60 per cent.—of the first 313 homes built by LDDC in his constituency were sold to local people, so their interests are not being overlooked.

The hon. Member was somewhat dismissive of the 4,000 jobs that are being created in the docklands area, and his objection was that they were simply relocated jobs. However, the trouble was that Southwark, Tower Hamlets and the docklands were not even getting the relocated jobs —they were getting nothing. In the annual report, the chairman estimated that at least 3,860 people were employed in docklands jobs that had not been there in July 1981, and that is a cause for congratulation for the LDDC.

A number of hon. Members expressed the hope that the tenants of the industrial and commercial units should get the opportunity to buy, consistent with getting a proper return for the taxpayer. We have recently improved the guidelines to make sure that tenants have adequate notice of forthcoming sales so that they can raise finance or form consortiums to buy the assets.

My hon. Friend the Member for Chorley (Mr. Dover) asked about the arrangements for housing transfers to housing associations, which is the popular option in Central Lancashire. A framework has been agreed with the Housing Corporation and we are now working out the details, but we do not need statutory powers in the Bill. I can confirm that we shall shortly be asking Lancashire county council and the districts for their views, as required by statute, as to whether the Central Lancashire development corporation should be wound up on 31 December 1985, which is our proposal at this stage.

My hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Hawksley) raised three constituency points which I shall investigate and about which I shall write to him. Ministers are grateful for the close watch that he keeps on the development corporation.

The hon. Member for Houghton and Washington (Mr. Boyes) and a number of other hon. Members spoke about the future of the north-east towns. I met some of the councillors from his constituency this morning and his point about the Crombie terms — that is about compensation terms for housing staff—was not one of the points raised with me, and it was not said that that might inhibit the transfer. However, there are no grounds for anybody to expect Crombie terms, because the Government's intentions were clear in 1982 when it was said that Crombie terms would not be available. We are taking the first legislative opportunity to make that perfectly clear. The hon. Gentleman raised three issues about housing that were raised by the councillors—the transfer of housing, the contractual claims and the defects. I shall be taking up those points in writing with the councillors who came to see me.

The hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. Hamilton) claimed that his new town, Glenrothes, was not allowed to build houses for rent. That is Government policy, and it reflects the trend that was begun before the Government came into power. Nearly two thirds of housing in Glenrothes is public sector, and in our view that is too high a proportion. Therefore, the corporation has been told to concentrate on building for special needs, rehabilitation and private sector building. In that area, people want homes of their own and nearly 3,500 corporation houses have been sold.

Those who serve on corporations are not creatures of the Tory Government, as the hon. Member for Fife, Central implied. His local corporation is headed not by a Tory nominee but by Sir George Sharp, who has had a distinguished career as a Labour party local government politician. It also has representatives from labour local authorities in the area.

The hon. Member spoke also about the attendance of Scots Members in the debate. Although attendance is high now, it was somewhat lower earlier on in our debate. My attention has been drawn to an article in *The Times* on 27 June 1983 on attendance in the Chamber, which says:

> "The new, smaller parliamentary Labour Party must be much better organised, three of the most active Labour MPs say in a paper to be discussed at a meeting in the Commons on Thursday.
>
> Dr. Jeremy Bray, Mr. Jeff Rooker and Mr. Jack Straw argue that with only 209 Labour MPs there must be big changes in the way the Opposition whips' office is run."

It goes on to say:

> "They want attendance in the Chamber properly organized, not left to chance. The whips should be told in advance when a member is available for a debate, and for debates likely to be undersubscribed there should be a rota so that the burden does not fall on a small number, as in the past."

I see from literature put out in the hon. Gentleman's constituency that people in the area are encouraged to

> "Vote Jeff Rooker—He Gets Results",

so I am sure that there will be results in this case.

The hon. Member for Bishop Auckland held up the new town development corporations as examples of Socialist planning, but he did not explain why the Labour party opposed the establishment of the London Docklands Development Corporation and the Merseyside Development Corporation.

I hope that I have dealt with the points raised about Crombie. It would be anomalous for housing staff to continue to receive those terms when other staff of new town corporations which might be wound up the very next day would receive only the ordinary terms available to everyone. My hon. Friend the Member for Shrewsbury

[Sir George Young]

and Atcham (Mr. Conway) spoke from his experience on a development corporation and explained why opening meetings to the public might not always be in the best interests of the corporation's objectives.

The hon. Member for Easington (Mr. Dormand) pressed me about the wind-up date for the north-east new towns and I shall say more about that in a moment. He may have misunderstood the position on clause 4. That clause provides cover for money which, by and large, has already been paid to local authorities which have taken over housing stock. It does not provide powers to give money to private owner-occupiers. I shall, however, write to him about that.

I appreciate the concern of hon. Members about the north-east new towns. In June 1980 we announced the target wind-up date for the three north-east development corporations — Newton Aycliffe, Peterlee in Durham, and Washington in Tyne and Wear — as 31 December next year. This reflected the Government's general policy to wind up the remaining English new towns over the decade. I must point out to the hon. Member for Easington, however, that any date chosen by this Government was likely to be later than that which would have been adopted by the Labour Government.

In answer to a question on 22 March 1978, the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) announced that consultations had taken place with the development corporations of most of the "earlier" new towns and their local authorities and that as a result

> "I have decided on the following programme of target dates for winding up development corporations . . . Washington— 31st December 1982". — [*Official Report*, 22 March 1978; Vol. 946, c. *570*.]

That is far earlier than the date that we propose, yet the hon. Member for Easington accuses us of winding up the corporations next year for reasons of pure doctrinal dogma because they are examples of successful public enterprise. His right hon. Friend announced earlier dates for winding up eight new towns. In the light of that, dismissive gestures from the hon. Gentleman do not convince anyone.

Nevertheless, as reasonable people, we responded to representations from Opposition Members with constituencies in the north-east to review the target dates for Peterlee, Newton Aycliffe and Washington. The review took the form of consultation under the new towns legislation as to whether the purposes of the new towns had been substantially achieved.

Mr. Cowans: The Labour Administration announced earlier wind-up dates, but the policies applied since then by the Conservative Government inevitably meant that they would have to be later, because unemployment is now 10 times what it was then.

Sir George Young: The hon. Gentleman's valiant attempt to rescue his hon. Friend does not quite succeed, because the hon. Member for Easington was arguing that as a matter of principle the corporations should not be wound up because they were shining examples of Socialism in action. I was simply pointing out that the hon. Gentleman's right hon. Friend proposed to wind them up even earlier.

We took the view that the three development corporations had successfully carried out the task required of them. Nevertheless, I concede that because of the serious unemployment problem in the region there is a need for the continued promotion of the three towns' industrial potential for the development of the region as a whole. Our consultations did not close the door on the possibility of continuing the development corporations in the limited role of encouraging industrial development. However, we questioned whether the development corporation was the right vehicle for achieving that aim. We suggested some alternatives. For instance, English Industrial Estates Corporation, possibly working with the North of England Development Council, could be a successor for the development of the new towns' industrial assets. We floated the possibility of moving some new town staff to English Estates, to avoid the loss of their expertise.

My colleagues in the Department and I have been very impressed by the strength of the support for the retention of the three north-east development corporations, not least from hon. Members. I realise that a decision is now anxiously awaited, especially by the staff. The decision is not easy. We have to weigh up the implications for other new towns if the north-east appears to be singled out for special treatment, given the needs of other areas and the existence of other bodies which might be able to take over a limited role. I hope to announce a decision before the House rises for the Christmas recess.

A number of hon. Members who have spoken today have served in local government. Some of them have asked why we need development corporations when powerful and experienced elected bodies are already available. However, both Labour and Conservative Governments have found it necessary in special circumstances to set up direct public sector arms of Government simply to get things done.

If one considers the tasks achieved by the new towns and those now being undertaken by the development corporations in the inner cities, one sees that the scale of activity is simply too large for any local authority. The task of the new towns was to create entirely new communities, often in green field sites. The urban development corporations have the task of rescuing from a continuing spiral of decades of deterioration and neglect large tracts of London and Liverpool. I know that the GLC attempted to tackle the problem in London, but frankly it failed. My hon. Friend the hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Thorne) served on the joint docklands committee. He described to the House the lack of progress of that body.

It is said that the corporations are undemocratic. However, if democracy means nothing but endless wrangling — and that is what the docklands joint committee exemplified — accompanied by uninterrupted deterioration, central Government have a responsibility to step in and help local people. The development corporations do not displace local authorities. They work alongside them, and local councillors contribute to their work.

Mr. Spearing: Oh.

Sir George Young: It is no use the hon. Gentleman snorting. The leader of his council is a member of the London Docklands Development Corporation and plays a useful role on it.

The House will recall that the Labour party vigorously opposed the establishment of the urban development

corporations, which have been commended to us during the debate as examples of Socialism. In the light of the progress achieved by the corporations, the Opposition should review their position. Those who live and work in the areas concerned are grateful for the work that has been done.

The Government are proud of the new towns and of their record of support for them. That record speaks for itself: in England, £1,500 million invested in them since 1979, 100,000 more jobs created since 1979, and over 50,000 new homes built by the corporations, or on land provided by them.

We are also proud of the role which they have played in helping the Government to achieve their broader policy objectives. Since 1979, 19,000 homes have been sold to their tenants, which means that, so far, more than one tenant in five has been able to buy his own home, raising £300 million, which we have ploughed back in new investments. Nearly £500 million of industrial and commercial assets have been transferred from public ownership to private ownership, bringing about a better balance in the new towns.

Recognising the progress made towards the ideals and objectives of the new towns, we have already been able to wind up four of the corporations, and five more are expected to be wound up next year.

We have recognised the success of the new towns in the most tangible way, by adopting the new town model and applying it with vigour to some of the worst problems of our inner cities. The urban development corporations are the spiritual successors of the new towns and complete the cycle of development. After the war the new towns were needed to give our cities a breathing space, to provide homes, jobs and controlled development rather than a sprawl. Our task in the 1980s is to revitalise the heart of our inner cities. In that objective, urban district councils are succeeding where others have failed. The Bill marks a further milestone in the successful development of a unique British institution, and I urge the House to support it.

Question put, That the Bill be now read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 256, Noes 121.

Division No. 12] **[10 pm**

AYES

Alton, David
Amess, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Sir H.
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Beith, A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Benyon, William
Best, Keith
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Brooke, Hon Peter
Browne, John
Bruinvels, Peter
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon A.
Bulmer, Esmond
Carlile, Alexander *(Montg'y)*
Carlisle, John *(N Luton)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carlisle, Rt Hon M. *(W'ton S)*
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chapman, Sydney
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Clegg, Sir Walter
Cockeram, Eric
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Cranborne, Viscount
Crouch, David
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dover, Den
Durant, Tony
Favell, Anthony
Fenner, Mrs Peggy
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Freeman, Roger
Freud, Clement
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Glyn, Dr Alan
Gow, Ian
Greenway, Harry
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, E. *(B'y St Edm'ds)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Harvey, Robert
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hawksley, Warren
Hayhoe, Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Hickmet, Richard
Hicks, Robert
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Hooson, Tom
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Stratf'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howell, Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Howells, Geraint
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jackson, Robert
Jenkin, Rt Hon Patrick
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(W Herts)*
Kellett-Bowman, Mrs Elaine
Kennedy, Charles
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Gregory *(Derby N)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lawrence, Ivan
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim
Lewis, Sir Kenneth *(Stamf'd)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Peter, *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Nicholas
McCrea, Rev William
McCurley, Mrs Anna
McCusker, Harold
Macfarlane, Neil
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New F'st)*
McQuarrie, Albert
Major, John
Malins, Humfrey
Malone, Gerald
Maples, John
Marlow, Antony
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mates, Michael
Mather, Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Meadowcroft, Michael
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Hal *(B'grove)*
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Mills, Sir Peter *(West Devon)*
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Roger
Montgomery, Fergus
Moore, John
Morrison, Hon C. *(Devizes)*
Moynihan, Hon C.
Murphy, Christopher
Neale, Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, J.
Norris, Steven
Onslow, Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Osborn, Sir John
Page, Sir John *(Harrow W)*
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Paisley, Rev Ian
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Parris, Matthew
Penhaligon, David
Pollock, Alexander
Porter, Barry
Powell, Rt Hon J. E. *(S Down)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Price, Sir David
Proctor, K. Harvey
Raffan, Keith
Rathbone, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Robinson, Mark *(N'port W)*
Robinson, P. *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ross, Stephen *(Isle of Wight)*
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Sims, Roger
Skeet, T. H. H.
Smyth, Rev W. M. *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spence, John
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, John

Steel, Rt Hon David
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, J.
Sumberg, David
Taylor, Rt Hon John David
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Terlezki, Stefan
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, David
Walden, George
Wall, Sir Patrick
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Watson, John
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Wheeler, John
Whitfield, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Wrigglesworth, Ian
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Tristan Garel-Jones and
Mr. Tim Sainsbury.

NOES

Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Bagier, Gordon A. T.
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Tony
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Boothroyd, Miss Betty
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'mline E)*
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Buchan, Norman
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Carter-Jones, Lewis
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Thomas
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S.)*
Cohen, Harry
Concannon, Rt Hon J. D.
Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cowans, Harry
Craigen, J. M.
Crowther, Stan
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Donald
Dormand, Jack
Dubs, Alfred
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry
Fatchett, Derek
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Fisher, Mark
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Gould, Bryan
Gourlay, Harry
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hamilton, W. W. *(Central Fife)*
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Haynes, Frank
Heffer, Eric S.
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Ron *(Carlisle)*
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
McCartney, Hugh
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McGuire, Michael
McKelvey, William
McTaggart, Robert
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Maxton, John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Mikardo, Ian
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Miller, Dr M. S. *(E Kilbride)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Park, George
Patchett, Terry
Pavitt, Laurie
Pike, Peter
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, M.
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Robinson, G. *(Coventry NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, J. W.
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Short, Mrs R.*(W'hampt'n NE)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C.*(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Spearing, Nigel
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Thomas, Dr R. *(Carmarthen)*
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Tinn, James
Welsh, Michael

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Allen McKay and
Mr. John McWilliam.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read a Second time and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 42 (Committal of Bills).

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at this day's sitting, the Elections (Northern Ireland) Bill may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Mr. Archie Hamilton.]*

NEW TOWNS AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT CORPORATIONS BILL *[MONEY]*

Queen's Recommendation having been signified—

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the New Towns and Urban Development Corporations Bill ("the Act"), it is expedient to authorise—

(1) any payment out of the National Loans Fund, the Consolidated Fund or money provided by Parliament resulting from—

(a) increasing by, or by order made by virtue of, the Act, to an amount not exceeding £5,250 million, the limit on borrowing by new town development corporations and the Commission for the New Towns ("the Commission"); or

(b) increasing to £600 million, with power to increase by order to £800 million, the limit imposed on the amount of grants to and borrowing by urban development corporations by paragraph 8(1) of Schedule 31 to the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980;

and any payment into the National Loans Fund or the Consolidated Fund resulting from such increases:

(2) the extinguishment by order of all or any liabilities—

(a) of a new town development corporation in respect of advances made to the corporation falling within section 60*(a)* of the New Towns Act 1981, subject to a limit of £1,750 million on the aggregate amount of liabilities authorised to be extinguished;

(b) of the Development Board for Rural Wales in respect of money borrowed under section 9(2)*(a)* of the Development of Rural Wales Act 1976 for the purposes of the Board's functions in respect of the development of new towns; and

(c) of the Commission in respect of money lent or advanced by the Secretary of State to the Commission or a new town development corporation in the event of the dissolution of the Commission by the Secretary of State;

(3) the suspension by order of the repayment of the principal of or the payment and accrual of interest on sums—

(a) advanced to a new town development corporation or the Commission as mentioned in section 60*(a)* or *(c)* of the New Towns Act 1981; and

(b) specified by the Secretary of State with the consent of the Treasury;

subject to a limit of £950 million or such greater amount not exceeding £1,300 million as may be specified by order on the aggregate of the loans authorised to be suspended;

(4) the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(a) any expenses of a Minister of the Crown attributable to the provisions of the Act; and

(b) any increase attributable to the provisions of the Act in the sums which under any other enactment are paid out of money so provided;

(5) the payment of any other sums into the Consolidated Fund.—*[Mr. Archie Hamilton.]*

Elections (Northern Ireland) Bill

Considered in Committee.

[MR. HAROLD WALKER *in the Chair*]

Clause 1

VOTERS TO PRODUCE PRESCRIBED DOCUMENTS

10.12 pm

Mr. J. Enoch Powell (South Down): I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 1, line 12, leave out from beginning to second 'the' in page 2, line 3, and insert 'if'.

The Chairman: With this it will be convenient to take amendment No. 2, in page 2, line 4, leave out 'the document raises' and insert 'there is'.

Mr. Powell: As you sagely observed, Mr. Walker, the amendment hangs with amendment No. 2. It may be to the convenience of hon. Members who are taking an interest in our proceedings if I set out the effects of the amendments on the Bill. The new proposed rule, if the amendments are made, would read:

"A ballot paper shall not be delivered to a voter if the officer or clerk decides that there is a reasonable doubt as to whether the voter is the elector or proxy he represents himself to be."

A leading article in *The Times* this morning carried a sentiment from which most hon. Members would find it difficult to dissent. It states of Ulster that

"the rules by which it returns members to Westminster should be the same as the rules that return members from other parts of the kingdom."

So far that seems to be a statement of a proposition which it would be in the nature of the House to assert. As is the custom of *The Times*, which looks for the approximate middle of the fence, it then asks whether there were any qualifications which the rule admitted. Not surprisingly, moving to its accustomed seat, it said:

"Yes, provided there are strong and special reasons for variation, and"—

these are the words to which I wish to draw attention—

"provided the variation does not touch the franchise."

10.15 pm

As the Bill is drafted, the variation in the voting procedure proposed for Northern Ireland does, indeed, touch the franchise. The Bill in its present form enacts a new and additional condition for casting a vote. One must have not only the other entitlements of being an elector and not being disqualified; one must not only be entered upon the register of electors; one must also fulfil a new condition without which one will not be allowed to cast one's vote. The condition is the production of a prescribed document.

That is as major an alteration in the franchise as could be imagined. As the Parliamentary Under-Secretary conceded in his reply on Second Reading last week, these are uncharted waters. It is new in our electoral law to withhold the vote from those who are otherwise qualified to vote, except upon the condition that they produce a document. Hitherto there has been no limitation and no let or hindrance upon the right of the voter duly entered upon the register to cast his vote. How he must fulfil the condition of producing a document.

That would be wholly objectionable and a wholly unacceptable modification of the law of the franchise, especially in only one part of the United Kingdom, whatever had been the nature of the document or documents to be produced. The mere requirement that the elector shall not vote unless he has produced a defined document is a revolution, albeit a revolution restricted geographically in the kingdom, in the law of the franchise of this country. Consequently, it would send us back to the proposition that it is unjustifiable to alter the law under which the franchise is exercised in one part of the United Kingdom—Northern Ireland.

The mischief to which the amendments draw attention is not restricted to that major inroad upon the liberties of the subject and the rights of the elector. It creates an almost incredible position in the polling station by the provisions of subsection 1(B), which reads:

"Where a voter produces a prescribed document, the presiding officer or clerk to whom it is produced shall deliver a ballot paper to the voter unless the officer or clerk decides that the document raises a reasonable doubt as to whether the voter is the elector or proxy he represents himself to be."

Should the presiding officer come to the conclusion that the document raises a reasonable doubt, he will refuse to deliver a ballot paper to the voter. The voter is not only disfranchised unless he complies with the condition of producing a document, but he will be disfranchised if, on its face, the document raises a reasonable doubt in the mind of the presiding officer.

I am substituting the words "presiding officer" in my restatement of the effect of the clause for the words "officer or clerk", because in the event of doubt arising in the mind of a clerk, the matter would, under the subsequent provisions, be referred to the presiding officer. I am glad to have the Minister's assent on that. We are referring to the judgment of the presiding officer.

Therefore, let us consider, carefully and cautiously, the crucial words in the new rule:

"unless the officer . . . decides that the document raises a reasonable doubt".

It is the document that must raise that doubt. Under the clause the presiding officer is directed to look at the document and at nothing else. If that document, as it is presented to him by the would-be voter, raises in his mind a reasonable doubt, he has to deny that would-be voter the opportunity to vote.

It was suggested on Second Reading on Thursday that the presiding officer could use his common sense and that perhaps the word "reasonable" in that context may have been misunderstood. But the word "reasonable" in that context has to be interpreted in the light of the words with which it is located. It says:

"unless . . . the document raises a reasonable doubt".

That must mean a doubt that is reasonable in the light of what is in the document.

There may, for instance, be a minor imperfection in the document, something which was clearly a misprint or a mistake of some kind. Therefore, in those circumstances, the document could be held not to raise a reasonable doubt in the mind of the presiding officer who was studying it. But if that is the meaning, that only the document must be the basis of the doubt which withholds the vote from the elector, we are in a grave position indeed. For it is to be the document and the document alone, as it stands, which is not merely produced as a condition of voting, but which, if any doubt attaches to that document and to nothing else, will deprive the elector of his vote.

If the Government are going to say that I am misinterpreting the clause, I have two observations to

make. First, this is a matter too important to be left in any doubt. If it is not intended to bear the construction that I have placed upon it, it ought to be so amended that it is clear that the doubt is to be one which arises not simply from the document but from the document in the light of all the circumstances. Or, to put it in vulgar terms, to make it clear that the presiding officer is entitled to use his common sense.

If the Government are going to say that, they have gone a long way indeed. The Government are in a cleft stick. On the one hand they can say that the document and nothing else will decide the eligibility of the elector. That is to say, when my hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann (Mr. McCusker) turns up with an out-of-date medical card with the wrong address on it, the presiding officer will not look at him and say that it is his old friend Harold McCusker and that he is the chap on the register. He cannot do that.

Mr. John Hume (Foyle): The right hon. Gentleman keeps concentrating on the second half of the sentence. What is being said is that the presiding officer shall decide. Surely any human being going through the process of decision-making uses his common sense.

Mr. Powell: Yes, but it depends on what is the object of the verb "to decide". It depends on what he is to decide and all turns upon that. However, if the hon. Gentleman will bear with me he will share and no doubt enjoy the dilemma on which the Government have pinned themselves by the wording of the clause.

The first alternative is that the clause is to be interpreted strictly as I propose. The presiding officer, confronted with the obsolete medical card of my hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann, will not be able to look at the would-be elector. He will hold up the document in front of himself, rather like the Mogul emperor who had been blinded by the Rohillas and who was asked in mockery whether he saw anything. He answered, "Nothing between me and thee but the holy Koran." The presiding officer is to look only on the face of the document. He is to observe and consider nothing else.

Mr. Peter Archer (Warley, West): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Powell: If the right hon. and learned Gentleman wants to go further into the mire in which the Government are struggling, by all means.

Mr. Archer: I am listening with great admiration to the right hon. Gentleman's very clear exposition, but does he agree that if the presiding officer does not entertain a reasonable doubt, the document cannot have raised it?

Mr. Powell: Yes, I think that I can go as far as that with the right hon. and learned Gentleman. That is the case in which the elector, having had these obstacles placed in his path, is nevertheless able to exercise the franchise. But I am concerned with the case in which the "unless" condition specified in the rule is fulfilled. I return, I hope for the last time, to the predicament of my hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann. The presiding officer will have to declare that the document produced by my hon. Friend, as it specifies the wrong address, raises a reasonable doubt as to whether its holder is the person shown on the register at my hon. Friend's new and present address.

That is one of the alternatives between which the Government must choose. but that is apparently not the one that they choose. They say that that is not the interpretation. But, if it is not, I hope that they will make it much clearer than it is upon the face of the Bill before we part with it. The alternative is that the presiding officer considers other things, that he uses his judgment and that he takes into account not only the document but other matters that might reasonably raise a doubt in his mind. So a very important and wide Rubicon has been crossed by the Government upon that interpretation. They have accepted what the present electoral law does not accept, which is a presiding officer's right and duty — not merely right—to exercise his judgment and to make a decision, to use the word emphasised by the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume), in the light of his common sense, no doubt taking account of the document but not being bound by it, whether that is indeed the elector whose name stands on the electoral roll.

If that is the alternative that the Government prefer, they must think a good deal further and a good deal more stringently before they can be satisfied with the Bill. I need not remind the Minister that at present the presiding officer has no discretion whatever except to put the two statutory questions. But, having put them, he has no discretion to disbelieve the answers. Unless the legislation has the first of the two alternative meanings that I offered the Government, it is something different and is an enactment which for the first time—and, incidentally, in only one part of the Kingdom—will give the presiding officer a real discretion to use his common sense, presumably using his eyes, ears and so on, to decide whether personation is taking place.

What will the presiding officer do? Will he just apply his common sense in vacuo? Will he rely upon his knowledge of the neighbourhood and upon the fact that he knows what that person whose name is on the register looks like and that there is no resemblance to my hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann? Incidentally, I apologise, because I have over-used the example, classic though it is, presented by my hon. Friend. But does the presiding officer go by the physiognomy of the would-be voter and nothing else? Does he go by his general smell and instinct of what might be going on, or does he ask questions? I should have thought that we would not be willing for a matter of such importance to be settled by a presiding officer without him being able to put certain questions to the person asking for the vote.

What we have in the clause is either an absurdity, which should be unacceptable to the Government or any section of the House of Commons—a wholly binding document beyond which the presiding officer has no power to look —or we have a discretion, vested for the first time in the presiding officer, to smell out personation, no doubt with the assistance of a document. If, in his judgment, there is a reasonable doubt that personation is taking place, he may withhold the vote. That is both severe and far reaching.

10.30 pm

We understand that the Government have been influenced in their preparation of the legislation by the fear that presiding officers might be unwilling to shoulder the responsibility and the risk of exercising their discretion. They can hardly, thus motivated, come before the House of Commons and say that that means that the presiding officer is to exercise his discretion. It would be just as invidious, just as dangerous, for the presiding officer to

[Mr. Powell]

exercise the first as to exercise the second of those discretions—for him to say to a person presenting a document, "I do not like your document, you can take it away", or "there are certain discrepancies between this document and the register, can you give me a reasonable explanation for that?"

Mr. K. Harvey Proctor (Billericay): Is my right hon. Friend suggesting a specific or a series of specific extra statutory questions that the presiding officer may ask, in addition to the limited questions that he can currently ask, or is he advocating a general provision that the presiding officer could ask any questions to prevent personation?

Mr. Powell: The hon. Gentleman is asking the very questions to which I would be surprised if the Government were not already directing their mind. If he discovers that the answers to those questions are all bristling with various difficulties, probably that is a discovery that has already been made among those who advise the occupants of the Treasury Bench.

Merely to add to the statutory questions does not help us, because the presiding officer, under existing law, is obliged to believe an answer, however untrue, tendered to a statutory question. It would be no use simply to extend the list of statutory questions. We would have to turn the statutory questions into real questions and then enable the list of those to be extended, before we could arm the presiding officer with the powers and the duties that would make sense of the provision.

The amendment raises two of the central issues of the Bill. First, there is the question whether the franchise should be dependent upon the document. My hon. Friends and I answer that question in an unhesitating negative. We shall maintain an amendment — not necessarily this amendment, but an amendment—that will remove that blemish upon our law of franchise.

Mr. Barry Porter (Wirral, South): I tend to agree with the amendment. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that it is impossible to provide an exhaustive list of questions and documents? Might not the Government consider the amendment either at this stage or later?

Mr. Powell: I am much obliged to the hon. Gentleman I hope that his words will be persuasive in the ears of his right hon. and hon. Friends. If he will allow his eye to fall further down the Order Paper, he will find a proposed new subsection that would have the effect of enabling presiding officers to take account of documents—not necessarily a limited range of documents, but any documents—that bore upon the identity of the person in forming their judgment.

It may be that in the end the decision will have to be that the judgment of the presiding officer must be satisfied that it is indeed the person specified on the register, and that documents as well as questions may be relevant to that satisfaction. That, of course, will be very different from a satisfactory answer to the statutory questions. It will also be very different from the question of a reasonable doubt, for a reasonable doubt is not the opposite to being satisfied of a fact. It seems to me that the presiding officer ought to be satisfied of the fact that the person before him is indeed the elector before a ballot paper is given out. That is the first of the root issues which the amendments raise.

The second reason, to which I referred in reply to an intervention, is the discretion of the presiding officer. These are matters that the Government cannot leave where they stand at the moment. The new rule, in its present form, is indefensible. It has not only to be restated so that we know which alternative of the dilemma the Government have chosen. If in their dilemma they choose the only rational alternative, the Bill must be so extended as to give to presiding officers exactly that discretion which this legislature considers is right and necessary.

The Government, as I said last Thursday, will have to take the Bill away and look at it again. I was encouraged by the words which were used on Second Reading by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, when he said that "it is sensible for the Government, having heard the arguments in today's debate, to be able to give the Committee a considered view of our position before embarking on the remaining stages." —[*Official Report*, 15 November 1984; Vol. 67, c. 877.] I admit that the context of those wise words was the content of the list of prescribed documents. Nevertheless, they are words which are wise and to be recommended in their own right.

Therefore, I hope that the Government will not so arrange the conduct of this business in Committee that they are unable to have time themselves to reconsider their position in what the Minister himself called "these uncharted waters". They have set themselves a task of considerable difficulty. It is a task which will call for real determination on the part of the Secretary of State to find a satisfactory method, instead of this unsatisfactory method—if he intends to do it at all—of altering the law as it applies to Northern Ireland.

Fortunately, we know that the Secretary of State is a determined man. Those of us who had the pleasure of watching the interview on television in which he featured with his right hon. Friend the Prime Minister held our breaths when the Prime Minister turned to the right hon. Gentleman and said, "But you are a determined man, aren't you?" There we sat, holding our fingers and hoping that he would give the answer, "No". He chose, if I may say so, the easy way out, and gave the answer, "Yes". So, since we may treat this as a statutory question, we know indeed that the right hon. Gentleman is a determined man because, like the Lily of Laguna, he "says so". Will he, then, apply his determination to what he already realises are the real and unsolved problems lying upon the surface of the clause which is before the Committee?

Time is now available to the Secretary of State without prejudicing the possibility of having the legislation in place before next May. He has the time; let him use it. That is the plea with which my hon. Friends and I urge these amendments to which we have put our names and to which we are in duty bound to put our votes.

Mr. Harold McCusker (Upper Bann): I ask the Committee to bear in mind what I asked the House to consider last Thursday. Despite what we heard last Thursday and what we shall hear this evening, personation is not as widespread in Northern Ireland as some believe. Presiding officers are not required to exercise their minds every time someone comes in to vote at a polling station in Northern Ireland. At best, we are dealing with 10 per cent. and less—*[Interruption.]* We can argue about the proportions. There is no doubt that in constituency after constituency in Northern Ireland, presiding officers, polling agents and others are not worried about the abuse of personation. Last Thursday, I gave evidence of that, and

it was not contradicted. There are vast swathes of Northern Ireland where personation and especially vote-stealing are not problems.

Last Thursday, I posed the question whether the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights had changed its mind since its eighth annual report and made a different recommendation to the Government. I learnt that the commission had produced another document a few weeks previously. On reading the document, it does not appear that the commission had changed its mind to advise the Government to ask for some form of identification. Rather, the commission accepted the fact that the Government would proceed along these lines and said that it would express its view. The commission is not a body whose opinions can be lightly set to one side, yet, when talking about personation, it said:

"Proof is notoriously difficult to obtain and hard-and-fast evidence has not been produced to substantiate or disprove allegations but the weight of opinion within the majority of political parties . . . is that some form of identification should be required before a person claiming a vote is given a ballot paper."

The commission went on:

"The Commission has reservations about the merits of such a proposal but accepts that it warrants testing."

The commission expressed certain other reservations, and then said:

"there is an inherent risk that the requirement to produce proof of identity may in effect disfranchise some of the electorate. Some electors will not have ready access to identification documents of the kind proposed, and may not want to go to the inconvenience involved in acquiring identification in advance of polling day. Others may not be aware of the requirement and will arrive at polling stations without the necessary identification expecting to be allowed to vote. The Commission cannot rule out the possibility that some of these voters will be so alienated by this experience that they may never again exercise their right to vote and will be lost to the democratic process."

There is plenty of evidence that people are not voting in the numbers hon. Members generally think. In the 1982 Assembly election, which, we were told, was an election during which personation had occurred, for every person who voted in county Antrim, one did not. There was a 52 per cent. poll. That is hardly evidence of massive personation or a high motivation to go to the polls. *[Interruption.]* That may well be so, but it will not help them to believe in much else.

We are worried that we are building into the Northern Ireland electoral laws the position whereby a document would give a person the right to vote, even if that person had no right to vote. A person who identifies himself without a doubt by other means may be denied the right to vote because he does not have the prescribed document. I shall not go over the ground covered by my right hon. Friend the Member for South Down (Mr. Powell).

As soon as I had finished my speech last Thursday, I was met by a number of hon. Members from both sides of the Chamber. I was told that my interpretation of certain parts of the legislation was wrong. If the explanatory document is wrong, I need to be assured that it is wrong. Clause 1(2) states:

"(1A) A ballot paper shall not be delivered to a voter unless he has produced a prescribed document to the presiding officer or a clerk."

10.45 pm

The explanatory document expands that. It states:

"Rule 37(1A) requires that a ballot paper should not be delivered to a voter unless he has produced a prescribed document to the presiding officer or a clerk. The provision is mandatory: the presiding officer or clerk will have no discretion to permit him to vote without producing a document."

A list of documents is given. I or anyone else who goes to that polling station, and does not have one of those prescribed documents, will not be allowed to vote. I may well be able to establish that I am the person on the register. I might have all sorts of proof and I might be well known in the area. If I read this correctly, however, if I do not have a prescribed document with me—no matter how deficient the document may be—I shall not be allowed to vote.

I was told that that was a misinterpretation. I should like to know what the misinterpretation is, because, as my right hon. Friend the Member for South Down said, if we allow some discretion where will the limit be? Will the discretion be given to a presiding officer because he is dealing with a Member of Parliament, a local councillor or some other local worthy who is known in the community or when it comes to perhaps a new resident or someone who is not generally known in the community will that discretion be denied?

Is clause 1(2)(1A) as dictatorial as is stated in the explanatory document—"The provision is mandatory."? One of the prescribed documents must be produced and, if it is not, no vote will be permitted.

I illustrated the nonsense of that by referring to my right hon. Friend the Member for South Down. One of the prescribed documents is a current Great Britain driving licence. Unlike a Northern Ireland driving licence, it has no photograph. My right hon. Friend could lose his driving licence or it could be stolen from him.

Mr. J. Enoch Powell: That is unlikely.

Mr. McCusker: My right hon. Friend does not think that likely, but it could happen. Someone in the South Down area could go to the polling station where my right hon. Friend normally votes, present himself to the presiding officer and say, "I am Enoch Powell." If he produces a prescribed document—the driving licence with the name "Enoch Powell" on it—he has met all the criteria.

There is nothing on the document that is likely to raise a reasonable doubt. Is that person to be denied the right to vote as Enoch Powell because that presiding officer exercises his discretion? He will say to himself, "This is not Enoch Powell." There is no photograph on the document, and there is nothing to show that it is not Enoch Powell. He is relying on the fact that he knows an Enoch Powell. He is assuming that the person standing in front of him has acquired the document illegally. Is that the position?

Mr. Keith Speed (Ashford): That is an interesting point. If the presiding officer were in some doubt surely he could ask the impersonator for his signature. He would then perhaps find that the signature was not the same as that of the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell).

Mr. McCusker: That discretion and power is not given to the presiding officer, because the next subsection provides that

"Where a voter produces a prescribed document, the presiding officer or clerk to whom it is produced shall deliver a ballot paper to the voter unless the officer or clerk decides that the document raises a reasonable doubt".

[Mr. McCusker]

That relates to the document. The person standing there is saying, "I am Enoch Powell." He has produced a document which purports to show that he is Enoch Powell. What in the document raises a reasonable doubt? There is no photograph on that prescribed document to show that it is my right hon. Friend that the presiding officer believes that the man is trying to personate.

Unless the document has been altered or there is something on it to cause the presiding officer to ask questions, the document does not help. We want to know whether that is the right interpretation.

In the other situation that has been already described by my right hon. Friend, I can arrive at my polling station, give my name, produce my medical card and, as I showed last Thursday, my medical card would raise a reasonable doubt. The address on my medical card is not the same as my address on the register.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): May I help my hon. Friend to advance his argument? Some hon. Members may not have realised the significance of his argument, as their mental process identifies Enoch Powell with one specific person. Would he be prepared to recognise that in county Down there are at least three Martin Smyths?

Mr. McCusker: I am sure that that would add further complications. In Portadown there is only one Harold McCusker.

I have arrived at my polling station and produced my prescribed document, my medical card, but on the face of it, it would raise reasonable doubts about whether I am the person entitled to vote because the address on the card is not the same as the address on the register. What do we do there?

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): Get your medical card changed.

Mr. McCusker: I am not required to do that. Assuming that two or three days before the election I thought that that was necessary, I still would not have the time to do so. Many people might be in that situation.

I have been told to use a bit of common sense and to be reasonable about this. The presiding officer will know who I am and will use his discretion. However, are we not suggesting that the presiding officer can use his discretion where it is to the advantage of people in the community who are well known? Someone might come after me who is not well known, and also have a medical card the address on which does not coincide with the address on the register. That is highly likely. Is the presiding officer to say, "I am sorry. I know that I could accept that gentleman's document because I know him, but I am not prepared to accept yours."? I could help him by producing my House of Commons pass and could say, "If there is any doubt, here is my pass. Will that help?" [HON. MEMBERS: "It is not a prescribed document."] Indeed. It would be of no assistance. The other person behind me may work for Securicor; he may be a member of the Ulster Defence Regiment, and could produce an equally valid piece of identification, but it would be refused.

We are told that one of the reasons why pieces of identification will be refused is that it is easy to duplicate them. I do not believe that any political party, including Sinn Fein, has the means of producing hundreds of thousands of identity cards simply for the purpose of stealing votes. In all our suggestions, we hope that the presiding officers will be given discretion. If he is concerned about the prescribed document because it is not updated, he should be able to consider some other evidence or proof to help him make a judgment, but as we read the Bill and as we interpret the advice that has been given to us in the documentation that accompanies it, that discretion is missing. Unless, at this early stage, we can build in some discretion, we believe that——

Mr. John David Taylor (Strangford): I should like to bring my hon. Friend back to a point made by the hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Speed) because it is important to understand that the question of a request by a presiding officer for the signature of the person to see whether it complies with the prescribed document does not apply. In the document listed, for example the medical card or the Northern Ireland driving licence, there is no signature by the owner of those documents. Therefore, the question that was posed cannot arise. Does my hon. Friend agree about that?

Mr. McCusker: I agree with my right hon. Friend. The presiding officer has no power to ask anyone to reproduce his signature anyway.

When I first looked at the Bill, which we received at fairly short notice last week, I concentrated almost entirely on clause 1, and I think most of my hon. Friends did as well. We omitted to give much attention to clause 3. Therefore, my comments were based on the belief that it was one thing or the other; that the effectiveness of the Bill depended on the effectiveness of clause 1. When clause 1 and clause 3 are taken together, it is arguable that clause 3 will put the teeth into the Bill. Clause 3 will contain the real deterrent to the vote-stealer. That being so, I hope that the Government will seriously consider how clause 1 can be adjusted to strengthen the position of the presiding officer and to give him the discretion which at present he will not have. By giving him that discretion and perhaps enabling him to probe the potential voter, we may enable him to expose that person to the real sanction which will be behind him—the police constable, who will now have substantial power to intervene at election times, even in the polling station. The most frustrated people in areas where vote-stealing has taken place have been the local police, who in the past have had to stand there while vote-stealing took place, unable to do anything about it.

The Government are not, as I thought last Thursday, standing firm on clause 1 and unable to move. I believe that clause 3 gives the back-up power. That being so, I hope that the Government will consider making some adjustment to clause 1, because we are to inflict on over 90 per cent. of the electorate in Northern Ireland conditions which I do not think that they deserve.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels (Leicester, East): I welcome the Bill, which I believe is ideally designed for the correction of electoral abuses and cheating. It is of interest to the rest of the United Kingdom because we have problems too.

I am concerned about how easy it is to vote in Northern Ireland at present. The presiding officers must scrutinise the electoral roll far more carefully. I should like some clarification of paragraph (1A) in clause 1(2). Will everyone have to produce a document of identification? I believe that that is the case, but that the presiding officer

has very little discretion once those documents are presented to him. I agree with the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) about that.

In Leicester it has been known for unscrupulous people to follow the postman down the road, pick up electoral cards and present them at the polling station. The presiding officer must be shown certain documents which will show whether a person is who he says he is, but it is not difficult to get hold of such documents. The hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) has just shown me the Northern Ireland driving licence. It could easily be forged. Anyone could stick a photo on the driving licence. It is not embossed, and the licence that I have been shown is stapled.

The Official Unionist and Democratic Unionist parties believe in official identification cards. Even those could be forged, but they would be far better than some of the documents listed for showing to the presiding officer as guarantees of identity.

Many hon. Members may feel that the passport is an ideal form of identification. However, many people do not have passports. Recently someone in Leicester was required to present a passport as proof of identity in order to receive a DHSS payment. She reported the fact to one of the discrimination boards and was awarded over £100 in compensation, because it was considered that that was an intrusion into her liberty. I do not know what will happen if a member of the ethnic community in Northern Ireland finds himself in the same position. Discretion is far more important and, although the documents that we are considering would help to some extent, they are not exclusive. Listening to the debate last Thursday, I gathered from my hon. Friend the Minister that other plans might be examined. I hope that they will.

The presiding officer, provided that he is presented with the relevant documents, has no choice but to accept that a person is who he says he is. That is disconcerting and democratically unfair. The face of some Northern Ireland constituencies could be altered as a result. For that reason, I shall support the amendment and urge that the presiding officer be given more discretion.

11 pm

Mr. William Ross (Londonderry, East): What we really need is discretion for the presiding officer. If he is given some discretion, his role in the prevention of impersonation becomes much easier. If he is not given discretion, he will be as much use as a wooden post. He will simply not be able to ask the questions that need to be asked or to take the action the he believes needs to be taken.

If the presiding officer is not given the power that we believe he needs, a large and deserving section of the community will suffer. The people who will suffer from the application of this law will be the genuine electors. We must be clear that hon. Members and those who work to get us here are deeply interested in politics. Some of them eat, drink, sleep and breathe politics. The people who work at election time take an interest in what is going on.

What proportion of the population as a whole is deeply interested in politics? I suggest that it is small. The vast majority take an interest in politics only when the papers associated with a coming election pop through the door. It is surprising how many of them never read or even open the carefully produced election material. The result is that such folk have not read the warnings in the newspapers or those issued by the chief electoral officer as they think it is something to do with the election and put it on the mantelpiece behind the clock, into the fire or in the dustbin. On the day of the election, a large proportion of those who go out to vote—despite the best efforts of parties and officials—will arrive at the polling station not knowing that they must have a certain document. Some will have come out eagerly and willingly to do their duty for their party, others will have come out simply because the neighbours might talk about them if they did not and still others will have turned up simply because they intended to go shopping anyway and the polling station was on the way. Many are old and many are not used to dealing with officialdom. As all of us who have been party workers know, they arrive in their hundreds not too sure what they are to do. They go into the polling station and are confronted by an official and the agents of various candidates. The voters get flustered. Those of us who have been at election counts have seen that reflected in votes when the boxes are tipped up. Such folk are then asked to produce a specified document of which they have never heard. They will then be told to go home and get it because there is nothing that the presiding officer can do under the law if they do not have it. Some may go to their party representatives outside the polling station, who will also tell them that they need a document.

The voter may say, "There is no way I can find it. Anyway, the children are coming home from school for tea"; or "My man is coming home from work and we are going out tonight. I am sorry, we shall not be back"; or "I don't feel like coming back after the way I was treated. I have been voting for the past 40 years". In Northern Ireland it seems like every year. Or the voter may say, "No one has ever asked me for these things before and now I'm suddenly being told to produce it. What is more, I am being told by the headmaster of the school who has taught my children and grandchildren. He knows me. I saw him at church last Sunday. He didn't tell me then that I had to produce my medical card. I don't know where it is, anyway."

The hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) represents a smaller area than many of us, although it is densely populated. He knows of the genuine difficulty of trying to contact every elector to tell him what the issues are and what he must do. That must be done on every doorstep in every constituency in the two or three weeks leading up to the election, and it will have to be done by various party workers. People are not willing to spend time reading all the bumf that they receive, least of all that from the electoral officer.

In those circumstances, vast numbers of electors will go away and not return to the polling station. The end result will be that the total percentage poll in all constituencies will decrease with an awful crash. I am not so sure that the Sinn Fein vote will drop so dramatically, which will enable it to say that, instead of winning only 10 per cent. of the poll, it has won 15 per cent., although its numbers are restricted.

Mr. Archer: The hon. Gentleman has deployed persuasively the arguments for accepting that it might be oppressive to ask ordinary people who do not spend their time reading political documents to produce one of a range of documents. Does he agree that that argument would apply a fortiori to requiring them to produce one specific document, for example, an identity card?

Mr. Ross: No, I do not believe that the same arguments would apply. An identity card would not be presented in the same way. It would be more widely publicised and every person would receive not one but two or three official documents telling him where he had to go with proof of his identity to collect his new identity card. People would not be as unaware of a single identity card which everyone had to have, carry and produce when asked. That is a totally different ball game. A citizen is not required by law to have a range of documents on his person. He may be asked for his driver's licence if he is driving his car, but he can produce it within two or three days. A single specified identity card is a totally different kettle of fish.

I turn now from the innocent, old grandmother or housewife who has appeared at the polling station and been refused entry to the organised person—organised for a militaristic campaign. The hon. Member for Foyle lives in Londonderry and knows some of the people who organise such things and their capabilities. He will agree that "militaristic" means very militaristic, highly organised, highly disciplined and prepared as though for battle. That is what they consider it to be. Those people will not be put off by officialdom. They have spent their lives fighting officialdom in every form in which it confronts them. They are organised for personation. They have probably sent one or two people through the polling station early in the day to find out what the position is. I shall return to the mechanics of personation as I understand them. They know precisely what to do. They will collect various specified documents, and, although I believe that the specified documents will restrict their movements to some extent, they will not eliminate personation completely. They will be able to carry on fairly effectively with their personation procedures.

From what has been said by several hon. Members in the House last Thursday and in interventions today, it appears that the general perception of people here is that the presiding officer has discretion. As has already been proven by my right hon. and hon. Friends, that is incorrect. The presiding officer does not have such discretion; therefore, the general perception upon which people have based their judgments of the Bill is wrong. Only when they get it clear in their minds as to what the Bill says will they begin to realise its shortcomings, and the difficulties that it poses for those who wish to cast their votes in Northern Ireland.

Even if an official suspects that the document does not belong to the person who presents it, he must hand over a ballot paper. That brings me to the present long stop on personation in the polling stations. The long stop is the candidates' representatives, who are there specifically to stop personation by their opponents or, for that matter, by anyone else. The candidate's agent is there to represent his candidate's interests, and he is allowed to use his knowledge and discretion—something that the presiding officer cannot do at present, and which he will not be able to do under the Bill.

To give an example, a queer-looking character walks into the polling station and says, "I am Johnny Smith, and here is my driving licence which shows that I am Johnny Smith." If it is a perfectly valid document, no matter how it has been obtained, the presiding officer must immediately hand over a ballot paper. If the candidate's agent knows his business and is alert, he can say, "Wait a minute; I do not think that you are Johnny Smith." He can then ask the presiding officer to put the statutory questions. That is an exercise of knowledge and discretion which the presiding officer cannot carry out.

The hon. Member for Foyle will remember that in the elections to the Assembly in his constituency one person was arrested for personation. He was arrested not because of the activities of the presiding officer, but because of the activities of one of my party's agents, who had an active register that showed that the individual apparently asking for the ballot paper had died three weeks before. His obituary notice had appeared in the newspaper, and his name was taken off the register. That is a measure of what has to be done to stop such activities in Northern Ireland, or, for that matter, elsewhere if personation were to be practised on a large scale in other parts of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Bruinvels: Surely the problem is that there are insufficient polling agents, or what we call personation officers. Was not that an isolated incident which the officer was able to help with because the obituary notice was in the paper? The point is that the Bill will stop the need to have so many personation officers.

11.15 pm

Mr. Ross: I could not agree. In some respects the role of the personation agent will be even more important now because the presiding officer does not have discretion. As I have already said, in certain circumstances the only long stop is the personation agent who can ask that thestatutory questions be put and then ask for individuals to be arrested if he is sure of their ground.

I know that the hon. Gentleman has taken considerable interest in Northern Ireland, but he clearly does not understand the amount of organisation that goes into stopping personation there. It is the practice to man as many polling booths as possible. Every booth, if it is humanly possible, is manned by at least one and, if possible, two or more named persons so that they will at least be able to come and go for their tea and keep a careful eye on who is coming in and out of the polling station.

The Committee will appreciate that the only folk who are of any real use at that work are those who live in the areas and who know the individuals on their section of the electoral register. It is not easy. It is difficult. It takes a lot of people. But if enough people are interested, it can be done because we do it every election.

That is all very well if we are talking about an isolated school in a rural area or the small village where there are perhaps only one or two booths and where the personation agents know between 75 and 90 per cent. of the individuals. A person who has lived in a small village or rural area all his life will naturally assume that a neighbour down the road whom he knows, knows him. In those circumstances, the possiblity of personation is greatly reduced. In fact it becomes almost impossible so long as the personation agents are prepared to do their job.

All people engaged in the work are warned of certain dangers before they begin. First, there is the rush hour. That is at tea time. At some time between 5 o'clock and 7.30 most people in Northern Ireland decide that they will go to the polling station having finished work either before or after they have their tea. All at once the polling agent, presiding officer and other officials are confronted with a steady stream of people passing rapidly through the polling station.

If there is only one box there will probably be two booths at which people mark their X or one, two, three or four—that abominable system. Many people come at that time. Polling agents must be alert at that point to make absolutely certain that they get the numbers right and that they react quickly to ensure that the doubtful folk are challenged.

That is one problem. The other problem arises early in the morning, as soon as the polling booths open. If someone is going to personate, he should try to organise a rush then, because perhaps not all the personation agents will be present and other folk may not have pulled their fingers out and got themselves organised. Consequently, a few people can be shoved through, and the presiding officer has no choice but to accept them. Under the Bill, he may well be a bit inhibited, but not very much.

There are a considerable number of Republicans in my constituency, and during the elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly there was a fair showing of them around the school gates. Inside, the polling booths were fairly well manned. On that day, they had a tremendous turn out. But it is a mixed community and there are enough folk there to stop large-scale personation. Consequently, in the morning of the 1983 general election none of them was there. In that school, the Sinn Fein representatives were mighty thin on the ground. I wondered where they were, but then I heard of the massive personation taking place and being attempted in the Foyle constituency, only 18 or 19 miles away. One wondered where they had been and what they had been up to, especially when they started to turn up in full force at about 3 pm. It seemed to me that their organisation was such that all their party workers had been shoved into one relatively small area to do what needed to be done for their candidates.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Is the hon. Gentleman arguing for greater discretion to be given to the presiding officer, or for what he describes as personation agents to be an official part of the electoral scene in Northern Ireland? He seemed to start by arguing for greater discretion for the presiding officer, but for the past few minutes he has concentrated almost entirely on the fact that perhaps personation officers should have a mandatory role that is written into the Bill so that they can play their part in elections in Northern Ireland. I am unclear as to the exact line that he is taking. However, I deplore the legislation and would like to see Northern Ireland legislation in line with the legislation to be enacted for the rest of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Ross: Not for the first time I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, who has been such a friend of Northern Ireland over the years. I was simply trying to explain the mechanics of a large-scale personation campaign and the measures that need to be taken to combat it. It can be combated, but it takes a lot of hard work. I am not in favour of expanding the rights of personation agents because, after all, they live in the community and act as agents for their candidates or political parties. They are recognised and known by all concerned as such, and are expected by all parties to carry out their duties competently.

At present discretion is withheld from the presiding officer. But unless he is given the discretion that the personation agent possesses, there will be enormous problems for the ordinary elector wishing to cast his ballot. I have already mentioned the position in a small rural community, but let us take the other extreme, and the example of a large housing estate where there are eight or nine boxes.

Whenever tea time comes in such an area, there will be literally hundreds of enthusiastic electors arriving, many of them having been told that their old aunty, grannie or mum has been refused her ballot paper, and many of them will not be in the best of temper. What will the position be outside the polling station? What will happen when many Unionists arrive having heard reports from their families—this applies to nationalists, and no doubt the supporters of the hon. Member for Foyle will be in the forefront of the furious crowd—that amount to grossly inflated stories that have been passed on from the newspapers and the radio about the difficulties that voters are experiencing in casting their votes? They will be told that hundreds and perhaps thousands of electors are being refused ballot papers for a variety of reasons. The hon. Member for Foyle can expect a riot outside many polling stations if those circumstances prevail. That, I fear, is the natural consequence of many electors being refused their ballot paper in the highly charged atmosphere that is bound to arise on such an evening.

That must be prevented. That must not be allowed to happen or develop. I have always believed that prevention is better than cure, and so we must ensure that the law is not an ass and is, in fact, effective. Clause 3 will stop what was described on Thursday as benign personation. When those who have practised that form of voting are made aware of the effect of the Bill and their attention is drawn to the severe penalties to which they will be liable, that form of personation will be wiped out. That means that future personation will take the form of militaristic Sinn Fein personation, which is the most difficult practice to stop. However, we are all agreed that it must be stopped for the good of the Province. It must be stopped in a proper, workmanlike and efficient manner. It must be stopped by tying the individual to the name on the electoral register. That is the only way to stop it.

I fear that militaristic personation can be stopped only by the elector having a document which is not voluntarily in his possession and which everyone must carry. It must be supported by wider discretion being given to those who are officiating in the polling station. They must be allowed to use their own eyes and ears.

I think that we all appreciate that the Government want to take the heat and pressure off the presiding officers and other officials by saying to each electorate, "You must produce a paper that is neutral." It is thought that that will remove, for their own protection, discretion from presiding officers. That will not work and it cannot work. Presiding officers must be granted a larger measure of discretion—they are being paid to do the job and we expect them to do it—or they must be shown a piece of paper that everyone must carry, an identity card.

It is a great failing of human nature, especially in Northern Ireland, that we all want to find an easy way out. We all want to find a simple remedy. Many easy solutions have been tried in the past 15 years, but they have not worked. If personation is to be stopped, it must be brought to an end properly and effectively, or we shall be the laughing stock of the Republic. I want personation stopped. I want militaristic personation—the theft that has been carried out by the paramilitaries—stopped by this measure, and it must be done effectively. I fear that

[Mr. Ross]

that will not happen as the Bill stands. If the Government go down the road that we have chosen, there is a good chance that much personation will be stopped and the Bill will be immeasurably improved.

11.30 pm

Sir John Biggs-Davison (Epping Forest): I support the amendment tabled by the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) and I shall make two brief observations. I understand the urgency with which the Government have introduced the Bill. They want it on the statute book in good time for the local government elections in May next year. That gives time for reflection, and Ministers will be considering what was said on Second Reading and in Committee.

The argument is strong for such a measure to apply to the United Kingdom as a whole. My hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Bruinvels) told us what happened in his constituency. We were not all aware of that. There has been a tendency for Ministers to underestimate the extent of personation on this side of the water. I wish that a Minister from the Home Office could be here, because lessons can be learnt. Advice can be given by different Departments concerned withthe holding of elections.

A number of hon. Members have argued the case for identity cards being held by British citizens throughout the United Kingdom. We shall not achieve that overnight, but identity cards exist in the rest of the European Community and I do not understand why such heavy weather is made of the idea here. I cannot for the life of me understand why identity cards in the pockets of hon. Members, public servants, members of the armed forces and the police should not be added to the list of prescribed documents. Attention should be paid to the list of prescribed documents, because it is unsatisfactory.

The presiding officer must be trusted to exercise a degree of discretion. The presiding officer is often drawn from the teaching profession and is respected. We are talking about a man or woman of integrity who is well known in the neighbourhood and who knows the neighbourhood well. As the hon. Member for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross) said, the use of such discretion can be difficult or dangerous, but that is no argument for depriving presiding officers of all discretion. He or she should have discretion when discharging the duties of a presiding officer.

Mr. Clifford Forsythe (Antrim, South): In considering whether voters should produce evidence of their identity, it is not good enough to say that of course it is necessary because of the folklore that has grown up over the years.

The stories and jokes include the claim that in some Ulster constituencies candidates hold their final rallies at the local cemetery and that the personation experts of opposing parties hold eve-of-election meetings to decide which of their respective dead should rise for polling day.

We must look at the facts and decide logically what should be done. There is an old saying, "Vote early, vote often" in Ulster, and there are stories of busloads of personators coming in from the Republic to vote in border constituencies. It has been said that police raiding drinking clubs have found bundles of voting cards waiting to be distributed to willing and unwilling helpers.

It would help to consider the facts. The report of the chief electoral officer says that in the Assembly elections, 26 people were arrested for personation, mostly in Fermanagh and South Tyrone and in Belfast, North and Belfast, West. In the 1983 general election, 149 persons were arrested in Northern ireland and 108 were subsequently charged. A total of 762 tendered ballot papers were issued at the Assembly elections and 949 such papers were issued at last year's general election. More than half of the papers issued at the general election were handed out in Foyle and Belfast, West.

The constituencies that issued most tendered ballot papers at the general election were Foyle, with 386, Belfast, West, with 240, Belfast, North, with 111, and Newry and Armagh, with 55. Antrim, East and Upper Bann issued no tendered papers and North Down and Antrim, South issued two each.

The number of tendered ballot papers gives some idea of the number of stolen votes, but it is well known that not everyone who has had his or her vote stolen asks for a tendered ballot. It may be claimed that as the average Northern Ireland constituency has 60,000 electors, the number of tendered ballots issued in recent elections would have no effect on the results. However, the standing advisory commission on human rights points out that at the 1983 general election, four Northern Ireland constituencies were won with majorities of less than 3,000. In two constituencies, the majorities were less than 600, so tendered ballots could be significant there.

The figures for tendered ballots—191 at the 1973 Assembly elections, 762 at the 1982 Assembly elections and 949 at the 1983 general election—seem to show that the Sinn Fein vote could have included 20 per cent. personated votes. At the time of the two by-elections in Fermanagh and South Tyrone in 1981, when Sinn Fein had majorities of 1,446 and 2,230, it was said that the number of personated votes could have been as high as 4,000.

The folklore cannot be proved, and we should not regard the whole of Northern Ireland in the same way. Problems exist only in some areas. It is unfortunate that because of what is happenning in some parts of the Province we have to consider legislation that may disenfranchise some voters. We should not allow this House, the democratic process in the United Kingdom, to be influenced by a bogus party such as Sinn Fein, so that we disenfranchise any citizen of the United Kingdom. Any legislation for any part of the Kingdom should be the same for all parts of the Kingdom.

Having studied the figures, we could arrive at the conclusion at which the Government have obviously arrived in bringing forward the Bill. Legislation should be brought forward because it is right to do so and not because of pressure from those who believe in the bomb and the gun rather than the ballot box. I support the amendment which, if carried, would clear the way for later and more effective amendments.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the Bill could influence elections in Northern Ireland in a worse manner than personation may affect them? People who legitimately should be allowed to vote will not be allowed to vote, so there is a false and undemocratic result in certain constituencies.

Mr. Forsythe: I agree with that, and it is something of which we are very much afraid. A gainfully employed

man would have no benefit book, no pension book; he may not drive so he has no driving licence; he has no passport because he does not go on holiday, and his medical card bears a former address. How does he obtain a vote at the polling station? He does not have any of the prescribed documents.

If we make the mistake of bringing forward weak legislation, which will make the position worse, we will be in a more difficult position than when we began this process. That would be an awful mistake for this illustrious House of Commons to make. The responsibility that will be placed upon the presiding officer is great, and we wonder about the wisdom of putting such pressure on people who do a magnificent job on polling day. We would probably end up with a much lower vote if the measure is introduced.

There is no way to identify a voter either by age or sex except by inference from the name on the register. The Government should consider that.

11.45 pm

Mr. Proctor: I support the sentiments of the hon. Member for Antrim, South (Mr. Forsythe) and his right hon. and hon. Friends from his party who have spoken to this group of amendments.

I voted for the Second Reading of the Bill, with reservations on detail, and those reservations have been amplified by almost every speaker in the debate on the amendments.

In principle, the argument whether we should have identity cards has in the past been finely balanced. I believe that the use of an identity card throughout the United Kingdom would now be more acceptable than it was five or 10 years ago, bearing in mind the nature of the documents that we carry with us from time to time. The weakest argument for identity cards that I heard tonight was that it was common in all other member states of the European Community. There are now other and stronger arguments. It is clear that that alternative is not available to meet the Government's predicament in the local government elections next year, and we cannot clasp it to our breasts tonight as a saving grace.

It seems to me that in principle it would be best if that which we propose for Northern Ireland with regard to personation were to pass the litmus test it was applied at the same time throughout the rest of the United Kingdom. I hope that my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State will talk to his Home Office colleagues and tell them of the view that has been expressed tonight that legislation on personation might usefully be spread to the rest of the United Kingdom.

The Chairman: Order. The hon. Gentleman must confine himself to the Bill and to the amendments before the Committee.

Mr. Speed: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Proctor: I cannot give way to my hon. Friend on a point on which I have been ruled not to be in order, but I shall allow him to intervene.

Mr. Speed: It seems that one of the problems, whether in Northern Ireland or in the United Kingdom as a whole, is the disparity between documents in Northern Ireland and other parts of Britain. The driving licence——

The Chairman: Order. Having heard his hon. Friend called to order, the hon. Gentleman must not himself seek to go beyond the same point.

Mr. Speed: On a point of order, Mr. Walker. The driving licence — one of the documents that we are discussing—is a prescribed document. I am suggesting to my hon. Friend that if the driving licence in Northern Ireland, which is a prescribed document, were more in line with the driving licence in the rest of the United Kingdom, some of the drawbacks legitimately mentioned by Opposition Members would not——

The Chairman: Order. If the hon. Gentleman will look at the Amendment Paper he will see that his point has some relevance to a later amendment, but not to the groups of amendments now before the Committee.

Mr. Proctor: I am on the horns of a dilemma, but I shall keep in order, and I am sorry if I offend my hon. Friend in so doing.

There needs to be an answer other than the one contained in the Bill as it is before us. The answer seems to relate to a combination of factors. The giving of more discretion to the presiding officer is an important ingredient which has to be considered. Indeed, in his speech on Second Reading the Secretary of State said as much when he said that the statutory questions which presiding officers could currently put to prospective voters are very limited indeed.

My right hon. Friend explained what the two questions were and went on to say:

"No inquiry as to the right of any person to vote, other than the above questions, may be made. The voter must not be asked, for example, to spell his name. Nor may a voter be asked if he has been bribed or whether he has done anything which, if he does vote, will render him liable to a prosecution."—[*Official Report*, 15 November 1984; Vol. 67, c. 811.]

Giving extra discretion to a presiding officer to ask further specific questions or making a general statutory provision to allow that officer to ask any question he wishes if he has a reasonable doubt that the person presenting himself as a voter is not the voter on the electoral roll may involve a discretionary — not a mandatory — power to ask the prospective voter to produce any range of documents or any documents which the presiding officer thinks the voter should have if he is the person he claims to be. A discretionary, rather than mandatory, production of documents may well be an important ingredient in sorting out our dilemma.

My hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest (Sir J. Biggs-Davison) talked about the prestige of the presiding officer, and I concur with his view. Should we consider arming presiding officers with not just statutory provisions but information on past examples of how other people have perpetrated impersonation? Should we not train presiding officers in what to look for in matters of impersonation. What training is given to presiding officers?

I ask my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State to consider seriously taking the Bill away and having further discussions about the detail before we proceed. I ask him to consider again whether the precise details in this part of the Bill meet the principle for which I was glad to vote on 15 November.

Rev. Martin Smyth: I thank the hon. Member for Billericay (Mr. Proctor) for explaining so clearly the worries of some hon. Members about the implementation

[Rev. Martin Smyth]

of the Bill. I should like to think that before the debate concludes the Under-Secretary of State will give us an understanding that the Government are now prepared to take this measure back and return on Report with improved drafting so that we are better able to improve the Bill. I echo the point made by the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) on Second Reading, when he said that some of us were concerned lest we are throwing out the baby with the bath water.

The amendment deals with two particular points: first, it pleads for more discretion to be given to the presiding officer; and, secondly, it tries to remove the difficulty some of us face concerning the use of mandatory documents.

During his presentation speech on 15 November the Secretary of State turned down the concept of an identity document, because some people may refuse to use such a document. It would still be valid for the same approach to be used in the Bill. It might be argued in law that instead of having to produce one specific document there should be an alternative. It is an infringement of the right to exercise the franchise to say that someone should be on the electoral register and be in possession of whatever might be stipulated.

The Opposition are keen to see some means of strengthening the role of the presiding officer. While in the past we had men and women who had resided for many years in a community and knew the general movement of people in the community, there have now been changes of presiding officers and, as the hon. Member for Billericay said, they are insufficiently trained. They are not as au fait with the community as some of their predecessors. Therefore, if there are to be documents to identify the would-be voter they must be reliable.

When the Under-Secretary replied on 15 November he said that he was advised that

"the wording has the effect not of asking the presiding officer blindly to follow the evidence of the document but of enabling him to apply his common sense and judgment in coming to a conclusion whether in practice there is a reasonable doubt."—[*Official Report*, 15 November 1984; Vol. 67, c. 877.]

I wonder who gave the advice. Was it those who drafted the wording? I was reminded of an old adage that counsel's opinion was only an opinion until it was tested in law. There is an element of doubt in the interpretation given to us in the Minister's reply when one considers the mandatory prescription contained in the Bill. It is the document that raises the doubt. Some of the documents that have been prescribed would undoubtedly raise doubts. How will the presiding officer satisfy himself that the person who has come to vote is the person that he or she claims to be?

I ask that further consideration be given to how we can strengthen the electoral process without hindering people who wish to vote. Those of us who have argued that the matter should be dealt with in the context of the United Kingdom as a whole are on strong ground.

As I understand it, we shall shortly be having the Representation of the People Bill. This matter could be taken on board at that time. It is being brought in now so that subordinate legislation can be introduced to deal with the Northern Ireland local government elections in May.

This is a fundamental issue. Every citizen of the United Kingdom who exercises his franchise in an election for this House should be treated the same. I believe that that is inherent in our national identity. I hoped that the cry from the hon. Member for Epping Forest (Sir J. Biggs-Davison) would have had a more permanent effect because I thought that I saw an apparition from the Home Office. We should then be able to legislate on the franchise for the nation as a whole.

Therefore, I urge the Minister to give us an assurance that the Government are prepared, having heard the arguments, none of which has yet been refuted, to think again and to come back on Report with something that would be more workable in Northern Ireland.

12 midnight

Mr. Peter Robinson (Belfast, East): What a topsy-turvy world we live in, where the Government bypass the logical and opt instead for the near impossible, and where, instead of punishing those who are guilty of personation, they make it more difficult for people who genuinely want to vote.

The logical solution to the problem is, first, to recognise, as hon. Members have in the debate and on Second Reading, that there are two distinct types of personation. There is the personation of the dead and the non-voter, which is common to all parts of the United Kingdom. The hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Bruinvels) said that it happened in his constituency, so if the Secretary of State believes that the Bill is necessary for Northern Ireland for that type of personation it will become the Elections (Northern Ireland and Leicester) Bill, because there seems to be a significant problem there, too.

The second type of personation concerns those who are guilty of vote stealing. They grab the votes of those who they are aware will come out to vote later, and they get there before that person can claim his rightful vote. It is clear, as the hon. Member for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross) said, that such personation is a militaristic campaign.

The first type of personation can be dealt with by having more stringent punishment of those who are found guilty. That would dissuade such personators from committing that offence. With regard to the militaristic campaign, there is only one way that the Government will ever deal with Sinn Fein, and that is to face up to the reality that it, being an integral part of the Irish Republican Army, must be proscribed. Let the Government be under no illusion. Sinn Fein is under the army command of the IRA. It is every bit as much a part of the IRA movement as the people who shoot on the streets.

Therefore, the way to deal with Sinn Fein is not to try to make life more difficult for the genuine voter, but to deal with that organisation by way of proscription. My argument that the Government are making it more difficult for the genuine voter was amply demonstrated by the hon. Member for Londonderry, East, who put each one of us in the place of a person coming to vote in the circumstances that would pertain on polling day in Northern Ireland. Having learnt that mother or grandmother had been turned away, angry people turn up at polling stations wanting to know why and the circumstances in which they were denied their vote.

That might cause a mild ripple in Leicester. I can assure the Secretary of State that it would cause significantly more than that in Northern Ireland. I warn him now, as I have on many other occasions, though my warnings may not be heeded, that the polling day in May will be a most

interesting experience for him if he persists with the Bill, unamended. I trust that he will not succumb to that undoubted folly.

It is the view of hon. Members on both sides of the House that personation must be tackled. We do not run away from the need to do so, though unfortunately it appears that the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) has done just that tonight. However, those who believe that we have a duty to ensure that people can claim their vote will address the business that we are now considering in Committee. We want steps to be taken to make personation more difficult.

Of course I agree wholly with amendment No. 2 because it is identical to amendment No. 18, tabled by my hon. Friends and myself. I had therefore hoped that the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell), who introduced amendment No. 1, would concentrate more on amendment No. 1 than on amendment No. 2. However, I gathered from what he said that the two amendments are closely linked. The second amendment can stand on its own, but the first needs to be linked with the second if it is to be effective.

The effect of amendment No. 2 cannot be denied. It is all very well for the hon. Member for Foyle to say that the presiding officer or clerk should use his common sense and should be able to use the evidence of his eyes, which may suggest to him that the person claiming to be the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. McCusker) is indeed the hon. Gentleman—who has been much abused in this debate. Unfortunately, the Bill, unamended, would not allow that degree of flexibility to the presiding officer. Although the presiding officer may be acquainted with the hon. Member for Upper Bann, he may not use the evidence of his eyes. He may say, "Hello, Harold. I hope you are having a good polling day"; but if the hon. Gentleman has moved four times since the medical certificate was issued the presiding officer cannot accept it and the hon. Gentleman will be denied his vote. The Government cannot say, therefore, that the franchise is not involved.

It is ludicrous that a presiding officer who knows an individual by sight—and this often happens, as most presiding officers are members of the local community—may not use the evidence of his own eyes, as well as the documentation, in awarding a ballot paper to the would-be voter. I do not think that that can have been the Government's intention. I hope that the Minister will be willing to say so, and will show willingness to make changes.

Mr. J. Enoch Powell: If the Government say that the presiding officer may use the evidence of his eyes, they must say that he can use it negatively as well as positively. They will have to vest in the presiding officer a presumption to say on sight that someone is not the person who appears on the electoral register. The attribution of that form of common sense will carry the Government a great deal further than they imagine.

Mr. Robinson: Yes, and, although I have dealt so far only with the evidence of the eyes, there is also the obvious question that the document may name "James H. McCusker" and the electoral register may give the name as "Harold McCusker". It might be proper for the presiding officer to ask the prospective voter, "Does 'H' stand for Harold, and is there some reason why the name 'James' is not included in the electoral register?" before he was satisfied that a ballot paper should be produced. However, under the Bill, the presiding officer may not do so. He can use only the documentation in front of him. The Government have landed in an unholy mess by going for a prescribed list of documents. There is only one way in which the job can be done properly, neatly, officially and fairly, and that is to introduce a purpose-made identity card. Of the list of documents given in the notes on clauses, one has a photograph whereas another does not one has an address whereas another does not, so it would be right for every elector to have the same type of documentation as required by the Government.

As the problem of impersonation is not unique to Northern Ireland, provision should be made for the whole of the United Kingdom. Difficult though I should find it if one hon. Member could enter these doors having been elected by voters who subscribe to one list of rules and regulations while another hon. Member's electors had a less onerous list of regulations, I should be prepared to accept that if the Government were to accept purpose-made identity cards.

I therefore have some difficulty in accepting amendment No. 1 because I do not think it allows for such an eventuality should the Government have a Damascus road experience. I shall therefore wait with interest to hear what the Minister says to see whether such a proposition is even faintly possible. If he gives me that element of hope, I shall be happy to vote against the amendment. If he does not, I shall support both amendments.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Nicholas Scott): We have had a wide-ranging debate on the narrow point of the discretion which might be exercised by presiding officers in judging whether somebody is the person he presents himself to be when asking for a ballot paper.

The Committee will nevertheless expect me to deal with some of the more substantial points that have been raised. The Government do not have a closed mind. I have listened with care to many of the issues that have been raised. If it is possible to clarify more closely the intention of the Bill by legislation, the Government will not shirk from doing so. We shall consider what has been said today, and we are prepared to discuss the matter more widely. However, I believe that the principle upon which this part of the Bill is founded, the intention of the Bill and its wording meeting the questions that have been put by several right hon. and hon. Members.

I hope that I shall not be out of order in responding to one particular point. As I understand it, amendments have been ruled out of order because they deal with whether the Bill should be extended to the whole of the United Kingdom. Several hon. Members have said that it should be, so perhaps I should respond to that view. It is not for me to say whether it should be, but I repeat what I said on Second Reading. No evidence has been presented to my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary which suggests that there has been the scale of personation and electoral abuse on this side of the water which it is commonly accepted exists in the Province of Northern Ireland.

The right hon. Member for Down, South (Mr. Powell) mentioned a leading article in *The Times*, but he did not mention the leader in *The Daily Telegraph*, of 7 November which concluded an assessment of the Bill thus:

[Mr. Nicholas Scott]

"The idea is to make voters carry passports or other means of identification (but not including death certificates). This is a good idea; admittedly, it involves treating Northern Ireland as different from other parts of the United Kingdom, but in this respect it most certainly is."

Coming from a newspaper which has consistently said that Northern Ireland ought to be treated in most respects on a par with the rest of the United Kingdom, I think that we should take that judgment seriously.

Since 1981 there has been widespread electoral abuse in Northern Ireland. On Second Reading all parties agreed that that was the case. The solution that electors should have to produce a document to obtain a ballot paper is central to the Bill's approach. It is mandatory. However, it is not new. It has not been sprung on the House during the past few days or weeks. All parties have know about it for two and a half years.

12.15 am

In the intervening period we have continued to receive representations, including some from the Official Unionist party, that that approach was in line with its thinking. I have answered at least one parliamentary question on the subject. I have been quoted in public print, as was my right hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Mr. Prior), as saying that we intended to produce a Bill on these matters. No one interested in the question of personation in Northern Ireland could have been under a misapprehension about our intention to introduce legislation that would require the production of one of a range of documents before a ballot paper could be issued. Every opportunity was available to representatives and parties to make the kind of points which are only now being raised.

Mr. J. Enoch Powell: Will the Minister be so obliging as to allow my right hon. Friend the Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux) and myself to refresh our memories of the document which is two and a half years old, which shows that a mandatory document would be part of the Government's proposals? Will he be helpful enough to do that?

Mr. Scott: I shall not weary the Committee by reading the letter. It showed the Government's intention to say that electors should have to produce one of a range of listed documents to obtain a ballot paper. The list then was somewhat longer than that which is included in the Bill because we have sought to achieve the balance, which I outlined on Second Reading, between disfranchising some electors and having a range of documents sufficiently tight to deter and inhibit personation, which is the abuse that we seek to tackle. If the right hon. Gentleman will read that letter from my right hon. Friend the Member for Waveney, he will see that the underlying principle of the Bill was set out then and that every opportunity was given for people to raise matters. Indeed, representatives of the right hon. Gentleman's party accepted that principle as recently as 12 months ago.

We are debating the discretion which presiding officers should have in the view of some hon. Members. On Second Reading I stated why I thought it was wrong for presiding officers to have that discretion. I pointed out, in particular, that presiding officers and the chief electoral officer would not wish presiding officers to have such power. If they were to have that power, it might be difficult to recruit members of the public who offer to do that service now to come forward and provide it in the new circumstances. I shall deal with that point in more detail in a moment. It underlines our fundamental approach to the problem.

The hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. McCusker) mentioned the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights and its change of view. It is common knowledge that during its study of the problem it contacted and took evidence from many groups in Northern Ireland. The commission came to the conclusion that the approach which the Government have now outlined in the Bill warranted testing. I was frank with the House on Second Reading in recognising — the right hon. Member for South Down quoted my words—that we were in a sense in uncharted waters. I would go no further than to say that the Government's approach warrants testing. We must try to get the balance right between not disfranchising genuine electors and inhibiting and deterring those who seek to subvert the democratic system.

The hon. Member for Upper Bann and several others sought to reduce the argument about people presenting themselves to the presiding officer to the level of absurdity. I remind the Committee that the powers in the Bill, and the lack of discretion of the presiding officers, which are central to the amendments that we are discussing, go hand in hand with several other matters. There is a practice in Northern Ireland for the parties to appoint polling agents, or personation agents as they are commonly called in the Province.

The RUC has the right under the Bill, which it did not previously have — the hon. Member for Upper Bann recognised this — to arrest those who are in possession of documents for the purpose of personation. If someone arrives at a polling station and represents himself to be someone whom he is not and has a document which seeks to represent him as that person, he is committing an offence. The penalties are up to two years' imprisonment or an unlimited fine — not insubstantial penalties — and for the first time the RUC has the right to intervene and to arrest those who seek to personate. That, marching hand in hand with the continuing right of the parties and their representatives at the polling stations to challenge, is a substantial deterrent to would-be personators.

I shall not deal this evening with identity cards, which were mentioned by the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) and others, because they will be the subject of other amendments which the Committee will consider in due course.

The hon. Member for Antrim, South (Mr. Forsythe) asked us to examine the facts of personation. I do not wish to dwell at length on the points made on Second Reading, but in my reply to the debate I set out the Government's best judgment on personation in Northern Ireland. We are convinced that the 149 arrests for personation at the 1983 general election were only the tip of the iceberg. Translated into figures for arrests in Great Britain, that would have meant about 5,000 or 6,000 arrests. The Home Office does not collect statistics for personation in Great Britain, so rarely does it occur, but I am sure that the number would not reach double figures. I accept that it is a serious problem in Northern Ireland and that it must be dealt with.

The Government are right to tackle it in this way, understanding that we are in uncharted waters, and that we shall wish to reconsider these matters in due course.

Mr. William Ross: The Minister is covering ground which was discussed in detail on Second Reading. Can he now assess the percentage of the votes cast for Sinn Fein which were personated votes in places such as west Belfast and the west bank of Londonderry? Those are the places where the personation ratio would appear to be highest, because that is where the personators find it easiest to operate. We can forget about the rest of the Province, where the percentage was relatively small.

Mr. Scott: I recognised on Second Reading that the problem was restricted to some constituencies. I sought to answer the point by saying that it was impossible to deal with an area smaller than the political entity of Northern Ireland. One cannot restrict an examination to anything smaller than that. I hope that the Committee agrees with that.

I should tell my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mr. Proctor) that the chief electoral officer is provided annually with funds to provide training for electoral staff, and especially to provide training in the methods for dealing with electoral abuse. A training programme has been developed, and, in the circumstances of the new legislation, special emphasis will be placed on training.

Mr. Ross: The hon. Gentleman has just said that money was provided for the training of staff. Which staff? Is it the regular staff, or the temporary staff in offices, or the presiding officers?

Mr. Scott: All those who undertake the duties are included, in particular the presiding officers who come forward and exercise the powers.

The hon. Member for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross) painted a touching picture of teachers in schools and people coming in unaware of the requirements of this legislation. I can assure him and the Committee that before any requirement comes into operation for the local government elections in May 1985 there will be a widespread advertising campaign in which I hope the political parties in Northern Ireland will play a responsible and active part in letting people know of the necessity to turn up at the polling station with one of the prescribed documents. By the time we come to those elections nobody in Northern Ireland will be in ignorance of the need to turn up and obtain his ballot paper by the production of one of the documents.

Rev. William McCrea (Mid-Ulster): Will the Minister address his mind to the fact that, despite massive propaganda, press statements and television advertisements, when proportional representation was brought into the Province there were still many lost votes—and there still are? Is the Minister telling us that just because of a few advertisements in the press or on television the old-age pensioner will arrive with all the documents in his pocket? Does the Minister really ask us to take that seriously?

Mr. Scott: I hope that, as we prepare our campaign to alert people to the need to produce the documents, we can look back at previous campaigns and perhaps learn some lessons from those to make this one as effective as possible. I hope that we shall be able to reach everybody in Northern Ireland and alert them to the need to produce not all the documents but at least one of them when they turn up to ask for their ballot paper.

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): Will the Minister give an assurance that the documents will be listed on the polling card when the instruction is given to the registered voter that he has a vote and where he is to cast it? Can he assure us that those dcuments will be printed on that card so that the voter will know that he needs to bring those documents with him?

Mr. Scott: That is an interesting idea and I shall certainly consider it sympathetically. We want to use every opportunity to alert people to this need.

I understand the concern of the right hon. Member for South Down and his hon. Friends that the procedures for obtaining a ballot paper do not allow presiding officers or clerks to investigate further if there is a reasonable doubt that the person applying for the ballot paper is the person lawfully entitled to that paper. However, some at least of the right hon. Gentleman's worries, and those of his colleagues, are based on a misconception, namely, that the procedure set out in the Bill requires the presiding officer to follow blindly—as one hon. Member said a wooden post might do—the evidence of the prescribed document produced for inspection.

The right hon. Gentleman suggested that if the document produced gives a different address, for example, from that given as the qualifying address in the register, it would be a defiance of the natural meaning of the words in the rules to deny that that raised a reasonable doubt as to the elector's identity.

I said on Second Reading that I did not believe that to be so. It is by no means unknown for people to change their address. It is also common knowledge that documents such as medical cards are liable to be out of date, at least in terms of the address on them. Much will depend on the document in question and the circumstances of particular cases. The actual address on the document is likely to be of less consequence than the person's name, which is central to the question of identification.

Mr. Archer: We on the Opposition Benches have no axe to grind other than to get the Bill right. We have listened with an open mind to the debate. I have already said that we believe that if there is no doubt in the mind of the presiding officer, it cannot be said that the document raises one. However, a problem arises from the statutory restrictions on the questions which the presiding officer can ask. Will the Government at least reconsider that point before they return to the Committee?

12.30 am

Mr. Scott: I shall certainly give thought to the right hon. and learned Gentleman's point.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels: Will my hon. Friend address himself to the question of forgery, in the sense that the passport or driving licence could have been forged, and so the presiding officer would need to ask certain specific questions?

Mr. Scott: I have already made it clear today that we may not have the perfect answer.

Another option is identity cards, but whatever view one might take in the longer term, it would be impossible to have a system of identity cards in operation in time for the local government elections in May 1985. In any case, the introduction of identity cards would raise questions which the whole House would wish to consider carefully before going down that road.

We have tried to strike a balance with documents which are issued by the Government and are official, but of

[Mr. Scott]

course one has to consider the possibility of forgery by those who have sought in the past to subvert the democratic system by personation and other means of electoral abuse, and the penalties that exist.

Another example that has been raised tonight is that of a document in which the name of the elector is inaccurately given although the presiding officer knows the person before him to be the elector named. In the unlikely event that the name on the document is entirely different from that on the register, the rules, as amended, will prevent the presiding officer from handing over a ballot paper. But if the names are similar but not the same, the test involved in the amended rules does not prevent a presiding officer from drawing on his own knowledge.

The test is a subjective one. In particular, if the presiding officer knows that the person standing before him is the elector in question, it would seem to me virtually impossible for the document then to raise a doubt in the mind of that officer as to the elector's identity. I said as much quite clearly on Second Reading, and I am still advised that the words in the Bill enable that subjective judgment to be made. If the presiding officer knew who the elector was, it would be impossible for the document to raise a doubt in his mind.

Mr. J. Enoch Powell: But let us suppose that the presiding officer knows the person presenting himself not to be the individual named in the electoral register. What does he do then?

Mr. Scott: If the presiding officer had a reasonable doubt he would be able to ask the statutory questions, as he can under the existing rules.

Mr. J. Enoch Powell: Go on.

Mr. Scott: Then, indeed, personation agents and police officers will be present who might well be able to intervene at that point. Given the penalties available, it would be a bold personator who ran that sort of risk.

In formulating the test the Government have done their best to avoid—for the reasons that I outlined on Second Reading—the general discretionary power provided by these amendments. The Government believe that this discretionary power would be undesirable, would draw presiding officers directly into the inter-party electoral contest, and would inevitably lead to significant variations of judgment and practice across the Province. It would lead to allegations of partisan bias and provide a great temptation to those seeking to undermine the democratic process to influence the exercise of that discretion.

Mr. William Ross: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Scott: I think that it would be useful to draw my remarks to a conclusion.

As I said when I began, we do not have a closed mind. I have listened carefully to everything that has been said, both in this debate and on Second Reading. I am certainly prepared to consider whether, short of giving a general discretion—which would be extremely damaging and subject to the sort of abuse that I have outlined—it might be possible to revise the wording of the subsection in the light of the explanation that I have given.

Mr. James Molyneaux (Lagan Valley): A debate in this place is always instructive, and so it has been tonight. It has become clear to us all that we might be tackling the problem from the wrong end. By depriving presiding officers of even limited discretion we are requiring every elector to produce a document, be it what it may at the end of the Bill's progress, as a basic requirement. We are thereby organising and arranging, in a sense, the maximum degree of confusion and congestion in polling stations. If the presiding officer can be given even limited discretion, he can, if he wishes, subject those of whom he has suspicions to the most stringent tests. He will thereby avoid the hideous problems, which we all foresee, in the final hours of polling.

On behalf of my right hon. and hon. Friends, I assure the Minister that we support the principle behind the Bill. We differ solely on the mechanism to be employed. I think that he knows from personal experience that we are sincere in seeking to improve the measure and to co-operate with the Government. We are delighted that the official Opposition are in the same position.

On Second Reading I had the distinct impression that Ministers, having listened to the debate, were prepared on behalf of the Government to take a flexible approach to the crunch issues. The Secretary of State, in introducing the Second Reading debate, said that he and his colleagues would listen carefully to what was said then and at subsequent stages

"so as to produce arrangements that best meet Northern Ireland's particular circumstances." — [*Official Report*, 15 November 1984; Vol. 67, c. 817.]

I should like to think that that is still the Government's position. The Minister of State replied by saying that it would be sensible to be able to give the Committee a considered view of the Government's position before embarking on the remaining stages. I had earlier suggested that it would be unfair and unrealistic to expect the Government to review their position within the 120 hours or five days which have elapsed between Second Reading and Committee.

However, my right hon. and hon. Friends still feel that we have a duty through the amendment to press the case for all legitimate electors. As we feel that the issues are so central to the Bill, we must demonstrate our concern by dividing the Committee. I hope that other Members will join my right hon. and hon. Friends in supporting the amendment.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 13, Noes 129.

Division No. 13] **[12.38 am**

AYES

Beggs, Roy	Scott, Nicholas
McCrea, Rev William	Smyth, Rev W. M. *(Belfast S)*
McCusker, Harold	Taylor, Rt Hon John David
Maginnis, Ken	Walker, Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James	
Nicholson, J.	Tellers for the Ayes:
Paisley, Rev Ian	Mr. William Ross and
Powell, Rt Hon J. E. *(S Down)*	Mr. Clifford Forsythe.
Robinson, P. *(Belfast E)*	

NOES

Batiste, Spencer	Cope, John
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony	Currie, Mrs Edwina
Bellingham, Henry	Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Boscawen, Hon Robert	Dover, Den
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*	Durant, Tony
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*	Fenner, Mrs Peggy
Carttiss, Michael	Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Cash, William	Forth, Eric
Chalker, Mrs Lynda	Franks, Cecil
Conway, Derek	Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*

Freeman, Roger
Gale, Roger
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Ground, Patrick
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harvey, Robert
Hawksley, Warren
Hayward, Robert
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Hickmet, Richard
Hind, Kenneth
Holt, Richard
Hooson, Tom
Howarth, Alan *(Stratf'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hume, John
Hunt, David *(Wirral)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(W Herts)*
Kellett-Bowman, Mrs Elaine
Kennedy, Charles
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
Knight, Gregory *(Derby N)*
Knowles, Michael
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lester, Jim
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Peter, *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Nicholas
Macfarlane, Neil
Maclean, David John
Major, John
Malins, Humfrey
Marland, Paul
Mates, Michael
Mather, Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Hal *(B'grove)*
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Moate, Roger
Moynihan, Hon C.
Murphy, Christopher
Neale, Gerrard
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steven
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Parris, Matthew
Penhaligon, David
Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Rathbone, Tim
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ross, Stephen *(Isle of Wight)*
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Nicholas
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Skeet, T. H. H.
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spencer, Derek
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Sumberg, David
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Terlezki, Stefan
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Tracey, Richard
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Viggers, Peter
Walden, George
Wallace, James
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Watson, John
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Michael Neubert and
Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd.

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr. J. Enoch Powell: On a point of order, Mr. Armstrong. Is it possible for you to take official cognisance of the fact that the Parliamentary Under-Secretary voted in each Lobby, having, no doubt, desired to give an example of personation?

To report Progress and ask leave to sit again.—[*Mr. Scott.*]

Committee report Progress; to sit again tomorrow.

A11 Road (East Anglia)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn—*[Mr. Boscawen]*

12.50 am

Mr. John Powley (Norwich, South): I wish to express my grateful thanks to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to raise an important subject for east Anglia. I also express my grateful thanks to the Minister for coming to the Dispatch Box for the second time in less than three weeks to consider roads not only in Norfolk —as we discussed recently—but in east Anglia.

I wish to speak about the A11, which covers more than just my county of Norfolk. It begins at junction nine of the M11. There is a small part of it in Essex, some in Cambridgeshire, a greater length in Suffolk and the balance in Norfolk. I have the support of a number of my hon. Friends in constituencies representing those counties, for which I am grateful.

The issue of the A11 has received widespread public support in east Anglia. The local newspaper with the largest circulation, the *Eastern Daily Press,* has conducted a campaign. However, the general campaign has been waged for much longer than that waged by the newspaper. Many of my hon. Friends have sought improvements to the A11 for 15 or 20 years, if not longer. I am grateful to them for their past lobbying, which has secured some improvements.

Why do I seek improvements to the A11? I shall give the House a short travelogue of the A11 in east Anglia. It begins at junction nine of the M11. As soon as it leaves the M11, one is on a single carriageway from Stump Cross to the Newmarket bypass—although that is not the A11, as it was built as part of the A45 to the port of Felixstowe. On leaving that bypass, one is immediately on another single carriageway until reaching Freckenham Red Lodge, when there is, to one's joy, three quarters of a mile of dual carriageway. That soon slips by, and one is back to a single carriageway to Thetford. There is a proposal for a Thetford bypass, but it is for a single carriageway outer bypass. I ask the Minister to change that to a dual carriageway. After Thetford, it is single carriageway again to Roudham, where there is about three miles of dual carriageway—heaven upon heaven for the motorist—until another single carriageway all the way to Cringleford. The distance from where the A11 leaves the M11 to Norwich is about 62 miles. There is less than five miles of dual carriageway, other than the Newmarket bypass. Without doubt, it is a poor road.

Paragraph 1.3 of "Policy for Roads in England 1983", relating to industry and commerce, says:

> "The lorry has offered consignors of freight a unique degree of convenience, responsiveness and speed. It plays a vital role in keeping down the cost of goods and services and maintaining our competitiveness. By cutting down journey times and congestion between cities, the motorway network has produced important efficiency gains for commerce and industry and indirectly for all of us in the greater range and competitive prices of goods in the shops."

That description could surely not be applied to the A11.

I should like to refer to some of the remarks made to me by representatives of industry and commerce in Norwich. The A11 is the primary road into East Anglia and into Norwich, my constituency, and the constituencies of my colleagues, for goods and services. Colman is a well-known national firm, and 100 per cent. of its goods

[Mr. John Powley]

in and out go by road; 60 per cent. of all those goods go by way of the A11. I am told by the managing director that in the peak holiday months of July and August, when all the holiday traffic is on the road, there are about 100 40 ft trunkers each day using the A11—about 50 in and 50 out.

The Norwich Brewery, also in my constituency, has a total trunk in of 166 barrels a week and a total trunk out of 144 barrels a week. The percentage of its total production going by road is 82 per cent., and 90 per cent. of that uses the A11.

I could quote statistics from other firms in my constituency, but time does not permit me to do so, because my hon. Friends also wish to speak in the debate.

There is no doubt that the capacity of the A11 is very limited and that it is very dangerous. I have from the chief constable the most recent accident statistics. They refer to the Norfolk and Suffolk parts of the A11. In 1983 there were 311 accidents on the A11 in Norfolk and Suffolk, 158 resulting in damage and 146 resulting in injuries, and there were seven fatal accidents. The statistics are available only for three-quarters of 1984. There have already been 264 accidents, 119 of them resulting in damage alone and 134 resulting in injuries, and 11 fatal accidents already this year. Those statistics show clearly that the A11 as it is at present is a dangerous road. When we also consider the congestion that is caused every day of the week we can see the problem involved.

I had the privilege of entertaining my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the night in Norwich, and I had the pleasure of driving him down the A11 the next morning. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister of State will have consulted her colleague on his experiences.

I draw attention to the comment of the Secretary of State for the Environment, who used the A11 last Friday. He is quoted in the newspapers as saying:

> "Having travelled along it this morning, I can understand. We were held up by a bypass under construction and that is welcome. What you need is more of them."

I heartily agree with that comment.

I hope that I have amply demonstrated the effects on commerce and industry. I ask the Minister to consider very carefully the economic benefits that will accrue not only to East Anglia and the firms in my constituency but to the country as a whole if we have an efficient road system into east Anglia serving not only my constituency but those of my colleagues.

East Anglia does not want assisted area status—we are not in that league. We want an efficient road system—the A11 is the primary road—that will enable firms in our constituencies to use their time efficiently, get their goods in and out efficiently, keep their goods competitively priced and provide jobs. I remind the House that Norwich, South has the highest unemployment rate in east Anglia, excepting Peterborough. That means a lot to the firms and people in my constituency. I hope that the reasons I have given my hon. Friend the Minister of State will convince her that she should look again seriously at the road's present condition. We are grateful for the improvements that are under way, but improvements are still needed for the much more efficient running of the A11.

1.1 am

Mr. Patrick Thompson (Norwich, North): I am glad to have the opportunity to speak briefly in support of the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Powley) about the A11 from London to Norwich. Fresh in my mind is the experience of driving yesterday to Westminster down the A11 and three weeks ago being at the wheel of a heavy goods vehicle driving with caution and increasing confidence, as described in the local newspaper, so I have been able to see for myself what it is really like to drive down the A11. That experience strengthens my determination to campaign for higher priority to be given to roads in east Anglia.

My hon. Friend the Minister of State has already by letter referred to the necessity for traffic flows of 20,000 vehicles per day for the road to qualify for dual carriageway status. It is right to point out that the proportion of heavy goods vehicles on the A11 is especially high, leading to overtaking and safety problems. My hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, South referred to the poor accident record on the A11—indeed, only recently there were fatalities on that road.

I remind the House that, by the time the Attleborough bypass is completed next year, only 6 kms of the 47 kms of the A11 in Norfolk will have become dual carriageway. Like my hon. Friends, I believe that that is not good enough. I hope that tonight we will convince my hon. Friend the Minister that it is necessary in the short, medium and longer term to give higher priority to road communications in Norfolk, especially the A11. I hope therefore, that in this respect, as in many others, we will see fairer treatment for east Anglia.

1.3 am

Mr. Henry Bellingham (Norfolk, North-West): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Powley) for allowing me to intervene briefly. I entirely support everything he said. My hon. Friend the Minister of State must be getting fed up with Members representing Norfolk constituencies coming to debate these topics, but she must admire us for our persistence. My hon. Friend could easily have been short of one hon. Member in this debate, because, on my way to Norwich last Friday on the A11 I was nearly the twelfth fatality this year. Just north of Attleborough a lorry coming towards me careered out of control, mounted the pavement and narrowly missed my car.

I certainly endorse everything my hon. Friends the Members for Norwich, South and for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson) said about safety on the A11. The A11 has an abysmal safety record, and that is why we need improvements so badly. My constituency does not have the A11 coming into it—the A11 goes into the heartland of Norfolk. If the heart is strong, the areas about it are made that much stronger. That is why King's Lynn in Norfolk would obviously benefit a great deal from improved communications into the heartland of Norfolk.

I also endorse the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, South about assisted area status. We are not asking for that. We have asked for it in the past because parts of Norfolk have high unemployment, but we are realists in Norfolk. We are not asking for that type of Government assistance; we are asking for special help from my hon. Friend's Department for communications

and in particular for this crucial road into the heartland of Norfolk. If that road is improved, Norfolk's prospects generally will improve.

1.4 am

The Minister of State, Department of Transport (Mrs. Lynda Chalker): First, my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Powley) has been most fortunate in securing the debate and giving us a further opportunity, just two weeks after our last debate on Norfolk's roads, for hon. Members to put, and for me to hear, their views about the A11, one of the three trunk roads serving the county. Of all Norfolk's roads, it is the A11 about which not just they but I feel most anxious.

My postbag is full. The local feeling is clear. I am sure that while the county feels that it has been less than fairly treated in the past, we shall show bit by bit that the vigorous campaign that has been waged by all my hon. Friends in Norfolk, including my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, and my hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, South-West (Sir P. Hawkins), many of whom are here tonight, has brought to light the increasing traffic caused by the growing economic activity in the county, which must be recognised. The anxiety has come across loud and clear. They need have no fear of that.

I recall the points that my hon. Friends made in the earlier debate. I told the House then of the priority that we were giving to our plans to provide Norfolk with better road communications. In determining the standards of individual schemes we must aim to satisfy the needs of the traffic to be expected on any particular length of road.

It is not common sense to adopt one arbitrary standard of road because it happens to be a departmental road. We must provide a road that will meet the needs rather than uniformity. To do otherwise will only involve us in higher expenditure and greater use of land. It will also involve the diversion of resources from deserving work to provide other communities with traffic relief.

In the debate on 6 December my hon. Friends said that no extra funds should be spent. If we were to dual the remaining 33 miles of the A11 it would cost at least £35 million. That would mean that six bypasses would not come forward in the foreseeable future. I ask them to think about that at the same time as I assure them that we are considering improving stretches of the road in addition to those that they already know about.

By the end of the decade, I have no doubt that the A11 will meet Norfolk's needs for a good direct link to London and other parts of the national network. We have heard a great deal from my hon. Friends tonight about the lack of overtaking opportunities on the A11. We heard of the near miss of my hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, North-West (Mr. Bellingham). I am glad that it was a near miss, but I wish that it had been a fair miss. Of course, it is frustrating for drivers to be behind a tractor or several heavy goods vehicles on a single carriageway.

I am aware that about one quarter of the vehicles that use the A11 are HGVs. They are often interspersed with slow-moving agricultural traffic. As I think several hon. Members know, I have driven over the route several times this year already. I know the position at first hand.

Our published improvements provide for greater overtaking opportunities. They will also bring much needed relief to the local residents along the route to be bypassed, who have had to live with the nuisance of heavy through traffic for so long.

It has also been said tonight that the accident rates are unacceptably high. I am in no way complacent about accidents, nor of the importance of reducing their number. I emphasise that a significant objective in all our improvement proposals, both large and small, is to attack and, where possible, remove those factors which contribute to their occurrence.

I should like to say a few words about the areas of the A11, of which hon. Members may not know tonight, which I am proposing to consider in greater depth. That is in addition to the schemes of which they are already aware. For the southern end of the A11, between the junction with the A505 and the Four Wentways junction with the A604, we have a scheme in the programme. We have yet to go to consultation, but we shall deal with that stretch and those two junctions. A bit further north, at the Balsham crossroads, there is a regional scheme that we are now investigating, with the possibility of improvement at that place in a few years time.

Further north, between Chalk Hill, where I very much regret the three recent fatalities, and the Fiveways junction, we have the Barton Mills bypass, where the orders have been made, we are going out to tender and intend to start construction in March next year. That is the most serious stretch that is not so far under construction, which is why it will be the next section to have a dual carriageway.

Further up the road, we shall extend another section of dual carriageway just to the south of Larling Ford, and from Larling Ford to Snetterton race course we are investigating measures to improve that stretch, the entries on to the road and the cross traffic at those points.

Therefore, those are five more areas where we are giving careful extra attention, in addition to the work that is going on now.

The Attleborough bypass is under construction, and is due for completion next spring, and, in addition, there are eight schemes for the A11 in East Anglia, between the M11 at Stump Cross and Cringleford. There is good progress with the proposals for the construction of just over five miles of dual carriageway between Wymondham and Cringleford, which went to public inquiry earlier this month. Subject to the satisfactory outcome of the statutory procedures and provided that funds are available—there is no reason why they should not be—work could start late next year.

Design work has already started on the next stretch—a 2·9 mile dual carriageway improvement between Besthorpe and Wymondham. At Bridgham Heath, north of Thetford, work should start next summer on a one-mile extension of the existing dual carriageway to bring that section of the road up to current design standards. At Thetford itself there will be a public inquiry into our proposals for the northern bypass in the spring. I know that hon. Members wish that that were not to be a single carriageway. Many of them have written to me and discussed the matter with me, but they will remember from my reply on 6 November that the proposals for Thetford include two crawler lanes on the gradients to allow the passing of slow-moving vehicles. I said at the time, and I must repeat tonight, that the traffic flows, when they reach that point on the A11, are not great enough to justify the dualling of that section, but with the crawler lanes and

[Mrs. Lynda Chalker]

the other improvements that I mentioned and a few more that I shall mention, the opportunities will be there for safe overtaking provided that the rules of the road are adhered to by the traffic.

At Barton Mills the planned dual carriageway bypass is over two miles in length, and it will go out to tender with a start in the spring. I mentioned how sad I am at the fatal accidents on the existing section of the road to be bypassed in a short period earlier this month. The police are investigating the causes of those accidents, but for our own part, prior to the accidents we had already been making plans to change the road markings and make the signs more prominent. That work is now completed. We shall consider whether any further measures are needed, pending the completion of the bypass. My hon. Friend the Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Griffiths), and one of his constituents who lives near the scene of the accidents, have written to ask me to introduce a limit of 40 miles an hour. I am considering their request and will reply shortly. However, it is important to have realistic limits. Wherever we see a need to place signs or white markings prior to the completion of further work, I will see that the necessary signs or markings are put there.

South of Barton Mills, two further dual carriageway improvements are programmed—one at Red Lodge, of 1·8 miles, and one from there to the Newmarket bypass. That will close the gap between the existing lengths of dual carriageway. South of the Newmarket bypass, the scheme that I have mentioned to improve the junctions of the A11 with the A604 and A505 at Four Wentways will go to public consultation.

When all those improvement schemes have been completed, some 46 per cent. of the 61 miles between Stump Cross and Cringleford will have been dualled. Additional dual carriageways to be provided will be mainly between Attleborough and Norwich, on the basis of the investigations that we have carried out. Further investigations are now in progress.

The other area which will justify dual carriageway is the stretch southwards from Barton Mills, where the A11 traffic from Norwich is joined by traffic from north Norfolk on the A1065 and the local traffic from Mildenhall, which is sometimes quite heavy.

Hon. Members will recall my pledge two weeks ago that those stretches of the A11 currently without schemes in the trunk road programme are being investigated to see how remaining problems may be tackled. We are also conducting checks on traffic passing along different stretches of the A11, to find out whether there is a case for another limited length of dual carriageway which could prevent a build-up of heavy traffic. Long platoons of slow-moving vehicles are particularly difficult to pass because they tend, very foolishly, to drive nose to tail, so that if one tries to overtake one has no room to pull in between the vehicles. I have a number of ideas for making it safer to overtake on stretches which do not justify dualling at present.

The road has changed dramatically in the past 10 years. Our plans for improving the A11 are not insignificant. Schemes at present in the programme involve an investment of over £30 million. However, I am not satisfied that that is all that can or should be done. That is why I restate my pledge to my hon. Friends tonight that the A11, which is taking an increasing amount of traffic to the busy areas of Norwich and Great Yarmouth, will receive individual attention both from my eastern regional office and my own office, so that as well as pressing on as quickly as resources will allow with the plans that have already been agreed we will investigate most carefully the areas where the accident levels, while not excessively above the norm, are still far too high. Every accident is an accident that we want to combat and prevent.

I hope that my hon. Friends will agree that we are doing everything possible. It will take time, but they need have no doubt of our earnest intention to meet their concerns for safe travelling, and reasonably speedy travelling, within the limits of the A11.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at eighteen minutes past One o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 21 November 1984

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

NEW WRIT

For Enfield, Southgate, in the room of the hon. Sir Anthony George Berry, deceased.—*[Mr. Cope.]*

PRIVATE BUSINESS

LONDON DOCKLANDS RAILWAY (NO. 2) BILL

Order for Third Reading read.

Queen's consent, on behalf of the Crown, signified.

Read the Third time, and passed.

HIGHLAND REGIONAL COUNCIL (UIG PIER, SKYE) ORDER CONFIRMATION BILL.

Read the Third time, and passed.

Oral Answers to Questions

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

BL (Privatisation)

1. **Mr. Grylls** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what further plans he has to privatise parts of BL.

The Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry (Mr. Norman Lamont): Further privatisation of BL will be one of the matters dealt with in the company's 1985 corporate plan, which I expect to receive shortly.

Mr. Grylls: Does my hon. Friend accept that the original merger into British Leyland, inspired by the then Labour Government, has been at the heart of BL's problems over these long years? Does he also accept that it will be denationalised only if the individual companies are returned to the private sector? With respect, may I ask my hon. Friend and his Department to show a little more speed, following the successful flotation of Jaguar, in returning some of the remaining parts, such as Unipart and Land Rover, to the private sector so that they can prosper better than they do now?

Mr. Lamont: I agree that if all the different businesses which today comprise BL had not been drawn together, we might not face many of the severe problems that we have. I also agree with my hon. Friend about the successful privatisation of Jaguar, which we want to follow up with more privatisation. Plans are being prepared for the privatisation of Unipart. The board is also looking at firm plans, which will be put to the Government, for the privatisation of other parts of BL. Our objective is that all the parts of BL should be returned to the private sector.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: If the Government are forced down that highly irresponsible route, will far more consideration be given to the issue price of the shares? Did the Government read the report of the Public Accounts Committee on the sale of public assets on previous occasions? If so, why are British Telecom shares selling at a premium of 20 per cent. in the City today? What will the Government do to stop that?

Mr. Speaker: Order. The question relates to the privatisation of BL.

Mr. Lamont: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for directing the hon. Gentleman to make his points more relevant.

It is easy to comment on the share price of Jaguar after the event. At the time of the flotation many people wondered whether that price had been pitched correctly, precisely because the stock market had gone through a shaky period. I believe that it was pitched correctly, and it was a successful flotation. The hon. Gentleman is worried because the Jaguar stock market price has risen further. The Labour party gets glummer and glummer as things get better and better.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Will my hon. Friend give the House some idea of the progress being made by British Leyland towards the privatisation of the bus and truck division? As there is still no likely prospect of that division being disposed of as a whole, will my hon. Friend assure us that vigorous efforts will be made to dispose of parts of the division to the private sector? Does he recognise that as willing buyers, even for loss-making parts of British Leyland businesses, are available in the private sector it is not good enough to wait until BL comes up with its own proposals for privatisation? There is considerable impatience——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think that that is enough.

Mr. Lamont: My hon. Friend has written to me on several occasions about the parts of British Leyland where some changes—*[Interruption.]* That is perfectly proper. My hon. Friend is rightly looking for people who can help us in our policy of privatisation. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made a statement some months ago backing the British Leyland board's plan for Leyland Vehicles and saying that we endorsed that strategy. As we have endorsed that strategy, we are not inclined to sell individual bits within the trucks business. We have committed ourselves to the pursuit of that plan. However, I assure my hon. Friend that we have told the board of British Leyland that privatisation is the objective, and the board is preparing firm plans for that.

Mr. Wrigglesworth: Is not the most important objective that British Leyland should return to its position as the most substantial volume producer of cars in this country? Does the Minister agree that if the company is to do that it will have to beat the competition from overseas and that, whether British Leyland is in the private sector or in the public sector, that strategy is the most important factor? What are the Government doing to help BL to achieve that objective?

Mr. Lamont: That is always the line of the SDP whether a company is in public or private ownership. We do not agree with that. We believe that a company has a better chance of being competitive and efficient and of creating jobs if it is in the private sector. We intend to return all the parts of British Leyland to the private sector.

Mr. Williams: A few moments ago the Minister said that he accepted that the mergers were at the heart of the problems facing British Leyland. Is it not a fact that those mergers took place when the companies were in private hands? On the Minister's basic doctrinal point, if private enterprise is so self-evidently successful and public ownership is so self-evidently undesirable, why did Ministers allow the Bank of England to take over Johnson Matthey?

Mr. Lamont: As I recall, the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) and the Industrial Reorganisation Corporation were much involved in some of the operations which brought the different parts of British Leyland together. The right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) cannot disclaim responsibility by claiming that it happened without Government influence. Governments were involved in creating the monolith of British Leyland. It comprises many different businesses, and the problems that they face are often markedly different.

Industrial Strategy

2. **Mr. Moynihan** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether his Department intends to review the extent of its financial intervention in industry and the current direction of industrial strategy in its support of investment programmes towards light industry, services and information technology.

The Minister for Information Technology (Mr. Geoffrey Pattie): Last week, on 12 November, I announced a review of the Department's support for industrial research and development to be completed within five months. The White Paper "Regional Industrial Development", published last December, announced our review of support for investment in the assisted areas, the results of which are due to be announced shortly. The White Paper made it clear we intend greater parity of treatment between manufacturing and service industries and to pay special attention to the needs of small firms. Other schemes of assistance are kept under regular review, not least in the context of the annual expenditure survey.

Mr. Moynihan: I regret the recent moratorium, but does my hon. Friend agree that it is a reflection of the greater liquidity of British industry, and will he confirm that pump priming is of vital importance to any industrial strategy, and particularly to our industrial strategy at the present time?

Mr. Pattie: I agree with my hon. Friend. Pump priming is an excellent way of describing the Government's approach in these matters. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for pointing out that the need for the moratorium on the support for innovation programmes has been occasioned entirely by the improving liquidity in British industry, which is causing companies to bring forward research and development proposals.

Mr. Ashdown: Will the Minister make a statement on the recent National Economic Development Council report on information technology? Does he recognise that that industry will have 1,500 fewer graduates than it needs this year and 5,000 fewer than it will need in 1988? Is the Minister aware that the deficit in information technology goods will reach £800 million this year? What action will he take to ensure that this key strategic industry is encouraged in Britain?

Mr. Pattie: I have read the report and discussed it with some of those who compiled it. The Government have already made their views clear. We believe that although there is a problem, the tone of the report is possibly unreasonably pessimistic. We are not complacent. The report possibly over-exaggerates the difficulties to have an effect.

Mr. Stokes: When supporting the new industries, will my hon. Friend not forget the basic industries, such as the manufacturing and engineering industries in the midlands? Is he aware that what they want is not intervention but a fair crack of the whip?

Mr. Pattie: I am sure that as long as my hon. Friend is in the House those industries will have a fair crack of the whip.

Mr. John Smith: Does the Minister realise that a written parliamentary answer is a furtive way of announcing a major change in Government policy? Does he appreciate that it is ridiuculous for the Government to introduce schemes for research and development support and then suddenly to withdraw them? Is he aware that that causes unfairness and uncertainty? Is that not a riduculous way to organise a relationship between Government and industry and to encourage the modernisation of important industries?

Mr. Pattie: No, it is not. The right hon. Gentleman will remember from his days as Secretary of State for Trade that demand-led schemes may have to be stopped quickly for the simple and obvious reason that, if they are not stopped, many additional applications will be made in the intervening period.

Paper and Board Industry

3. **Mr. Proctor** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the current prospects for the United Kingdom paper and board industry.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I am pleased to see that the industry's production in 1984 is running well ahead of production in 1983. The industry's prospects should be helped by the growth in United Kingdom output next year, foreseen by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his statement last week.

Mr. Proctor: Is my hon. Friend aware of the considerable concern in the paper and board industry and other energy-intensive industries about the possibility of too high an increase in industrial energy prices, particularly electricity? Will my hon. Friend pass on that expression of concern to his colleagues at the Department of Energy?

Mr. Lamont: I shall draw my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's attention to those comments. Prices for next year are a matter for the industries themselves. The external financing limits that have been announced are consistent with price increases at about the rate of inflation. My hon. Friend is familiar with the industry and he will know that coal accounts for 28 per cent. of the industry's energy consumption. What happens in the coal mines, the cost of coal and the consequences of the dispute are important for the industry.

Mr. Litherland: Is the Minister aware that the National Association of Paper Merchants has referred to

the first half of this year as a period of profitless prosperity? Is he aware that even the soft tissue industry is suffering? What steps will the Government take to prevent more closures of paper mills?

Mr. Lamont: Production so far is 8 per cent. higher than it was a year ago. Between 1979 and 1983 the Government gave the industry regional assistance of over £130 million and selective assistance of about £25 million.

The hon. Gentleman believes that people do not have confidence in the industry. I draw his attention to new investment. Thomas Tait and Son has a £22 million project to install a new fine paper machine near Aberdeen. Bowater has a £12 million project to increase capacity at Kemsley. Major projects from overseas are taking place. Consolidated Bathurst of Canada and UPM of Finland are investing here. When their mills are in production, the United Kingdom should be the second largest newsprint producer in the European Community. That does not indicate a lack of confidence.

Mr. Meadowcroft: What does the Minister think will be the effect on the paper and board industry of the imposition of VAT on books and newspapers?

Mr. Lamont: That is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. I am having consultations with representatives of the industry.

Basildon (Ministerial Visit)

4. **Mr. Amess** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement about his visit to Basildon.

The Minister for Trade (Mr. Paul Channon): My right hon. Friend has not visited Basildon recently, but I am looking forward to doing so this Friday at my hon. Friend's invitation.

Mr. Amess: We very much look forward to my right hon. Friend's visit on Friday. Is he aware of the increasing importance of Basildon as a growing centre of industry and commerce, as demonstrated by Essex county council holding its first business and industry exhibition in the area and the arrival of Access in the town, with 1,180 jobs, and of the substantial Alders department store?

Mr. Channon: Yes, I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. I am sure that the whole House will join him in welcoming rate-capping on Basildon, which will make it even more attractive to industry, as the burden of rates will be reduced. Indeed, there are signs that Basildon will become almost as attractive as Southend.

Mr. Marlow: When my right hon. Friend visits Basildon, will he go into a branch of a clearing bank and get a British Telecom offer for sale document, from which he will notice that the clearing banks will take £3·25 for every £100 of shares taken by shareholders? Will he do something to prevent the clearing banks from taking that money?

Mr. Channon: With respect to my hon. Friend, his question raises an issue which is not directly relevant to the question asked by our hon. Friend the Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess).

Tourism

5. **Mr. Adley** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the progress of the reorganisation of the tourism infrastructure in England.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The rationalisation of the activities of the BTA and the ETB is now at an advanced stage. Mr. Duncan Bluck assumed the chairmanship of the ETB on 1 November. The majority of BTA and ETB staff are due to move to shared premises at Thames Tower, Hammersmith, on 2 January 1985. From that date all common services functions will be provided by a single organisational structure under the joint responsibility of the two chief executives. Some 60 per cent. of the boards' employees will be engaged in the merged common services organisation.

Mr. Adley: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply and give a warm welcome to the progress that has been made so far. Does he agree that the eventual aim should be to reinvigorate and strengthen the regional boards in England, with the objective of giving them powers and responsibilities akin to those of the successful boards in Wales and Scotland? Does he also agree that, to achieve that objective, it would be sensible to consider the redrawing of the boundaries of the boards, and perhaps reducing them in number, but not to make them conterminous with the economic development areas?

Mr. Lamont: I shall consider my hon. Friend's point about the boundaries of the tourist boards. I agree that the objective should be to decentralise tourism, and I would like the regional tourist boards to do more. I have had a series of meetings with the chairman of the regional tourist boards to discuss precisely how that might be done. We are looking at a scheme whereby the ETB and the regional tourist boards would carry out joint promotion. That is the direction in which we wish to go.

Mr. Heffer: As the Government have more or less destroyed the industrial base of Merseyside, and as the future is clearly laid down in relation to tourism, will the Minister talk to the person responsible to ensure that tourism is developed on Mersyside, which has great potential?

Mr. Lamont: Many people apart from the Government have done a great deal of harm to industry on Merseyside. I agree that there is great potential for toursim on Merseyside. The support given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment to the international garden festival — which was opposed by some Opposition Members—gave a tremendous fillip to the city. I shall certainly hold further talks, because I believe that the potential of Merseyside is considerable.

Export Credits Guarantee Department

6. **Mr. Fallon** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he is now in a position to announce the Government's conclusions on the report of the Matthews committee on the future of the Export Credits Guarantee Department.

Mr. Channon: Sir Peter Matthews and his colleagues produced an excellent report, for which the Government were grateful. I fully share the committee's view that changes are needed to make ECGD more businesslike and

commercial, but I have desired that such changes do not require the Department to be turned into a public corporation, as the committee recommends.

I have therefore put in hand a further quick review to investigate the scope for change within the present departmental framework to give effect to the Matthews committee's underlying objectives. The terms of reference for the review have been placed in the Library.

I have also asked ECGD to discuss with the private sector the scope for increasing private sector involvement in support of United Kingdom exports, without detriment to ECGD's own risk portfolio.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has also asked the Treasury and the Bank of England to examine with other interested parties the idea of a private sector export bank.

Mr. Fallon: Can my right hon. Friend assure me that those changes will make ECGD staff and management more businesslike? When does he expect the review to be completed? Who will undertake that review?

Mr. Channon: The intention is to make the staff and management more businesslike. The review team will consist of management consultants from Coopers and Lybrand, together with representatives from the Treasury, the Manpower and Personnel Office and the ECGD. I hope that it will be a quick review. I think it will take about four months to complete.

Mr. Wilson: I very much welcome the latter part of the Minister's answer. Will the right hon. Gentleman take on board the fact that United Kingdom exports have increased by only about 4 per cent. during the past five years? That is a disgracefully low figure compared with the increase in other European countries. Will the right hon. Gentleman ask for a renewed thrust by the Government to help small exporters to go abroad and sell their wares, thus creating employment?

Mr. Channon: I am strongly in favour of encouraging small exporters to get into the market for the first time. I take note of what the hon. Gentleman said, although I am not sure that I accept his figure. I believe that our export performance is reasonably satisfactory.

Mr. Wilson: No.

Mr. Channon: I believe that it is. I shall do everything that I can to encourage people along the lines that the hon. Gentleman has in mind.

Mr. Dorrell: In considering the future of the ECGD and other public support to British exporters, will my right hon. Friend take special care to ensure that the support we give to our exporters is not only as good as the support available in competitor countries but, where possible, better?

Mr. Channon: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. From discussions that I have had with British exporters, I have formed the strong impression that, compared with the other credit agencies, they feel that the ECGD and the British Overseas Trade Board give a good service to British exporters.

Multi-fibre Arrangement

7. **Mr. Madden** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will give an indication of the timetable for preparations for the forthcoming negotiations on a new multi-fibre arrangement.

Mr. Channon: The multi-fibre arrangement extends until 31 July 1986, and it is by that date that agreement on any successor regime must be reached. By July 1985, however, the textile committee of GATT has to consider whether the arrangement should be extended, modified or discontinued.

Mr. Madden: Is the Minister aware that there is concern among British textile employers and trade unions about the fact that the Government are not representing the interests of British textiles with the same vigour as the Governments of our competitors represent their interests? Will the right hon. Gentleman take this opportunity to make a clear declaration that the British Government fully appreciate the crucial importance of any new MFA in helping British textiles to overcome unfair overseas competition?

Mr. Channon: We certainly appreciate the important contribution which the textile and clothing industries make to the British economy. It is far too soon to come to a decision on the future of the multi-fibre arrangement. We shall have a special report on that matter and we hope to publish the report in early December. There is another question on the Order Paper about the multi-fibre arrangement. I shall be happy to have the views of the industry and the House on the report.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is not too soon to come to an agreement that a new multi-fibre arrangement is essential if the expansion of the clothing and textile industry is to continue? The industry has just begun to recover. Is my right hon. Friend aware that, with the uncertainty of a future MFA or a successor to the current MFA, irreparable damage would be done to an industry which could do more than any other to solve the unemployment problem?

Mr. Channon: I note what my hon. Friend has said. I think he represents a view which is widely shared in the House and in the industry. I believe that we should await that report before deciding on its conclusions.

Mr. James Lamond: Should the Minister not consider the fact that at present China is ploughing ahead with its plan to develop its textile industry, with the object of exporting as much as Europe's entire output? Should not that aspect be looked at urgently?

Mr. Channon: Yes. The hon. Gentleman raises an important point. This year an agreement on textiles was made between China and the Community. I believe that the agreement was reasonably well received by the textile industry. Much effort went into trying to make it a satisfactory arrangement. These are difficult and important issues, which we all want to consider carefully. I take note of the views of the House.

Mr. Bowen Wells: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the multi-fibre arrangement was intended as a transitional measure to enable Britain's textile industry to adjust to new trading conditions? In pursuit of our free trade principles, will he ensure that the arrangement ends when it was expected to end, in 1986? *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Channon: It is not surprising that there are different views in different quarters of the House, and when the times comes we shall see where the different views lie. It is clear that there are differing views on the virtues of the arrangement. I can confirm that when the arrangement was made it was never intended to be a permanent measure. We should await Professor Silberston's report on the international textile and clothing trades, which will be available next month. When it is available we shall be able to take a balanced view on the issues that surround it.

Mr. Kirkwood: Will the Minister of State pay particular attention to the representations that are being made to him on the MFA by the Scottish Knitwear Council and others? Is he aware of the importance of some continued assistance and protection under the MFA for the hosiery industry in the border area of Scotland? Will he give us an assurance that there will be an early debate in the House on the subject as soon as the Silberston report is available?

Mr. Channon: The arranging of a debate is not a matter for me, but I note what the hon. Gentleman has said. The representations made by the Scottish knitwear industry will be taken fully into account, as will all the representations that are made to the Department. The hon. Gentleman's constituents were among those whom we did our utmost to help in the EEC-China agreement, which I hope and believe is satisfactory.

Sir John Farr: Is my right hon. Friend aware that, despite a succession of MFAs, many tens of thousands of jobs have been lost, especially in the knitwear and hosiery industries, which will never be restored? Will he assure the House that when he enters into negotiations for a new MFA there will be strict terms for third country imports?

Mr. Channon: Before we decide the exact terms of a new MFA, if that is what it is to be, we should study the evidence—*[Interruption.]* I am not saying anything new to the House. We must await the report of Professor Silberston and then the House will have an opportunity to decide how it would like the Government to proceed in the negotiations when the arrangement expires. There are some encouraging signs that the textile and clothing industries are now doing better, and I am sure that the House welcomes that.

Mr. John Smith: Is the Minister aware that to imply that there might not be a new arrangement, but some other device, will cause a great deal of worry throughout the textile and clothing industries? Surely the Minister should be able to tell the House that the Government's objective will be to obtain a new arrangement which caters for the problems of the British industry, without having to await the report of any professor?

Mr. Channon: I do not think that there will be any worry in the textile and clothing industries unless the right hon. and learned Gentleman goes around stirring it up. My right hon. Friend and I are in touch with the industries continually and there is no worry within them. No decision has been taken on what protection beyond 1986 might be appropriate for the British industry. I have made that plain in my original answer and in answers to supplementary questions. The right hon. and learned Gentleman is being only too typical in trying to distort my answer to the supplementary question of my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Sir J. Farr).

Post Office Closures

8. **Mr. Wareing** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received about the Post Office's proposals on post office closures; what percentage has been unfavourable; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Pattie: We have received many representations, all unfavourable, about the Post Office's proposals. We have explained to those who have written that proposals to close particular offices are an operational matter for the Post Office, and the Government have no power to intervene.

Mr. Wareing: The Minister's answer was what I thought it would be. Is he aware that 775 retired pensioners in my constituency will lose the services of the Maiden lane sub-post office? On the whole these people do not own a car, nor do they have a bank account. Commercial criteria are not sufficient for dealing with these problems. Will the hon. Gentleman ensure that there is further consultation with those in the area and in other areas? Will he ensure also that there is a stay of execution until there is proper consultation between the Post Office and those whom the Post Office is there to serve?

Mr. Pattie: I am aware that the hon. Gentleman attended a meeting with the chairman of the north-west region of the Post Office, to which other hon. Members representing Liverpool constituencies were invited. I understand that the chairman undertook to review the Maiden lane matter and to report back urgently. However, I must repeat that particular closures are operational matters for the Post Office. The criteria are long standing and have operated for many years. The criteria for the distances between post offices in urban areas have operated for a long time.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: Does my hon. Friend agree that because the Post Office is a nationalised monopoly it is far from operating for the convenience of its consumers? Why cannot more competition be introduced? For example, why cannot postage stamps be sold more widely than in post offices, thus avoiding many of the difficulties caused by the closure of sub-post offices?

Mr. Pattie: I note what my hon. Friend says. I think he will accept that at present, with the Post Office counter service under stress because of the strike at the Department of Health and Social Security office, I would not wish to entertain such suggestions.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: Does the Minister accept that his response to my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) was disappointing? He seems to have no understanding of the real difficulties that will be caused to pensioners and many others. Examples in my constituency are the Old Trafford and Moss lane post offices. There is a feeling that the Post Office has not given adequate consideration to people's needs in those areas. Will the Minister consider the matter once again?

Mr. Pattie: It is not for me to consider the matter once again. The hon. Gentleman should see the chairman of the Post Office. I am sure that the chairman would be happy

to see him. He should make representations to the chairman on what is an operational matter for the Post Office Board.

Sir Dudley Smith: Is my hon. Friend aware that the post office is nearly always the focal point of any village? Despite what he has already said, will he use his undoubted influence and residual powers to impress on the Post Office Board that the more post offices are retained in villages, the less chance there is that the villages will wither away?

Mr. Pattie: The exchanges in the House will be noted by the chairman of the Post Office, and I am glad to add what my hon. Friend describes as my "residual powers" to bring the matter further to the attention of the chairman.

Mr. Williams: In his initial reply the Minister mentioned the deep concern of the public. Will he confirm that that concern is expressed particularly on behalf of pensioners and the disabled? He said that he had no powers to stop the Post Office doing what it intends to do, but will he, in his sponsoring role, immediately consult the chairman of the Post Office and express his concern, or are he and the Government utterly insensitive to the needs of the least mobile groups in our society?

Mr. Pattie: Of course, that is not so. I have had frequent discussions with the chairman of the Post Office Board on that and other matters. The closure programme has been halted, as the right hon. Gentleman will be aware, because of the additional difficulties caused by the DHSS dispute at Newcastle.

European Community (Trading Restrictions)

9. **Mr. Alan Howarth** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress he has made on the removal of restrictions on trade in services within the Community.

Mr. Channon: My right hon. Friends and I continue to press in the Council for the liberalisation of services in the Community. Progress so far has been disappointingly slow, but we shall continue to press the case as hard as possible.

Mr. Howarth: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his efforts, but does he agree that one of the principal reasons why the economic strength of the United States of America has outstripped that of Europe is that for the past 200 years the United States has been a common market? Does my right hon. Friend accept that the way forward for Europe lies not in increased expenditure and bureaucracy but in removing the internal barriers to a true common market so that, for example, in future, Frenchmen, Germans and Italians will be able to buy British insurance, as we can buy theirs?

Mr. Channon: Absolutely I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. The issue goes far wider than just the point about insurance raised by my hon. Friend. It is a major priority for the British Government and the British people that the Community should function as an internal market, as a real market, so that British goods and services can flow freely. We would therefore save vast sums of money that are wasted at present. The insurance situation is disappointing at present. We are continuing to press other Community Governments and there are cases pending. I am grateful to m, hon. Friend for drawing attention to the matter.

Mr. Gould: To say that progress is disappointingly slow is a gross understatement. It has been outrageously and unacceptably slow. At a time when our trade in manufactured goods is running at an annual deficit of £10,000 million, is it not time that the Minister insisted that we have the opportunity to trade in those areas in which there is at least some chance of making good that deficit?

Mr. Channon: With respect, that is a bit rich from an hon. Member whose party opposed the Common Market at almost every stage. It is monstrous for the hon. Gentleman to imply that if he had been in office he would have made the Common Market work better. The whole world knows that that is absolute rot.

Research and Development

10. **Mr. Freeman** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what further steps he proposes to take to encourage the level of research and development expenditure by the private sector.

Mr. Pattie: As I announced in reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, North (Mr. Eggar) on 12 November, my Department is carrying out a review of our support for industrial research and development. The review will be completed within five months, when I shall announce the conclusions.

Mr. Freeman: Will my hon. Friend discuss with his colleagues in the Government the merits of requiring a fixed minimum of the Government's research and development budget to be spent through small firms? Is he aware that that is the practice under federal law in the United States and is still the practice of the Ministry of Defence in this country? Does he agree that small firms are the engines of growth and job creation and are often more innovative than large firms in research and development?

Mr. Pattie: I agree that there is much to commend small firms. On a point of detail, however, unless things have changed dramatically in the seven weeks since I left the Ministry of Defence, there is no positive discrimination in favour of small companies, according to rules. I remain unconvinced that the cause of small firms would be enhanced by an almost legislative framework positively requiring that funds go to smaller companies. Nevertheless, my hon. Friend raises an important question and I shall be happy to discuss it further with him.

Dr. McDonald: Does the hon. Gentleman agree with his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy that the future for jobs lies in high technology rather than with the Chancellor's view that the future lies in the low technology sector? If so, will he give priority to encouraging research and development in high technology and, especially, information technology?

Mr. Pattie: I think that the answer lies with both my right hon. Friends.

Mr. Wrigglesworth: Does the Minister agree that expenditure on research and development—I emphasise development as well as research—in both the private sector and the public sector falls lamentably short of that of our major industrial competitors in Germany, Japan and America? Are the Government worried about that, and if so what are they doing about it?

Mr. Pattie: The total spending on research and development in the United Kingdom is quite considerable, but it is a matter of some anxiety whether all of it is focused and organised in the best possible way. The Ministry of Defence, of course, has a sizeable share of that spending.

Mr. Forman: Does my hon. Friend accept that research and development expenditure in the private sector can be greatly assisted by an intelligent public procurement policy?

Mr. Pattie: Yes, and that is exactly the policy that we seek to follow.

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: Is the Minister aware that it is no use just coming to the Dispatch Box and voicing anxiety about the Government's grossly distorted spending on research and development for defence purposes? Is he aware that Government support for research and development in non-aerospace and non-defence related industries is under half that of our major competitors? What does he intend to do to rectify that?

Mr. Pattie: The proportion of the overall research budget spent for military purposes is similar to that which prevailed under the Labour Government. Precisely the same considerations obtain. We shall endeavour to ensure that efforts in research, advanced research and pre-competitive research such as the Alvey programme are properly focused, co-ordinated and organised. That is the real answer.

European Community (Frontier Posts)

13. **Mr. Maude** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress he has made in establishing a common opening time for adjacent frontier posts in the European Economic Community.

Mr. Channon: I am glad to say all member states have agreed to implement the frontier facilitation directive from 1 January 1985. This requires customs posts at all major frontier crossings to be opened for a common core time of 10 hours every working day.

Mr. Maude: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on achieving that result. Can he assure the House that this will end the frustration suffered by both holidaymakers and hauliers because of the difficulties that they have encountered in getting through customs posts within EEC?

Mr. Channon: The change will affect hauliers in particular. Lorries will be able to get through much more quickly. In the past it has sometimes happened that a lorry has passed one border post and found that the next frontier was closed. The total cost to industry of frontier crossings in the Community is currently about £500 million. The directive will bring about a useful reduction, and it is to be welcomed.

Debt Crises (Credit)

14. **Mr. Yeo** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he is in a position to authorise more credit for those countries which are successfully emerging from their debt crises.

Mr. Channon: I hope to be able to announce shortly that, for debtor countries which are rescheduling their debts, the Export Credits Guarantee Department will, in appropriate cases, maintain cover or resume it at an earlier stage than hitherto to support credit for goods which would contribute to the economic recovery of the debtor country.

Mr. Yeo: While it is essential to avoid providing irresponsible credit, which would only increase the risk of future defaults by developing countries, is it not very much in the interests of British exporters that adequate credit be provided to countries which are taking steps to emerge from their debt crisis?

Mr. Channon: Yes, my hon. Friend is quite right. We have such considerations in mind, and I hope shortly to be able to announce to the House in further detail what we propose to do. Both the considerations that my hon. Friend has mentioned are important. We must avoid further irresponsible lending which would put our credit insurers at greater risk, but we must also encourage British exporters by giving adequate credit in markets which are recovering.

Mr. Silvester: Bearing in mind the Minister's earlier remarks about the Export Credits Guarantee Department, will he confirm that he intends, not to impose a profit target on the department, but to maintain the objective of breaking even, taking one year with another?

Mr. Channon: The intention is to retain the target of breaking even. It is always difficult to achieve both our targets, because the second target is to promote British exports, and so the two are very often in contradiction.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I remind hon. Members that the question is about debt crises.

Mr. John Smith: I welcome the Minister's remarks about the action that the ECGD will take in relation to certain countries with a debt crisis. Has not the time come for the Government, in association with other Western Governments, to take a much more imaginative lead in trying to find an international solution to the problem of the debtor countries? We need a much more imaginative approach than the Government have been prepared to display so far in international forums.

Mr. Channon: I note what the right hon. and learned Gentleman says. He raises very wide considerations which are mainly within the province of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. I shall certainly ensure that they are conveyed to my right hon. Friend.

Middle East (Ministerial Visit)

15. **Mr. Coombs** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the recent visit to the middle east by the Minister for Trade, the right hon. Member for Southend, West (Mr. Channon).

Mr. Channon: I visited Iraq, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates to reinforce British business efforts there. In Saudi Arabia, for some of the time, I was accompanied by a team of senior British business men. These markets account for British exports worth over £2 billion a year. The Ministers whom I met are keen to see an expanding trade relationship with Britain. These are markets which we must pursue vigorously.

Mr. Coombs: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the middle east remains a most important area for British trade? Is he satisfied that the quality of the help given by

the Government to traders in that area is as high as it could be, and are there any new initiatives in that area about which he can inform us?

Mr. Channon: The middle east is indeed an extremely important market for the United Kingdom, and business men seem to be satisfied with what the Government are doing to help. I believe that the credit arrangements are reasonably satisfactory. When I went to Iraq I was able to announce a further line of credit of some £250 million to £300 million, which, combined with the credit that we offered last year, will afford British exporters the opportunity to export up to £600 million to what I believe to be a very important market.

Aircraft and Shipbuilding (Nationalisation Compensation)

16. **Mr. Colvin** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if the Government intend to pay any further sums for compensation to former owners of aircraft and shipbuilding assets nationalised under the Aircraft and Shipbuilding Industries Act 1977.

Mr. Pattie: No, Sir. The Government's policy remains as stated by my right hon. Friend the then Secretary of State for Industry on 7 August 1980.

Mr. Colvin: Is my hon. Friend aware that earlier this year the European Commission of Human Rights decided that all seven cases that it had considered were admissible to the Strasbourg court? Is it still the view of his Department, as expressed by the then Secretary of State, that compensation terms payable under the Aircraft and Shipbuilding Industries Act 1977 were in many cases grossly unfair? Should not a Conservative Government be more concerned with property rights and preserving them than with worrying about a little bit of legislation which will be required to right this wrong?

Mr. Pattie: The Commission found that there had been no breach of the United Kingdom's obligation under the European Convention on Human Rights' first protocol and it has referred the matter to the court for an authoritative further ruling. I recognise my hon. Friend's anxiety on this matter. This is an important issue, Mr. Speaker, so perhaps I might quote, I hope not too extensively, what my right hon. Friend the then Secretary of State said on 7 August 1980:

"We recognise that some previous owners and many members of this House and of the public believe that the terms of compensation imposed by the 1977 Act were grossly unfair to some of the companies and we share this view. We have explored every possibility to right the injustice done by the previous Government, but to our very great regret we have concluded that amending legislation to establish new compensation terms retrospectively would be unjust to the many people who sold shares on the basis of the previous terms."—[*Official Report*, 7 August 1980; Vol. 990, c. 290.]

British Steel Corporation

18. **Mr. Hickmet** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will take into account the effect of the coal strike upon the British Steel Corporation's target of achieving viability by December 1985 when considering the future capital investment programme and external financing limits of the corporation.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Hickmet: Does my hon. Friend agree that the British Steel Corporation's half year figures show that despite the National Union of Mineworkers' attempt to sabotage BSC at a cost of £100 million, much of which has been incurred in my constituency, the corporation has nevertheless shown a significant improvement in its competitive and productive performance? Will my hon. Friend bear in mind, when fixing external financing limits, that the cost of the miners' strike should not be paid for by a cut in the corporation's capital investment programme? Moreover, if the corporation is to maintain and sustain viability, it is essential that, at tomorrow's meeting of the European Council of Ministers, my hon. Friend presses for an increase in the quota share in real terms and percentage terms for BSC. Will my hon. Friend give an assurance in that regard?

Mr. Lamont: I can assure my hon. Friend that at tomorrow's meeting of the Steel Council I shall press the problems about quotas to which he has referred. I had a meeting with BSC yesterday to agree the line that we will take. The signs are that the EFL will need to be increased once the strike is over. When the additional costs are known, we shall consider the matter. The real danger associated with cutting investment and in closing plants comes not from the Government but from Opposition Members who have supported the miners' strike. I agree with my hon. Friend that it is remarkable that BSC is making as much steel—in some cases more steel—than before the miners' strike. That is a remarkable tribute to the determination and courage of those who work in BSC.

Mr. Ewing: In regard to the capital investment programme, will the Minister give an absolute guarantee that when the programme is decided Ravenscraig will receive its fair share? When is the Minister likely to make a decision about the much-needed investment for the renewal of coke ovens at Ravenscraig?

Mr. Lamont: A decision on the latter point depends considerably on the end of the miners' strike. As we have told the House, and agreed with the chairman of BSC, we cannot draw up a sensible plan until we know precisely what the position is as regards the miners' strike. I cannot give any guarantees about anything, but the hon. Gentleman knows that, with regard to Ravenscraig, which is of great interest, circumstances are exactly as they have always been stated to the House.

Mr. Caborn: Is the miners' strike the reason for not announcing the Government's proposals for Phoenix II? If not, will the Minister say what are the reasons for the delay?

Mr. Lamont: The miners' strike is not the reason. I know that this matter is of great interest to the hon. Member, but only in the past few days have we received final proposals from the companies involved. We are studying them now.

Mr. John Smith: Following the Minister's answer in relation to investment in Ravenscraig, is he aware of the worry that has arisen from the fact that documents have been published showing that the British Steel Corporation does not intend to find the finance to replace the coke ovens at Ravenscraig, without which it is hard to envisage a viable future for the plant? Does he agree that it is highly desirable that the investment is found for the coke ovens as an essential part of the continuation of the plant?

Mr. Lamont: I have read press reports about those documents and know that some hon. Members have discussed them with the chairman of the corporation. Those proposals have not been put to us, and the position is as I described it.

Post Office

19. **Mr. Alexander** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if, in setting financial performance targets for the Post Office, he takes account of its social responsibility to provide necessary services and facilities to the community.

Mr. Pattie: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Alexander: Is it not a matter of regret that, while some Crown Post Offices, such as the one in Newark, have queues stretching into the street and that it takes almost 40 minutes to buy a book of stamps, there are proposals to close sub-post offices? Is it not a fact that the elderly and the handicapped rely on sub-post offices? Should it not be a matter of social policy that they are retained, or are those people to join the ever-burgeoning queues outside Crown post offices?

Mr. Pattie: As I said in my earlier answer, the queues in post offices and sub-post offices will have affected almost every hon. Member, and I am no exception in that regard. I have discussed the matter with the chairman of the Post Office Corporation, which led him to decide that there should be this moratorium on any further closures, certainly while the Department of Health and Social Security dispute continues.

I repeat to the House that the criteria under which the Post Office Corporation has long operated have been re-examined, especially the operation of the "one mile apart" criterion for post offices in urban areas. As I said in my first answer, post offices supply social needs, and we are satisfied that the Post Office Board has been able to balance the financial and managerial criteria with those of social need.

Mr. Fatchett: When the Minister replied to his hon. Friend the Member for Newark (Mr. Alexander), was he saying that he had taken into account the Post Offices' social responsibilities in setting financial targets? Is it not also the case that the Minister has a responsibility to take account of the interests of, for example, the elderly in my constituency who will lose the service of a valued sub-post office? Is it not the case that his earlier answers were simply an exercise in handwashing and show that he is not prepared to meet the Government's responsibilities to look after those who depend on the services of the Post Office?

Mr. Pattie: That is not the case. The Government's responsibilities are to set the financial framework and to make certain that the Post Office is aware of its social responsibilities. How the Post Office meets those needs in relation to one sub-post office or another is a matter entirely for the Post Office Board.

Dr. Glyn: Is my hon. Friend aware that the arbitrary way in which post offices and sub-post offices are closed has a detrimental effect on the elderly and the disabled? His residual power must cover that point. Will he press the matter with the Post Office?

Mr. Pattie: My hon. Friend will be aware that representations made either by post or in the House are drawn to the attention of the chairman of the Post Office. I am certain that my hon. Friend's remarks will be noted in that quarter.

Mr. Ashdown: Does the Minister accept that it is the Government's own financial targets that are the underlying cause of the programme of closures of sub-post offices? Does he also accept that most people recognise that that is the case, and that closure has much more to do with sharing the misery doled out by the Government than the rationalisation programme of post offices? In view of the deep public anxiety about the long and short-term future of the Post Office, will the Minister use his best influence to ensure that the matter is debated on the Floor of the House?

Mr. Pattie: I thought that the hon. Gentleman would know by now that what is debated on the Floor of the House is not a matter for me. I am certain that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House will have heard what he has just said. The hon. Gentleman asserted that it is the setting of the Government's targets that has caused this. That is not the case, because the Post Office, like all state-owned undertakings, needs a framework of proper commercial and managerial efficiency within which it can operate—the same as any other undertaking.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: Does my hon. Friend agree that the consultation procedure which is always supposed to follow a proposed post office closure is seen by the public as no more than a device for handling a decision which has been taken and will not be changed?

Mr. Pattie: My hon. Friend is making an assertion about what the public may think. The Post Office chairman and his board colleagues take seriously the consultation process, although the events may not always turn out as my hon. Friend's constituents may wish.

UNESCO (United Kingdom Membership)

3.30 pm

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 10, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely

"the decision regarding the United Kingdom's membership of UNESCO."

This subject is clearly a matter that falls squarely within the criteria of the Standing Order. There is no doubt that the decision whether to remain a member of the organisation is specific and within the Government's responsibility. It is difficult to over-stress the importance of the decision, which will be a clear signal of our foreign policy orientation—whether we respect the views of the Commonwealth, our European partners and the Third world generally, or whether we are, indeed, the Trojan horse of the United States of America—Mr. Reagan's poodle — in our external relations. Other examples abound — Grenada, the law of the sea signature and general policy towards central America.

It is common knowledge that Mrs. Jean Gerard, the United States Ambassador to UNESCO, has been lobbying hard for European support for the United States position, including a visit to the Prime Minister. Hence the emergency meeting last Thursday of all the heads of mission of the Commonwealth countries in London and the crisis letter to the Foreign Secretary which resulted; the fact that those same heads of mission will be raising the matter with the Foreign Secretary when they meet him at 5 o'clock this afternoon; and that yesterday in Brussels our European partners made it clear to the Foreign Office that they will not follow our lead.

Our European partners acknowledge that there are substantial faults within the organisation, but, essentially, they press for reform from within and fear that the reform movement will be stalled if we withdraw.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Member must make out a case as to why this matter is urgent, specific and important and not go into the detail of the speech that he might make if the application were granted.

Mr. Anderson: Of course, I do not go into the merits of the matter, Mr. Speaker. I was repeating the views of our European partners. Having touched upon the specific nature of the request and the importance of the matter, I deal finally with the urgency. Apart from today's meeting of the Foreign Secretary and the high commissioners of Commonwealth countries in London, it is clear that the Government are on the brink of a decision. Yesterday, we heard the Prime Minister's fiery and hostile response to my hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke). Before reaching a decision of this importance, the Government should provide an opportunity for the House to express a view.

In short, the House should have an opportunity to pull the Government back from an impulsive, defeatist, incompetent and wrong decision—from what we believe to be a historic error.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman asks leave to move the Adjournment of the House for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter which he believes should have urgent consideration, namely

"the decision regarding the United Kingdom's membership of UNESCO".

I have listened with great care to what the hon. Gentleman has said, but I regret that I do not consider that the matter he has raised is appropriate for discussion under Standing Order No. 10 and I cannot, therefore, submit his application to the House.

BALLOT FOR NOTICES OF MOTIONS FOR FRIDAY 7 DECEMBER

Members successful in the ballot were:

Mr. Andy Stewart
Mr. Tom Cox
Mr. A. J. Beith

Orders of the Day

Civil Aviation Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

3.36 pm

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Nicholas Ridley): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

This is a short Bill with three very limited purposes. I had expected that it would even be non-controversial. However, one of its purposes has aroused considerable controversy and it might be best if I discuss the other two issues briefly and spend most of my time on the question of limiting air transport movements. I fear that that involves taking the clauses back to front.

Clause 5 provides for the writing down of the Civil Aviation Authority's debt to the national loans fund by the difference between the proceeds from the sale of its Scottish aerodromes and their book values. This will be less than £6 million. The Government transferred the aerodromes to the CAA in 1972, when they were valued, not at market values, but at higher figures based on the assumption that the CAA would continue to own and operate them and that losses would be met by subsidies. The CAA has continued to value them, and subsequent investment, on this basis, depreciating them over their estimated useful lives. As a result the current book values are substantially higher than the probable net proceeds.

Faster depreciation would have produced book values closer to market worth, but this would have meant larger deficits and subsidies. In view of this close relationship between book values and subsidies, the write down amounts to a rationalisation of the subsidy. New operators will buy the aerodromes at market values and will thus have lower financing costs and require smaller subsidies.

Mr. Stephen Ross (Isle of Wight) *rose*——

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe) *rose*——

Mr. Ridley: I shall be happy to give way to both the right hon. Member and the hon. Member.

Mr. Morris: Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that there is grave and widespread disquiet about the timing of the Bill? It is seen as a softener for a decision on Stansted, on which I hope he will say a word. Is he also aware of the concern that it further prevents a comprehensive review of airports policy? Is it not time that there was an end to ad hoc policy making?

Mr. Ridley: The right hon. Gentleman will forgive me, but I am now talking about later clauses in the Bill, which I wish to dispose of quickly before coming to the main burden of the legislation. I shall answer his points then.

Mr. Stephen Ross: Can the right hon. Gentleman bring us up to date on how far he has got with the sale of CAA airports in Scotland? Are there any buyers? Is it true that the British Airports Authority wishes to buy Sumburgh?

Mr. Ridley: There are various possibilities. It is possible that some of these airports may be sold before the Bill becomes law. A provision to cater for that possibility is contained in the Bill. There is a considerable amount of interest, though no deals have been done so far.

In addition, we expect that the privatisation of the Scottish airports will bring savings from efficiency improvements. We expect that new operators will reappraise the way in which aerodromes meet the needs of the remote communities which they serve, and meet those needs at lower costs. In some cases it may be possible for the aerodromes to be operated without subsidy.

Clauses 3 and 4 cover the second issue. In its past licensing decisions the CAA has frequently been able to take full account of airports considerations. Recently its decisions have reflected the impending imposition of the limit on air transport movements at Heathrow, but the 1982 Act made it difficult for the authority to take the effective use of airports into account when it regarded that as inconsistent with its other duties under the Act.

Clause 4(1)*(b)* amends section 68(1) of the 1982 Act so that the CAA is given a clear duty, along with its others, to secure the most effective use of airports in the United Kingdom, rather than, as is currently the case, simply being required to have regard to that. Clause 4(1)*(c)* places a fresh duty on the CAA to facilitate, in its licensing decisions, compliance with any limits imposed on air transport movements under clauses 1 and 2.

Mr. Robert Adley (Christchurch): My right hon. Friend knows my views about the Bill, so I shall not weary him with them, but I direct his attention to clause 3. Are we to assume that the reference to

"effective use of aerodromes within the United Kingdom"

means just those at present owned by the CAA, or will it apply to those which it might acquire in the future?

Mr. Ridley: I have not had an opportunity to check this, but I think that it refers to aerodromes owned by the British Airports Authority—not the CAA—and not to any others.

Clause 3 gives me reserve power to direct the CAA in cases where I believe that airports policy considerations should be given greater weight in a licensing decision. At present I cannot do so.

Clauses 1 and 2 provide me with powers to limit aircraft movements at aerodromes. These powers are needed in relation to our current problem at Heathrow, and it is in respect of Heathrow that I currently seek to justify them.

I cannot go further in defining airports policy, as the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) asked me to do, because, as we are all aware, we await the inspector's report on the future of Stansted and the decisions which my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Construction and I will have to take upon that. Following that report, those decisions will determine airports policy and the future provision of airport capacity in south-east England.

Mr. Terry Dicks (Hayes and Harlington): If we are awaiting the outcome of this inquiry into Stansted, why did my right hon. Friend not await it before introducing the Bill?

Mr. Ridley: If my hon. Friend will allow me to complete my remarks, he will discover that I shall be answering his question in the course of them.

These decisions will be major and important ones, but they are decisions for the future, and the Bill does not

[Mr. Ridley]

affect them in the least. It will be necessary to have the powers in the Bill to control movements at Heathrow, whatever decision is taken about the future of Stansted.

I wish to emphasise that. Whatever long-term decisions are taken about airport capacity in the south-east, it will be necessary to have powers to limit the take-offs and landings of aircraft at Heathrow in the near future. In 1979 the Government gave a pledge that air transport movements at Heathrow would be limited to 275,000 movements a year. We would be wrong to go back on that pledge, first, because those who live around Heathrow expect us to honour it. It seems straightforward to me that a pledge should be honoured. It is they who have suffered the noise and disturbance and we are right to seek to limit it for their sakes.

Secondly, we have given evidence to the inspector at the Stansted inquiry that we intend to impose the limit. To fail to do so would be to prejudice that inquiry. If we did not proceed with the limit, that would contradict the evidence that we put forward to the inspector.

Mr. Robert McCrindle (Brentwood and Ongar) *rose*——

Mr. Ridley: Let me put the argument first and then I shall give way.

That could lead to the reopening of the inquiry and a further substantial delay before a decision is taken. That would not be in anybody's interest.

There is no deep-seated plot here to box ourselves into a position where we have to develop Stansted. We have made it clear since 1979 that that limit would be imposed on environmental grounds. The House has known that since 1979. The Government have repeatedly told the House that they intend to implement the limit. We published a consultation document in July this year which made it clear that we intended to do so. There can be no question of a plot. We have been entirely open about this ever since 1979.

Dr. Alan Glyn (Windsor and Maidenhead): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the undertaking on the movements at Heathrow was endorsed on 22 February 1984 in *Hansard*, at column 948, when my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State, the Member for Hampshire, North-West (Mr. Mitchell), said that it would be in response to my speech that the undertaking would be honoured. That was as recently as 1984, not 1979.

Mr. Ridley: I agree with my hon. Friend that when a Government give a firm and unequivocal pledge of that sort it behoves them to seek to implement it by presenting legislation to the House. Those of my hon. Friends who differ from that must think of the consequences to those hon. Members who live and represent seats around Heathrow. They would have to explain a breach of that pledge to their constituents.

Mr. Rob Hayward (Kingswood): My right hon. Friend says that the House has always known that the pledge has been given, but the pledge was not given to the House. The then Secretary of State for Trade said on 17 December 1979:

"The details of this decision are being announced separately today and will include certain restrictions".

The announcement was actually made in a press notice. It was never made to the House.

Mr. Ridley: That does not alter the nature of the pledge.

Mr. McCrindle *rose*——

Mr. Ridley: We had better have a surgery.

Mr. McCrindle: Will my right hon. Friend accept that some hon. Members would concede that an undertaking has been given? Some of us would equally concede that that undertaking was repeated to the Stansted inspector. Will he, in turn, concede that there was an additional part to the undertaking that there should be a review? Why, rather than press ahead with the legislation now, should we not have the review, and if the situation remains as it was, by all means proceed with the legislation?

Mr. Ridley: I was coming to that point, but I shall give my hon. Friend the answer now, because it is important. At the time that the pledge was given in response to a planning decision it was stated that it was known that quieter aircraft would come in at the beginning of 1986 and that the limit was fixed at 275,000—I paraphrase—on the basis that those quieter aircraft would be in place at that time. That was the situation that was contemplated when the limit was first set. The review clearly related to the situation after some experience of the limit had been achieved. Nothing has changed that since then.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington) *rose*——

Mr. Churchill (Davyhulme) *rose*——

Mr. Ridley: I have given way several times and I should like to continue.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I do not think that there can be a point of order about the fact that the Minister is not giving way. The Minister gives way as he wishes; I cannot intervene in that.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. The point of order is for you and not for the Minister. The Secretary of State has given way eight times to Conservative Back Benchers. Surely courtesy requires that he should give way at least once to an Opposition Back Bencher.

Mr. Speaker: I am not the arbiter of courtesy.

Mr. Ridley: We were not able to fit the Bill into last year's crowded Session. We must have the scheme in place before next June, when the international scheduling conference of IATA will meet to allocate slots at about 50 of the world's most important airports. Without the information about the scheme in the Bill, the conference will not be able to do its job properly. If we work back from June, the time scale requires us to get the Bill started now.

Mr. Churchill: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Ridley: I think that I should be allowed to make some points. I shall give way to my hon. Friend later.

Even if I broke the Government's pledge to implement the limit of 275,000 air traffic movements at Heathrow, that would not make the Stansted application and inquiry go away. I do not say that we propose to do that, but, either way, we need the powers.

Our commitment on 275,000 ATMs does not constrain the Stansted inspector in any way. If he wishes, he can

quarrel with our pledge and recommend a higher or lower limit. Many who have given evidence to the inquiry have urged him to do so. I have no idea what he will say, because I have not received his report, but he is not constrained in his recommendations. We shall have to take any recommendations that he makes into account when reaching our decision.

However, as I have said, there are further reasons for the powers in the Bill. Heathrow is running out of runway capacity. Even if there were no environmental limit, there would still be a physical limit on its capacity. I am sure that hon. Members with greater knowledge than I will argue that it is possible to accommodate, say, 330,000 movements, but the House should note that there are already 20,000 movements—positioning flights, air taxi and business aviation flights—which are excluded from the limit, but which take up physical capacity.

Hon. Members seem to hope that the problem at Heathrow will somehow just go away. I must tell them that it will not. There are already limits at the peak times of the year and the peak times of the day. The growth of traffic is such that it will not be long before there are problems with annual capacity. In addition, it will not be too long before Gatwick also runs into capacity problems. Therefore, we must have powers to limit movements at airports in general and at Heathrow in particular.

Mr. Churchill: Where does the arbitrary figure of 275,000 come from? Is my right hon. Friend aware that Los Angeles airport handles 165,000 more movements than his intended limit and that O'Hare airport at Chicago handles 205,000 movements above his intended limit?

Mr. Ridley: The number comes from the pledge given by the Government to people living near Heathrow that that would be the limit. I am not responsible for what happens in Chicago. I do not know the conditions there and it is nothing to do with me. When the Government have given a pledge, it is not right for my hon. Friend to say, now that it does not seem to suit his purpose, "Go back on your pledge. Sweep it away."

Mr. Campbell-Savours: If the Secretary of State keeps to his 275,000 movement limit, what protection will he give to small regional airports, such as Carlisle airport, which will, in effect, close if they lose their access to Heathrow? Unless those airports can retain that movement of traffic, there will be no future for them. The right hon. Gentleman should be outlining the methods that he will use to secure the future of airports such as that at Carlisle.

Mr. Ridley: I accept what the hon. Gentleman says. If he had been more patient he would have heard me explain how the interests of such airlines will be protected. I have no quarrel with his basic premise.

Mr. Bowen Wells (Hertford and Stortford): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Ridley: I shall, but then I shall proceed without interruption.

Mr. Wells: My right hon. Friend has been patient. I agree that the Government must seek to keep their pledge and I commend my right hon. Friend for doing that. The Stansted inquiry and the possible opening of a fifth terminal implies that the limit can be extended, lifted or increased. Will the Secretary of State have power to increase that limit if the Stansted inquiry results in the Government accepting a recommendation to build a fifth terminal at Heathrow?

Mr. Ridley: I agree with my hon. Friend about the two hypotheses. If the inquiry results in the suggestion that there should be an alteration in the limit, and if the Government agree with that, it will be possible under the Bill to lift the limit. The House would then have to judge whether the Government were entitled to change their mind and go back on their pledge. The Bill contains powers for the limit to be set at any level needed. The limit is not specified in the Bill.

It is clear that hon. Members want to look beyond this minor, technical Bill to consider airports policy in a wider context. I cannot contribute to the debate, because if I express my views that will prejudice my position when I eventually have to make a decision on the Stansted report. I am sure that hon. Members will accept that.

The Government have accepted legal advice that it will be necessary to publish the inspector's report on Stansted before privatising British Airways early in 1985. We have not yet received the report, but when we do we intend to publish it, although there will be a short delay while it is being printed.

The House will wish to express its view and to discuss the major issue of airports policy in general when it has seen the report. This will be a major departure from normal practice in relation to a planning inquiry. The House has always accepted that such reports should be published at the same time as a Minister's decisions. We propose early publication in this case because of the relationship with the British Airways prospectus. For the reason that I have given, this is an exceptional case and will not create a precedent for planning or any other inquiries. Ministers will listen, no doubt with rapt attention, to the views of the House, but their lips will be sealed, because they must not prejudice their eventual decision.

Such issues are for the future. I must deal with the unglamorous Bill and the need to control an excess of demand over supply at a particular airport. Whatever the decision resulting from the Stansted and Heathrow fifth terminal inquiry, we need the powers in the Bill, whether we are to limit movements at Heathrow to 275,000 a year, or whether we are to limit movements only to the physical capacity of the airport. I repeat that we are committed to impose the environmental limit, and I hope that nobody is seriously suggesting that we should break that commitment.

It will be suggested that we should review the limit before it is imposed. It has been pointed out that the decision letter on BAA's application to build terminal 4 at Heathrow, which committed the Government to the air transport movement limit, mentioned that the limit would be subject to review and that aircraft are now much quieter than when the commitment was made in 1979. However, the Government set the limit in the full knowledge that noisier aircraft would be banned in 1986. So the fact that noise levels have fallen in line with expectations, as airlines have re-equipped with quieter aircraft in preparation for the forthcoming bans, was anticipated and is not an argument for scrapping or reviewing the limit now.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): I remind my right hon. Friend that when the so-called pledge was

[Mr. John Wilkinson]

made the Government undertook that the limitation on air transport movements would be subject to review in the light of progress on the prohibition of noisier aircraft and the introduction of quieter aircraft. No review has yet been undertaken. Why are the Government only halfheartedly carrying out their pledge? Is it not strange that just at the time when T4 is coming into operation, with all the additional passenger-handling capacity, and when the statutory noise regulations have been imposed, an arbitrary limit should be imposed on bases which are already out of date?

Mr. Ridley: I answered that question once directly to my right hon. Friend and then again a few moments ago. I shall answer it a third time, because I do not want to be accused of a lack of patience. At the time that the pledge was given, in response to a planning inquiry—which, therefore, makes it a matter of some status before the present Stansted inquiry — it was based on the knowledge that aircraft would be quieter and on the fact that any review should be after there had been some experience of the operation of the limit. Those circumstances have not yet occurred.

All sorts of changes may be made to what is appropriate for the future in the light of the Stansted report, because of decisions by the House or because of who knows what. However, at this time we need the power to impose whatever limit may be necessary — whether an environmental or physical limit—and I have said that many times. Nothing that has happened so far causes us to review the limit at this time.

Mr. Anthony Steen (South Hams): Will my right hon. Friend give way on a technical point? I assure him that I shall not intervene again.

Mr. Ridley: Very well.

Mr. Steen: Why is the 275,000 movement limit so important to my right hon. Friend when there are 20,500 additional movements—the general aviation movements —of which 15,000 are of noisy jets? Some of them are noisier than many of the quiet aircraft now flying into Heathrow. How can my righ hon. Friend exclude 15,000 noisy jets?

Mr. Ridley: I have already answered that point. I have been tolerant of hon. Members asking questions about matters to which I am about to come, and I hope to be equally tolerant towards those who ask questions about something that I have said.

The figures quoted by my hon. Friend make the figures worse, not better. They mean that on top of the existing 275,000 there are already another 20,500 movements which contribute to the noise and disturbance around Heathrow. That means that the tolerable limit set at 275,000 may be more onerous on the inhabitants of that area, as some of my hon. Friends have already said. However, all those facts were known when the pledge was given.

I want to say a word about how the limit might be implemented. We issued a consultation document in July about how it should be done. We indicated then that the Government favoured the maximum use of pricing mechanisms to limit demand, although some regulatory action might be needed. One option might be to raise landing fees, on the assumption that the airlines prepared to pay the most for slots would be those that would make the most productive use of them. However, we believe that landing charges would have to be more than doubled to produce a significant reduction in demand, since they form a relatively small proportion of an airline's operating costs. That would be very hard on small airlines and commuter airlines, which have a part to play. Another method, which would have the advantage of matching supply and demand exactly, would be to auction take-off and landing slots. A futher possibility would be to allocate slots to existing users of them and then allow airlines to trade slots among themselves.

A number of measures for excluding or restricting services were also described in the document. Small aircraft below a certain seating capacity might, for instance, be excluded. Another possibility was the exclusion of all cargo services. An alternative to excluding categories of traffic was the exclusion of services to particular destinations. The consultation document suggested that the most suitable services for transfer would be those with a low interlining content and which, therefore, carry a high proportion of passengers who, unless their destination or point of departure is close to Heathrow, could generally use another London airport without any serious loss of convenience.

Another option—which was favoured by a number of those responding to the consultation document—would be to restrict the number of daily flights on the densest routes. In doing that, passengers' interlining opportunities at Heathrow would be substantially preserved while other London airports would stand to gain services to some of the most important domestic and European destinations.

I have received a large number of responses from airlines, airport authorities, amenity groups and other interested organisations. Strangely, in view of the great interest in the Bill, there has been virtually no response from hon. Members. I very much want to hear their views. I hope that this debate will be an opportunity for them to express their views. I have reached no decisions on which measures might be employed to implement the limit.

The powers in the Bill will enable me to adopt any of the measures outlined above. As I said, I want to hear the views of the House on these matters. The particular measures which will need to be taken will depend on the size of the excess demand. We clearly would not wish to take measures which would restrict demand unless it is necessary to do so. Our perception of the likely excess demand changes over time. At present it seems likely that, with the discontinuation of the Heathrow-Gatwick helicopter link, air transport movements will be only slightly above the limit by the time it is introduced next year.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): Will my right hon. Friend pay special heed to the views of the smaller regional airports such as Humberside, to which landing slots are precious? They are concerned that if the BAA is allowed to consider commercial criteria alone the small airlines — some of which have only 36-seat aircraft—will be frozen out.

Mr. Ridley: I have already responded to that point, which was made by the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours). I have more to say on that matter, but would like to do so in my own time.

The Bill provides for the BAA to prepare a scheme for the implementation of the limit. In directing the BAA to prepare a scheme I shall tell it the features that I want it to incorporate if the scheme is to receive my approval, as it must do under the Bill. I shall have a power of veto. I shall want to lay down firm guidelines quite soon, in the light of the consultations, the views of hon. Members and of my obligations under international air service agreements.

Although airlines must realise that the limit means that they will not be able to operate every service they might want to, I shall also want to ensure that those which are established at Heathrow have a fair and equal opportunity to operate there to the extent that the environmental limit allows. Every effort will be made to ensure that within the constraints of the limit Heathrow is used as effectively and as commercially as possible, that it continues to serve the domestic market and is compatible with our wish to promote competition on domestic services, while not changing Heathrow's importance as an international hub airport of great importance to the economy. It must remain available to people wishing to visit London as well as retain its position as the world's busiest international airport.

I expect to be able before the House rises for the Christmas recess to tell BAA the features I would expect it to incorporate in a scheme. My aim would be to announce this before the House considers the Bill on Third Reading. Full details of the scheme need to be known by the time of the IATA scheduling conference next June at which the detailed allocation of slots — not only at Heathrow but at some 50 busy airports throughout the world—takes place.

Mr. Peter Fry (Wellingborough): May I make what I hope is a helpful suggestion — perhaps the first this afternoon from Conservative Back Benchers? When my right hon. Friend comes to give those instructions to BAA, will he include, as a possibility, the use of short take-off aircraft—which have considerably added to the capacity of many United States airports—on smaller runways at an angle to the larger ones? The aircraft which would use those runways are quiet and should not cause any environmental disturbance.

Mr. Ridley: I shall certainly take note of what my hon. Friend said. One must be careful to ensure that no proposal will require a new planning consent. We all know that when planning consents are required for airport development the process takes some time and generates a certain amount of interest, if not controversy, in the House and elsewhere.

I hope that I have been able to assure the House that the Bill seeks to impose a limit at Heathrow and to give me the power to do so. The Bill seeks to do nothing else in the first two clauses, and is not connected with Stansted or the furture of airports' policy. The House will have an opportunity to debate those matters when, as is now inevitable, the Stansted inspectors' report is laid in the Vote Office for perusal by the House. I am sure that hon. Members' views on the wider matters that were raised will be most interesting, and we shall listen to them with the greatest care. In the meanwhile, I hope that the House will give the Bill its Second Reading.

4.12 pm

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Is it not truly extraordinary that the Secretary of State for Transport should come here today to seek to dismiss an important measure as a minor piece of legislation of technical quality? It is interesting to note that, although this is only a slim Bill, the Secretary of State may find that he has created a Frankenstein's monster, because Conservative Members as well as the Opposition have understood one thing that he has not wanted to make plain. At the heart of this measure there is a basic inconsistency. The right hon. Gentleman is making major changes that strike at the heart of the airline industry, and that has considerable implications, beyond the simple enabling measure that the right hon. Gentleman would have us believe we are debating.

The reality is that this is a panic measure. It has been created by the Government's policies. The sudden decision to solve the capacity problems of Heathrow without proper thought will plainly not take account of either the Stansted report—a report which I would have assumed even this Secretary of State would have waited for — or, for example, the Scottish lowlands airports consultation, both of which measures will have a great effect, provided this legislation is allowed to go ahead.

The reality is that the Conservative Government's deregulations are a direct contradiction of their attempts to put limits on movements at Heathrow. There is a capacity problem, and there would have been a capacity problem at Heathrow irrespective, because the airport has existed for a long time. This measure will pre-empt the Government's statements on Prestwick and the inspectors' report on Stansted. At the same time, the privatisation of British Airways is still undecided. It was interesting to note that the IFS report this week seemed to put even more question marks over that matter.

This is an extraordinarily bad time to bring forward a piece of legislation of this kind. That the Government are legislating now seems to be a sign of their desperation in the face of their mismanagement. The Government have still not decided their attitude towards regional airlines or regional airports. After the deregulation measures, one would have assumed that there would have been more understanding of their problems, but this Bill could reverse the whole of that policy.

Is British Airways to be the only really large airline in the United Kingdom? If not, how is it that, on the one hand, the Government say they want at least two major airlines but, on the other hand, they seek to create difficulties in the form of aircraft movements? Let us be clear about this—nothing affects the viability of airlines as much as the control of airports policy. That policy is fundamental to everything that happens to any airline—independent or state.

The Government's response to the CAA review implied that they wanted only one big airline, but now the Government keep talking about competition. British Caledonian still does not know whether it is expected to compete in the same league as British Airways; yet, if that is the intention, it is clear that there will have to be a considerable change in the situation at Gatwick. Exactly what do the Government have in mind—provided, of course, they have reached any kind of clear decision? If British Caledonian is to compete equally with British Airways, why is British Caledonian not to have a second

[Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody]

Gatwick runway? It is true that that possibility was blocked when the second terminal was agreed, but in 1982 the Government took decisions which apparently made it impossible for Gatwick to go ahead in the way that would be necessary were it to form an alternative hub.

Are the limits proposed at present meant to apply for a certain limited period? If I were involved in the aircraft industry, I should be worried about the commitment of the Secretary of State to pledges. On the one hand, the right hon. Gentleman says, "We have to do this, because we gave this pledge as a Government a considerable time ago," and, on the other hand, he appears to say, "Well, of course, it may be that we shall have to alter the pledge at some point in the future".

Gatwick currently has 12·5 million passengers, compared with Heathrow's 26·5 million. Gatwick officially has a capacity of 25 million, once the second terminal is built. Since Heathrow has two runways and will soon have four terminals, and its capacity is probably only 31·8 million, it seems difficult to accept that the claims for Gatwick are accurate. Without a second runway, British Caledonian can hope for little more than to move British Airways out of Gatwick without improving its own facilities. Moving out the 6·7 million non-scheduled or charter passengers would give a great deal more room to British Caledonian. Neither of those options has been discussed in any sense in the speech by the Secretary of State. The right hon. Gentleman says to the House, "I could do this, or I might do that. Of course, I cannot make it clear what I am going to do, because I shall be the one who takes the final decision." That is an outrageous way to treat the House of Commons. The Secretary of State should have thought of that before he brought forward this piece of legislation.

There are three crises in relation to airports in the south-east, and this Bill is so general that it would close any one of those airports to a major airline. The Secretary of State is taking enormous powers but he has not made that clear. He was astonishingly cavalier in the way in which he suggested that the Bill is a minor measure. However, he is seeking to limit aircraft numbers and he must know that aircraft movements represent the most important factor. There is no sense in the policy that the right hon. Gentleman is putting forward. It is not a competition policy, it is not especially efficient and it will not serve the environmental needs of anyone who is most affected.

Regional airports are relevant to what happens in the south-east. The right hon. Gentleman must know that if he were to bring forward a sensible and planned policy on regional airport expansion he would begin to deal immediately with some of the problems at airports in the south-east. I am told by the Manchester International Airport authority that if the Government were to move 5,500 aircraft movements immediately to Manchester the pressure at Heathrow would be relieved without delay. If further movements were agreed by the Government, the right hon. Gentleman would have a breathing space in which to decide what he wants to do about airports in the south-east. It is clear that many of his right hon. and hon. Friends are far less concerned about environmental consequences at Heathrow than the Stansted airport inquiry. It is extraordinarily arbitrary of him to have taken a decision before the inspectors' report.

I should like to see regional airports developed in relation to domestic airlines. Heathrow is suffering especially from congestion because the Government's policy of deregulation has increased the number of domestic flights by about 5 per cent. I should like them to begin to offer genuine planned advancement for regional airports without suggesting that the issue will be solved by privatisation. Irrespective of who controls the airports, the problem of aircraft movements will not be satisfied by the arbitrary sale of the assets of basic and important facilities.

It is interesting that the Government do not attempt in the Bill to give the British Airports Authority the means to obtain money to produce an efficient airport service. Unlike authorities in other countries, the BAA funds itself from charges which it raises. Sometimes the moneys come from franchises but they come largely from charges. It is clear from the Secretary of State's remarks about the Bill that it is his view that some of the charges may have to double. This is certainly planning of a sort. In fact, it is planning by the purse. It is important that we should understand exactly why the Bill is necessary and what its effects will be.

We are changing the legislation on air transport movements because of the limit at Heathrow of 275,000 air traffic movements per annum. However, there are already 270,000 movements, with only three terminals. By the mid-1990s, the capacity is bound to fall because larger aeroplanes will need more room when landing. Noise and vibration limitations following the 1982 legislation apply to Gatwick, Heathrow and Stansted. It is obvious that action on capacity is needed now.

If the Government are genuine, they will allow development at Stansted to go ahead. If we limit movements at Heathrow, we shall do nothing to develop facilities at the regional airports. By definition, we are expecting the extra movements to take place at Stansted airport and it is clear that Stansted cannot cope now. The Government have been caught on the hop as a result of their own policies.

Despite the Bill's narrow origins, the Government have reacted by giving themselves the widest possible powers. They are so wide that they will allow them to control individual airlines through detailed control of airports policy. They are giving themselves an enabling measure to allow them to think of ad hoc solutions to the mess that they have created.

Clause 1 will insert two new sections into the Civil Aviation Act 1982. It gives the power to increase by number but not by percentages. This means that, as soon as the upper numbers are reached, there will be increasing pressure to increase the number rather than the percentage. The definitions are absurd. Section 75A(2) would allow a limit

"by reference to any matters or circumstances whatever."

What could be more precise parliamentary drafting than that? In future the Secretary of State will be able to decide limits by reference to

"any matters or circumstances whatever."

The power is boundless.

Section 75B(2) means that, if the BAA is privatised, any private operator will be subject to the same level of control as the BAA is now. Is that what the Conservative party means by freedom? The section is likely to cause some interesting situations to develop in future. The

authority feels that there is no need for the limitation rule to apply outside the south-east. It says that there are no capacity problems elsewhere.

I use Manchester airport frequently and it is efficient. It is developing extremely well. That is one reason why the Secretary of State wants to sell it. The problem at Manchester and at other regional airports is that there is too much capacity and they need extra movements brought to them. The new section 75B(3) appears to give powers to the CAA to decide whether to enforce limits which will imply that the Government may have reversed their decision on the ninth recommendation in the CAA's review of airline competition. The CAA will be able to act more specifically in the interests of policy.

When we read clause 2, we begin to realise that some of the other provisions in the Bill are as important as those in the proposed new sections. Clause 2(2)*(b)* provides for special charges. It is important that these charges are further defined. There is no clarity in what is intended. Clause 2(3)*(a)*(i) provides for charges to vary for equal rights. The Secretary of State explained that many of these decisions will have to be pushed through before the IATA conference next year. He did not explain that clause 2(3)*(a)* breaks article 70 of the air navigation order, which stems from article 14 of the Chicago convention. Therefore, international negotiations are required before clause 2(3)*(a)* can be put into effect.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): Where in the Bill is there a reference to the selling of Manchester airport?

Mrs. Dunwoody: I did not suggest that the proposal was to be found in the Bill. However, for the past three weeks, the newspapers have been carrying what I can only describe as inspired leaks. As the Secretary of State so rarely clarifies his transport policy, it is not entirely surprising that we rely on what we read in the newspapers. It is clear that the right hon. Gentleman would like to see more privatisation. He would like airports such as Manchester to be handed over to anyone who feels that he can get the cash together to buy them. The reason is simple. It is that Manchester is efficient. It is that Manchester has a large local authority input. It is that the Secretary of State has a basic, dogmatic and fundamental objection to any sort of state service. That is why the absurdity of the Bill is so clear. On the one hand, the Secretary of State says that he will use state powers to limit the movements at Heathrow and on the other he says that the Government are giving people a great deal more freedom.

Mr. Adley: The hon. Lady knows that I do not support the Bill. She referred to things that are not in it. She talked about the privatisation of BAA. Am I being imaginative or unfair in suggesting that one of the attractions of the Bill for the Government, presumably, is that by taking the powers that make Heathrow more or less a dead duck for growth, increasing the attractions of Stansted and making the argument for Stansted stronger for BAA, there is a useful by-product for the Treasury of making BAA a more profitable animal when it is sold?

Mrs. Dunwoody: I would never accuse the hon. Gentleman of being unfair. I am sure that he is exactly right in his interpretation of events. It is wise that the House should understand the implications, which are far-reaching. This is not a simple Bill; it will affect airports and aircraft policies, not only things such as the privatisation of BAA, but every other aspect of airport policy for many years to come.

In Committee I shall ask the Minister exactly what is meant by some of the wording in the Bill, because it appears that the money that will be raised will not go to the airports themselves, but in effect will be an extra tax. Will the extra cash that is generated go to the Chancellor or to the airports?

We must be clear that the sale of slots will have a direct effect on every airline that has to participate. The large airlines could buy out the competition, so it would be rationing by the purse. It would solve the problems of the small domestic airlines taking up space because they would be totally squeezed out. The idea that there is free competition is not only bizarre, but totally unacceptable.

Innumerable questions are raised by the Bill and there are few answers. The Secretary of State sought to confuse rather than clarify the issue. Today he should have made it clear that in rushing the Bill before the House, before major and relevant decisions have been taken elsewhere, he is seeking to block basic decisions that relate to airports not only in the south-east but throughout Great Britain. The Secretary of State's hon. Friends have taken that point quickly. There is no justification for the Bill, with its wide powers and arbitrary provision for major decisions to be taken without consultation, as far as I can gather, unless the Secretary of State has boxed himself into such a tight corner that he can no longer go ahead with the things that he regards as his policy.

It is true that Heathrow is close to its top limit, but the Secretary of State knew that. Does he genuinely imagine that we think that his pledge will stand for all time? If that is his view, why has he not come to the House today with the Stansted inspector's report? Why has he not been prepared to talk about what the CAA and BAA wanted? Why has he not made it clear where the interests of the general public lie? Nowhere in his speech was there any sign that he wanted an expanding, efficient and far-reaching revision of aircraft and airports policy.

It is a disgrace that the House should be asked to accept this extraordinarily opaque piece of legislation. We are no clearer about the Bill now than we were when the Secretary of State stood up. I shall ask my colleagues to vote against it because it is a totally unsatisfactory piece of legislation. The Secretary of State may find that, if his hon. Friends are genuinely concerned, many of them will join me in the Lobby. That would show their commitment to their constituents' interests, which I am sure they will be delighted to demonstrate.

4.35 pm

Sir Humphrey Atkins (Spelthorne): The hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) started her speech by saying that she thought that the Bill was a panic measure. I venture to suggest that she forgot or did not know that several of us, including myself, have been pressing my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for years to bring it forward. We hoped that he would bring it forward sooner, but he has done so now. There is no question of panic.

I should like to explain why I and several other Conservative Members have been pressing my right hon. Friend. The House probably knows that I represent the constituency of Spelthorne, but perhaps, because the name Spelthorne appears on no map, some hon. Members do not

[Sir Humphrey Atkins]

know where it is. [HON. MEMBERS: "Where is it?"] The northern boundary of my constituency runs straight through the middle of Heathrow airport. [HON. MEMBERS: "Ah."] I do not know why my hon. Friends say "Ah." I was chosen to speak for my constituents, and I propose to do so.

Many of my constituents live south of the airport, and are not much disturbed by the noise, but a great many live to the west, in places such as Staines, which I have no doubt is known to many hon. Members. Others live in places such as Stanwell, Stanwell Moor, Poyle and Colnbrook — names that I suppose no one knows. Nevertheless, tens of thousands of people live there, many for a very long time—and certainly before Heathrow was the place that it is now.

If one lives—I do not suppose anyone here does—within a furlong or so of the western end of the runway at Heathrow, one knows that it is a different place from anywhere else. Aircraft thunder at hundreds of feet over one's head, using full power to take off or, alternatively, using less power, but with a different and just as penetrating noise, to land. I freely agree that successive Governments have been good about providing grants and so on for double glazing. Double glazing is all very well, but it is not much use in the summer when one has to have the windows open, because it is too hot to sit indoors with all the windows shut, or when one is working or sitting in the garden, if one is lucky enough to have a garden. Generally, when aircraft go over one's head using the power that I have described, one has to stop saying whatever it is one is saying. I would have had to stop speaking twice since I began my speech.

We talk about 275,000 aircraft movements a year. Let us work out what it means. It means 753 aircraft movements a day. If a day is confined to the hours of 6 am to 11 pm, that means 44 aircraft movements an hour. Certainly half the number of aircraft will be landing and the other half will be taking off, so if one lives at one end of the runway one hears only half that number. That is 22 aircraft an hour going over one's head, causing one to stop speaking every three minutes of every day throughout the year—weekdays, weekends, public holidays, Christmas day, every day. Of course, it does not work out precisely like that, but it means that at certain times of the day, particularly in the summer when double glazing is no use, one has an aircraft over one's head probably every two minutes.

Understandably, my constituents have been pressing for years for less noise. I have been doing what I can on their behalf to ensure that that happens. How can there be less noise? There are only two ways — quieter aeroplanes or fewer of them, or both. With regard to quieter aeroplanes, it is undeniable that the present generation of aeroplanes is quieter than the one that it is replacing. However, anyone who has stood underneath a 747 at full load that is taking off knows that it still makes a great deal of noise.

We hope that as the years go by the noise will diminish. It should be remembered that my constituents, and others, have suffered increasing noise for about 37 years. The most effective relief would be a reduction in the number of aircraft movements. The number of movements at Heathrow has increased year by year. It reached a peak of about 280,000 in 1979-80. It then diminished, mainly due to the recession, and my constituents were pleased at that small reduction. The total then began to climb again and is just reaching 275,000, which is as high as it has ever been, with the exception of that one peak year. That being so, there is no question of the Bill making life easier and better for my constituents. It will merely stop things getting worse.

We have to recognise that there is a limit to what it is reasonable to expect people to suffer for our convenience. Many of the people whom I represent work at the airport, but many do not. All, however, are entitled to an assurance that the problem that they have suffered and with which they have lived and brought up their children will not get any worse. The Bill gives the Secretary of State power to impose the limit that he mentioned, which is roughly the current level of activity. We have been pressing for that limit for many years, and the Government committed themselves to it several years ago.

It will be noted that my comments have nothing to do with terminal 4, terminal 5, Stansted, Gatwick or anything else. I am referring to a limit on the amount of noise and disturbance at Heathrow. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on introducing a Bill which will enable him to impose and enforce that limit. I can only speak for my constituents, who will certainly be pleased, but I am sure that the constituents of a number of my hon. Friends will feel the same.

Dr. Glyn: I endorse all that my right hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Sir H. Atkins) has said. With the possible exception of his constituency, my area is by far the worst affected by aircraft noise. I congratulate him on the work that he has done in leading the fight for a number of years. I remind him that as recently as 22 February 1984, in response to my speech, the Minister endorsed the restriction to 275,000 movements. That is reported at column 948 of the *Official Report*. It is thus no idle promise. It was made in 1979 and endorsed earlier this year.

Sir Humphrey Atkins: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's support. I know that his constituents suffer as much as mine. I am not entitled to speak for other Members' constituents, but my conversations with Members who represent surrounding areas suggest that they will be as pleased as I. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will take some comfort from that support from Members who know what they are talking about. I hope that the Bill will go through, and I congratulate my right hon. Friend on bringing it forward.

4.43 pm

Mr. Lewis Carter-Jones (Eccles): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Spelthorne (Sir H. Atkins) and the hon. Member for Windsor and Maidenhead (Dr. Glyn) on bravely stating the difficulties faced by their constituents, but I have other fish to fry. I believe that this measure should be called the Promotion of Stansted Bill, strongly influenced by Mr. Norman Payne and the BAA.

On the last aviation Bill I gave the Secretary of State a friendly warning, and I do so again today. On that occasion, the Secretary of State got into a rather complicated situation. The Prime Minister said that British Airways should be privatised, so Lord King was told to reorganise the corporation, under instructions from the Cabinet and directly responsible to the Secretary of State

for Transport. In the meantime, the Secretary of State had a rush of blood to the head and decided that he wanted competition, so he instructed the CAA to produce a document on competition.

The interim report that was produced should have alerted the right hon. Gentleman to the dangers ahead, but he carried on and a document duly appeared in which the only element of competition was in the title. The CAA reported that there was no competition. The Secretary of State was then in a serious dilemma. British Airways said that he was doing the wrong thing—I note that the right hon. Gentleman has now left the Chamber—and he was warned that privatisation of British Airways would have ruinous consequences. At that time, there was a peculiar atmosphere in the House. With certain exceptions, Back Benchers on both sides agreed that British Airways was getting a raw deal and that the CAA had produced a highly embarrassing report. As a result, the Secretary of State was forced to back-track.

The reason for that preamble is simple. The Secretary of State has not learnt his lesson. He is doing the same thing all over again. He says that we are waiting for reviews—he is always waiting for Godot, a report, a review or something or other. Currently, he is waiting for reviews on the fifth terminal and the inspectors' report on Stansted, but he wishes to make decisions in advance. As a consequence, he is likely once again to find himself in an extremely difficult position. The Cabinet will be heaving and sighing. There will be special meetings and big discussions about whether this should be done to British Airways or BCal, whether we should go ahead with Stansted or the fifth terminal and what the legislation has done. Complete turmoil will be created.

I advise the Government to withdraw the Bill until its implications have been carefully considered in the light of the reviews that the Government themselves have requested. What is the use of calling for a review and legislating in advance of it? It is bureaucracy gone mad. It is a good way to keep civil servants in employment. Perhaps that is the object of the exercise.

In my day, an aircraft coming in to land was told to "stay at angels 35, skating 152, angels 35, turn 6". Shortly afterwards it would be "skating 152, angels 3", and so on, and down the line one came—unless there was a panic on, in which case one reached for the Very pistol, fired a red and belted in quick. Alternatively, if one had time, one went to the lame duck aerodrome at Manston. Those were the choices. Things have improved since then, thank God. In my day, it was two minutes in one direction, change course, two minutes in another direction and two minutes later one had a wind speed and direction. Nowadays the skipper simply presses a button and has it in an instant.

I say all that for this reason. People have not realised the rate at which aircraft movements can now be handled. The figure of 275,000 is based on safety, not environmental considerations. The right hon. Member for Spelthorne and the hon. Member for Windsor and Maidenhead have my sympathy, but I believe that the rate of landings at Heathrow can safely be increased quite substantially. If that causes hardship to the people living there, we have an obligation to pay them adequate and realistic compensation. They should not have to suffer 100,000 movements per annum of the kind that have been described. Even that is too much. Something must be done to improve their lot. However, what we must do is to organise the landings safely and increase their number.

I declare an interest. I am the hon. Member for Eccles. I therefore have an interest in Manchester airport—a deep and abiding interest. During our last debate on aviation, I was very critical of the report of the Civil Aviation Authority. On this occasion, I should make it clear that I believe the CAA to be the best judge of matters concerned with the handling of aircraft in the air.

Mr. Bill Walker: But not the only judge.

Mr. Carter-Jones: Not the only judge, but better than the Secretary of State. If a judgment is to be made about the safety of landings, it must be made not by the Secretary of State but by someone with high professional skills.

Whether or not we like the idea of developing Stansted airport, we have to acknowledge that it will be a long time before Stansted is a real international airport. Why does the Secretary of State not consider the potential of the regions? The regions are sick and tired of the Government sucking wealth into the south-east. Some of the gravy should go to the north-east, the north-west and Scotland. More movements should be directed to the north. I think that the British Airports Authority has a standard print-out which is permanently set up. It runs as follows: "If we do not have the third London airport at Stansted, it is Schiphol which will benefit." That will be the end of the world.

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Carter-Jones: I will give way for an old friend.

Mr. Jessel: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for describing me in that way. The hon. Gentleman and I have served for 12 years as joint secretaries of the Indo-British parliamentary group.

We all believe that more traffic should go to Manchester, and that it would be a good thing to help the north in that way. Why, therefore, does the hon. Gentleman not agree to limit the number of flights at Heathrow?

Mr. Carter-Jones: The reason is straightforward. It is that there will be no movements in this area unless the number is stepped up at Heathrow for a while. That is the justification for the Bill. The Bill is about building an international airport at Stansted. As a Welshman, my heart beats at the thought that Twickenham is at last supporting the Welsh and the north-west—the Welsh for their rugby facilities, and the north-west for its aircraft handling facilities at Manchester.

We need more traffic in the north, for this reason. This country has produced three new aircraft which are very important in connection with regional airports. There is the HS146 and the Super 748, and we are about to produce the ATP. Those are the ideal aircraft for hub and spoke activities. *[Interruption.]* I was choosing the aircraft which I knew about.

If Manchester and Birmingham have the chance to develop hub and spoke activities, there are distinct possibilities of increasing the amount of international movement from those airports. I do not accept the BAA's preoccupation with building another airport in the south-east.

Mr. Adley: They are empire builders.

Mr. Carter-Jones: I must not comment on that. The BAA may well be an empire builder. However, we have airports such as Manchester and Birmingham which are

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ready for expansion and capable of absorbing much of the pressure from which the south-east is now suffering. The Secretary of State should comment on that fact.

Another factor should be borne in mind. There is a tendency nowadays for aircraft flying international routes to land at smaller airports. For example, British Airways planes sometimes land at Brisbane and then do a quiet leg back to Sydney before taking off back to Hong Kong. That is a reasonably cheap option. It is possible that Qantas, flying to Frankfurt or Schiphol, will be prepared to go on to Manchester occasionally, thus helping Manchester to achieve international status.

As much as everything else in the Bill, I dislike the fact that we are to limit movements by price. Only one factor should limit the number of movements—not money, but safety.

4.56 pm

Mr. Fergus Montgomery (Altrincham and Sale): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for announcing that we are to have a debate on Stansted after we receive the inspector's report. Many of us who represent constituencies in the north have fought for that over the past few months. It is essential that the House should have some say about the report before any decision is reached.

Having said that, I shall not say much else that will please the Government Front Bench. I join the chorus of protest from both sides of the House about the speed with which the Bill has been presented. It was printed on 9 November, and on 21 November we are debating its Second Reading. The Minister knows all too well that many hon. Members are suspicious — our suspicions have already been voiced today—about what lies behind the Bill.

The Bill imposes a limit on air traffic movements at Heathrow. I do not oppose that, but it will affect the development of regional airports and the expansion of Stansted. We have been told that the inspector's report on Stansted should appear at about the end of the month. I do not see why the Bill could not have waited, at least until the report had been published.

Those of us who represent northern constituencies have fought for some time for a better deal for provincial airports. Some of us fear that the Bill may be the thin end of the wedge, giving the green light to a massive expansion at Stansted. The hon. Member for Eccles (Mr. Carter-Jones) rightly paid great tribute to Manchester international airport, as did the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody). Many of us are very proud of the achievements of that airport. We constantly draw attention here and elsewhere to the glories of Manchester international airport, but we often feel that the true significance and potential of the airport is still not properly understood in some quarters.

Manchester international airport is not a little airstrip with a few huts. It is this country's only international gateway airport for long distance flights, apart from London and Prestwick. It handles about 5 million passengers a year, and it is still growing. It makes a substantial profit, with no cross-subsidisation and under the most rigorous accounting criteria. It has a catchment area of about 20 million people, and that area includes much of the United Kingdom's manufacturing industry. It already services 40 British and foreign airlines.

Manchester international airport is a substantial enterprise and a major asset. It is a potential generator of jobs, trade and prosperity, all of which the north-west needs. In spite of that major potential and the permission that the Government graciously grant us to be able to spend our own profits or the borrowings that are negotiated by Manchester airport on the strength of its profits — the Government then claiming credit for there being more money to develop the airport — I am convinced that Manchester is still being held up by this Government, as it has been by previous Governments. I am speaking of specific opportunities that are being offered to Manchester airport by airlines and that are being blocked by the Government.

Mr. Adley: By way of confirmation, has my hon. Friend also read clause 3 of this little Bill which contains a proposal which is to be tacked on to section 6(2) of the Civil Aviation Act 1982? What my hon. Friend is saying is confirmed by section 6(2)*(a)* to *(e)*, as it refers to national security, relations with the United Kingdom, obligations on the United Kingdom and the United Kingdom's membership of international organisations. Paragraphs *(a)* to *(e)* concern national security or international obligations and paragraph *(f)* concerns noise, vibration and pollution. The Bill sticks in paragraph *(h)*, which is absolutely irrelevant to the rest, as it says:

"in order to secure the most effective use of aerodromes within the United Kingdom".

The Bill will therefore enable traffic rights or anything else to be taken away from Manchester or other airports without defining what "most effective use" means.

Mr. Montgomery: My hon. Friend has made a fascinating speech, but I am grateful to him as he has reinforced my point.

With few exceptions, the interests of Manchester international airport have been subordinated to the interests of the state-owned British Airways, the state-owned British Airports Authority and the south-east of England by successive Governments. However, I have noticed a slight change in the past few months. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State wrote a letter to the leader of Manchester city council on 14 September in which he said:

"When I come to make up my mind"

on the Civil Aviation Authority recommendations

"I will do so on the basis of what is best for the airline travellers in the North-West, people whose interests seem to have been overlooked recently."

I would have said that it has been much longer than "recently". My right hon. Friend was absolutely right and I congratulate him on seeing the truth. I only hope that he will now build on those words by giving us action on the basis of those excellent sentiments.

The second encouraging sign came in the White Paper on airline competition policy. I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to the splendid and refreshing principles that are unambiguously enshrined in paragraphs 2 and 3 of that White Paper. Paragraph 2 says:

"Airlines are complex businesses, using advanced technology and sophisticated communications and marketing. But the only reason they exist is to carry people and goods. The pattern of services and the fares charged should be decided by the market. The best test of what people want is what they will pay for. Those airlines which provide the right service profitably at the lowest

price should thrive. But they should be continuously open to challenge by competitors. The barriers to new services and airlines who can provide a safe and reliable service should be lowered."

Paragraph 3 says:

"Historically, most sectors of air transport have been heavily regulated and protected by the State. That is still so in many overseas countries and the Government has to take account of that in its bilateral relations. Regulation is clearly needed in the case of safety where high standards must be maintained; the case for regulating the commercial activities of airlines is much less clear. The Government will move as far and fast as it can from the world of regulations to one where airlines compete for the customer's attention. In doing so it will release the energies of an industry whose growth since the second world war has enriched the lives of many."

Nothing could be clearer or more welcome.

Mr. Peter Snape (West Bromwich, East): Would the hon. Gentleman care to comment on the fact that the Government, who espouse the views of which he so heartily approves, have recently refused an application by Singapore Airlines to fly into Manchester international airport?

Mr. Montgomery: The hon. Gentleman has anticipated my speech. I shall have much to say about that. I do not think that what I shall say will displease the hon. Gentleman. Indeed, he might even shout, "Hear, hear."

Mr. Snape: I should not go that far.

Mr. Montgomery: The hon. Gentleman should be a little more adventurous and do it this time.

In a letter to the leader of Manchester city council, my right hon. Friend put it in writing that passengers using Manchester airport, and therefore Manchester airport itself, have not always had a fair crack of the whip.

Secondly, we had it in writing in October that in aviation matters, given proper safety standards, competition and freedom of choice for the passenger are not the only but paramount criteria in deciding policy.

The third thing that gave me some encouragement was my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport's visit to Manchester airport last week. I have to declare an interest. My wife is a member of the Manchester airport committee, so if I do not say nice things about the airport in the House I am in terrible trouble when I go home. I am told that the questions he asked and his initial responses to officials at the airport left a strong impression that he might prove to be more liberal minded and less bound by the traditional restrictive regulatory protectionist policies of the past.

The principles that the Government have enunciated are therefore clear and, I believe, correct. However, practise has been very different from principle. We have a Secretary of State preaching competition and freedom of choice while the Department seems to practice old-fashioned protectionism.

One of the consequences of the Bill would be the diversion of flights to Stansted. That would involve considerable expansion at Stansted. The expansion would have to be paid for. Once that happened, the British Airports Authority would want even greater revenue from Stansted. There would therefore be a knock-on and spiralling effect of further expansion at Stansted. That is the danger for Manchester and other provincial airports.

Another effect of the Bill, which the hon. Member for Eccles mentioned, is that traffic movement limitations at Heathrow, combined with the high cost of peak slots as envisaged in clause 2, will create problems in the provision of sufficient slots at Heathrow for flights from provincial airports. I wonder how the Bill will affect passengers who use the shuttle from Manchester to Heathrow and then continue abroad. Will the Bill make interlining by passengers from Manchester more difficult?

I should have thought that the answer to all this—it would be welcome to Manchester and take much pressure away from Heathrow — is to allow Manchester international airport to have more international flights. The hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) drew attention to that. Two airlines have recently said that they would like to fly to Manchester. The first is Malaysian Airline System and the second is Singapore Airlines. At the moment, Malaysian Airline System flies four times a week each way between Kuala Lumpur and Heathrow. It wants to increase the number of flights to perhaps seven a week. Primarily, it wants to increase its frequency to Heathrow, but it said three months ago that it would be interested in taking in Manchester. We should have preferred it to fly direct to Manchester, but that is a matter for negotiation. The essential fact is that we have here an efficient and well-run world airline that wants to fly to the United Kingdom and is prepared to fly to Manchester and to grant equal reciprocal rights to British airlines. It would create more jobs in Manchester, give passengers more freedom of choice and give more encouragement to industry and commerce in the north-west, yet the Government have refused the Malaysian application.

The case of Singapore Airlines is even worse. Apparently it cabled the Department of Transport on 25 September saying essentially two things. First, Singapore Airlines wanted to fly direct three times a week each way between Singapore and Manchester. Secondly, it would be happy if, in straightforward competition, a British airline, whether British Airways, or British Caledonian, or another, wanted to fly the same route. It was and remains a wonderful opportunity for Manchester, because it fulfils exactly the principles of competition and the increase of passenger choice which the Secretary of State holds so dear.

Mr. McCrindle: Considering all that my hon. Friend said about the desirability of opening up Manchester to various airlines, does he agree that one of the effects of doing so would be to add competition to British Airways on routes between Heathrow and Australia? Does he agree that that might conceivably be a reason why Manchester is not being favoured for additional services?

Mr. Montgomery: A good airline should not be worried about fair competition. It should be prepared to compete with another airline fairly. During the recent battle over the CAA report, one of the points constantly made by British Airways was that it did not fear competition, provided that it was fair. That is precisely in line with the liberalising of flight policies, which the Secretary of State has been promoting domestically, within the European Community and especially Holland. It would promote more jobs in the north-west, which we need, and genuine and psychological encouragement to industry and commerce there, and ease pressure on traffic movements at Heathrow, which is the central point of the Bill. Despite those substantial benefits, the Department of

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Transport refused the application. The House may ask why an offer which conforms exactly to the Secretary of State's beliefs should have been rejected by the Department.

The Department of Transport says that there are not enough potential passengers to justify more flights. That is a bit of an old chestnut. If Singapore Airlines, which may be in the top half dozen most efficient airlines in the world, thinks that it makes commercial sense to fly to Manchester, who in the Department of Transport thinks he knows better? That general argument of the Department was spectacularly knocked on the head by the fact that when the Glasgow to London monopoly route of British Airways was opened to competition from British Midland two years ago, the number of passengers increased by 30 per cent., prices fell and service improved.

The next shop-soiled argument against accepting the Singapore Airlines offer is that that airline is subsidised by the Singapore Government and therefore would present unfair competition. I understand that that is completely untrue—that Singapore Airlines is not subsidised. The matter can be easily settled, because the accountants for Singapore Airlines happen to be the same as those used by British Airways. It would be simple and proper, with the agreement of Singapore Airlines, to ask them to say whether it is subsidised.

The next argument against Singapore Airlines and Malaysian Airlines System is that extra flights are not allowed for in existing agreements. In that case, agreements can be changed. If the British Government agree, no one else will disagree.

Another argument is that if Singapore Airlines or Malaysian Airlines System flies to Manchester, it may damage the present Qantas services from Australia by siphoning off passengers. No one is more aware of that than the people running Manchester airport. If they decide that the risk is worth taking and that the new services will mean more business, they do not want the Department of Transport telling them that it knows what is best for the people of Manchester.

The Department of Transport seems to fear that if Singapore Airlines or Malaysian Airlines System is allowed to fly more frequently to the United Kingdom, and especially to Manchester, it might hurt British Airways. I cannot see why British Airways should fear fair competition from such airlines.

British Airways, under Lord King, has made enormous improvements and smartened up its domestic and European flights enormously—I congratulate it on that —but some of its long-distance flights have not been improved. Part of the reason for that is that about five years ago, before Lord King became chairman, British Airways concluded a pay and conditions deal with its cabin crew, which restricted the number of cabin crew to 13 —unlucky for some. Other airlines, such as Malaysian Airlines System and Singapore Airlines, and, for that matter, British Caledonian, have a considerably higher ratio of cabin crew to passengers and, therefore, offer more attentive services. Malaysian Airlines System has 18 cabin crew on its flights. Of course, cabin crew numbers and conditions are matters for British Airways, but it is intolerable that less-than-the-best service standards by British Airways should result in Manchester airport and passengers in its catchment area suffering.

Manchester is keen to get new traffic from across the Atlantic as well as from the far east. We are delighted that British Airways has announced that from next year it will fly to the United States from Manchester. There is however, an additional point. Although the Minister, in his reply to an Adjournment debate recently, said that Manchester airport was specifically mentioned in the Bermuda 2 aviation agreement between the United Kingdom and the United States, he did not say that Manchester was mentioned only as a point of origination for a British airline and not as a point of destination for an American airline. We should like to see the latter added to the agreement.

It would greatly help Manchester to attract an American airline to fly from the United States to Manchester if my hon. Friend, when he replies, will say that the Government will look sympathetically at and be glad to receive an application from an American airline to fly to Manchester. That would bring great pleasure to the people responsible for running Manchester international airport.

Finally, nothing in the Bill gives serious consideration to encouraging greater use of non-London airports when restricting airport capacity at Heathrow. I am unhappy that money which is raised by the auctioning of slots should accrue to the British Airports Authority general reserve and, consequently, facilitate the development of Stansted. Indeed, I disapprove of that. I do not like the idea of BAA developing its own airports with excess profits at Heathrow, without regard to a national airports policy. The Bill does not do much to benefit Manchester. It concentrates on the south-east and makes the development of Stansted more likely. Therefore, I cannot support my right hon. Friend in the Lobby tonight.

5.18 pm

Mr. Stephen Ross (Isle of Wight): So far we have had a good lobby for Manchester. As I believe that undertakings should be fulfilled, I can hardly object to the part of the Bill which proposes a limit on air transport movements at Heathrow when terminal 4 comes into operation. The undertaking was given in December 1979 and has been repeated since. However, life has moved on since then. We now have larger and quieter planes, and still more are promised. Moreover, the limit which we are being asked to accept in the Bill conflicts with the evidence given to the Select Committee on Transport, of which I am a member, by Mr. Hewson, chairman of the Heathrow scheduling committee, only last summer.

On 5 June 1983 Mr. Hewson said:

"all my discussions with the Deputy Director of the Department of Operational Research and Analysis of the CAA, who is the acknowledged expert in such matters, indicates that the ultimate capacity in terms of total movements as opposed to ATMs, is unquestionably around 230,000 movements. It could be as high as 350,000. He has said the rock bottom minimum, assuming all pessimistic assumptions would be 300,000. The theoretical maximum is 420,000."

He was then asked:

"Does that include small aircraft and feeder services?"

He said:

"Movements of every description."

He was then asked:

"And helicopters, short landings and take-offs?",

to which he replied:

"He was talking about runway capacity. Therefore it technically excludes helicopters."

He was asked whether he would agree with that evidence and he said, "Yes." He was questioned again and asked, "Would you?" He said:

"Undoubtedly . . . I am quite sure that the scenario from the noise point of view that was envisaged at the time of the Terminal 4 Inquiry is quite different nowadays."

That is all to be found on page 457 of the minutes of evidence, volume II of the Transport Committee report.

The first page of the Secretary of State's consultation document states:

"The Government accepted that there should be a limit and in its decision approving the development of Terminal 4 prescribed a limit of 275,000 ATMs, set close to what was then estimated to be the capacity of the runways. The announcement of the limit which was to come into effect from the opening of Terminal 4"—

we are talking about a date in October next year—

"mentioned that it would be reviewed in the light of progress on the prohibition of noisier aircraft and the introduction of quieter aircraft."

The consultation document puts into question whether 275,000 is the limit for all time or whether it can be increased in the near future. On page 3 the proposed approach is mentioned. It states:

"The facilities at Heathrow (runways, terminals, parking areas and other infrastructure) should be used as effectively as possible; as much freedom as possible should be left to the preferences of passengers and the commercial judgment of the airlines. . . . compatibility with the Government's desire to encourage competition in the provision of domestic services"

must be taken into account and

"Heathrow's importance as an international 'hub' airport should be maintained by minimising the restriction on interlining opportunities; and insofar as intervention is required, the range of services available at Gatwick should be increased, so that it can develop similarly as an international hub."

The Bill seems to be somewhat controversial if all those comments are taken into account. Moreover, we have had firm promises for some considerable time that there is to be no second runway at Gatwick. That was an undertaking given to Surrey and Sussex county councils and by the Secretary of State recently. That effectively limits the traffic at Gatwick, so we are told, to 25 million passengers. I accept what the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) said. That sounds a high figure, and I suspect that it will be somewhat less than that.

One begins to suspect that the Bill is a preliminary to an announcement about Stansted. That should have come first. The Secretary of State's whole civil aviation policy is in disarray. He should have held this measure back until we had had time to see the inspectors' report and debate it in the House. It is only fair to say that his airline policy is in complete conflict with his public transport policies and the White Paper on buses. Everything seems to take second place to the privatisation of British Airways. Even President Reagan has been cajoled into falling into line, such is the fear that he has of meeting the Prime Minister. The power of Lord King and the Treasury seems to know no bounds.

Competition among our airlines is now a travesty. The Secretary of State was right to set up the CAA inquiry. It is a tragedy that he did not accept the report's recommendations. They seem to have been borne out by the report which we have had recently on British Airways' efficiency.

The Bill places a limit on slots and provides for the possibility of auctions. That must inevitably lead to a rise in charges, which are already high enough. Fortunately, in a recent press release, the British Airports Authority said that it thought that the use of quotas was the fairest answer to Heathrow's capacity problems. I hope that it will not be overruled on that by the Secretary of State.

Mr. Jessel: Is the hon. Gentleman in favour of a limit of 275,000 flights a year through Heathrow, or is he sitting on the fence as usual?

Mr. Ross: The hon. Gentleman wants to send a press release around Richmond and Twickenham, which I gather he did at the last two elections, about my being in favour of a fifth terminal at Heathrow. I am not in favour of that at this time and I have never said as much. I am opposed to the massive extension of Stansted. If he will be patient, I shall outline what I am in favour of. I know that in Richmond and Barnes there were only 75 votes between the Liberal candidate and the present Member.

How do increasing costs and the possibility of auctions, which will price out many of the smaller operators, help them and the regional airports? I am in favour of the expansion of our regional airports. I support everything that has been said about Manchester.

Why has the Secretary of State turned down the People Express application to go into Stansted? Why has he refused, as was repeated several times by the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale (Mr. Montgomery), the Singapore Airlines' application to go to Manchester? What is to happen to the Highland Express application to use Prestwick, because it could be the saviour of that international airport? If he believes in freedom and free competition, what is wrong with someone using Prestwick?

It is only fair—I accept the question that has been put to me—to put on record what I believe should be the alternative to what the Secretary of State is proposing. First, I believe that we should proceed with a STOL port, in docklands, which has been recommended by an inspector. That decision has not yet been taken. It is not in the hands of the Secretary of State for Transport. The Secretary of State for the Environment will decide. Quiet aircraft will be used—for example, the Dash 7 and the Twin Otter. Such an airport would take some pressure off the other London airports.

I hope that we will encourage, in every way that we can, greater use of our regional airports, not just Manchester, but Birmingham, Newcastle, Leeds and probably Cardiff. Those regional airports must have ready access to Heathrow and Gatwick at least unless they can establish hubs of their own. I suspect that Manchester is about the only regional airport that can do that.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): I suppose that when the hon. Gentleman talks about the only regional airport that can do that he means in England and does not exclude the possibility of Prestwick expanding in that way.

Mr. Ross: I do not exclude Prestwick. I have been to all these airfields, and Prestwick is a lovely airport. However, there is the challenge of Glasgow and the fact that British Midland, which could operate out of Prestwick, has turned it down.

It may well be Manchester that we are talking about, but if a company can establish itself at Prestwick, as People Express did in Newark, New Jersey, I wish it well, and I see no reason why that should not happen. I make one proviso, however. Public transport services into those

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airfields must be improved. There must be a rail link into Prestwick and into Manchester. That can be done, and it need not be too expensive.

We should proceed with the disposal of Farnborough. I am talking about the airfield, not about the research establishment. That has been on the cards for a long time. It should be used as a business executive airfield. Some of the small aircraft which go into Heathrow at the moment could probably use Farnborough.

I would allow limited expansion of Stansted. I believe that 2 million to 3 million passengers at Stansted would be acceptable. There are 500,000 passengers using it now. That has increased from 250,000. It was almost up to 1 million at one time. I cannot see how that limited expansion would conflict with the request from People Express to use that airport. If it can make a go of it, why not let it do so? When the Government talk so much about competition, I cannot understand why there is this restriction on these new routes. We can only assume that it is all to do with the privatisation of British Airways.

I asked the Secretary of State what the present position was about the sale of the CAA airports. I should be surprised, but I should be delighted to learn, that there are private buyers for these airfields. I suspect that there will not be. I do not know who will buy Benbecula. At the moment, Sumburgh is losing money. Does the right hon. Gentleman intend to hand these airfields over to the British Airports Authority for it to operate them if there are no buyers? If so, how can the BAA finance them if it cannot use cross-subsidisation? Is the right hon. Gentleman expecting the local authorities to take part? If he is, he had better have a word—I must be careful here, because the Secretary of State for Scotland is just as tough on local authorities as the Secretary of State for the Environment — with the responsible Ministers, because the local authorities have no cash. The idea that something like £6 million will come in from these airports may be pie in the sky. We shall watch that with interest, because if the Secretary of State manages to dig up buyers for those airfields he will be a magician.

Mr. Ridley: The figure of £6 million is the maximum that might be written off under the Bill. It is not the value of the airports.

Mr. Ross: I am grateful for that clarification. I believe that the Bill is premature, but I accept that the right hon. Gentleman is honouring a pledge. We must give him credit for that. However, this pledge was probably mistakenly given. Almost certainly the Bill will be unfair to the smaller operators, whom in his heart of hearts the Secretary of State must want to help. It will not be particularly helpful to our regional airports, and in my view it is unrealistic in respect of the CAA airports. For those reasons, we should vote against the Bill tonight.

5.30 pm

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): I take part in this debate out of a strong constituency interest, as the airport at Heathrow provides the greatest source of employment for my constituents. I also take part as the re-elected chairman of the Conservative party's parliamentary aviation committee, whose remit is to maximise the opportunities for British civil air transport with the aim of benefiting the economy and the travelling public.

I hope that this also is entirely the objective of my right hon. Friend, because to be candid this measure seems inimical to the interest of British civil air transport. I am sure that hon. Members will have noticed how critical and sceptical was the questioning of my hon. Friend during his opening remarks. That was entirely justified, because I believe the measure to be premature and ill-considered. I do not even believe that it is necessary. It has been parachuted into our legislative programme for this Session. There was no mention of such a Bill in the Gracious Speech, and if we were surprised by the absence of such a measure in the Gracious Speech it was because there was no mention of any proposal to denationalise or privatise the British Airports Authority either. That was in our manifesto. Its absence caused me to smell a rat.

The Secretary of State enjoins us not to be too Machiavellian and not to adduce links and connections where none exist, particularly any connection there may be with the decision which the Government will have to reach, sooner rather than later, about whether to approve the development of Stansted as proposed by the BAA.

It would be foolish and wrong to suppose that the obtaining of legislative powers to permit the Government to carry through what they regard as a pledge to impose a limit of 275,000 air traffic movements a year for Heathrow would not have a relevance to the Stansted issue. It most certainly and manifestly must, because, as the number of ATMs is already creeping up towards that limit, and as Lord Trefgarne expects it to be exceeded some time towards the end of this year or next, if such a limit is imposed aircraft will have to be shunted out of Heathrow. If those aircraft serve the London area, they can be shunted to Gatwick, or alternatively they will be shunted to Stansted.

It is noteworthy and instructive for the House to bear in mind that no airline—with perhaps the sole exception of British Caledonian, which has its own interests as Gatwick is its hub airport—favours this measure. I said that the Bill should benefit British civil air transport, but if the airlines are against it, who are its friends? I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Sir H. Atkins) is a friend, and without wishing to pre-empt his remarks, I imagine that my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel) is also favourably disposed towards it. However, among those of us who take a serious professional interest in these affairs, I doubt whether anyone favours it.

I must declare a further interest. Before I was returned to this House I was a chief flying instructor of a flying school at Stansted and acted as a sales manager for an air charter operation out of Stansted. I therefore know the airport well, and I am also professionally familiar with the south-eastern airports. I did what I thought to be the only reasonable and right thing and made a submission not only to the T5 inquiry, both written and oral, but also to the consultative process which my right hon. Friend initiated to consider the so-called pledge of 275,000 movements a year.

We must look at that pledge fully and the context within which it was made. Apart from noting the limit in the press statement of 17 December 1979, we should also bear in mind that the second part of the relevant paragraph states:

"The Secretaries of State have noted that the inspector's proposed limitation was substantially below Heathrow's runway capacity and could thus prevent the effective use of the airport's resources at a time when the London airports are likely to be under considerable pressure".

That summarises the position exactly. By this measure we are effectively inhibiting the development of Heathrow, which is a national asset of immeasurable price, value and worth. It is a huge national investment and will be an even larger one when terminal 4 comes into service. How paradoxical, perplexing and strange that, just when this additional capacity is available — in which we all invested as the BAA built it — we should prevent additional air transport movements into Heathrow!

The so-called rationale was noise, but, as the serious specialists will know well, noise is a very different issue from what it was when we had the big debates about Maplin. We may still carry our battle scars, but we recall those debates. We won then and I predict that we shall win again over Stansted. It shall not be developed to phase 1 as predicted, because I do not believe that there is parliamentary support for that development.

With quieter aircraft coming into service, the whole rationale for basing an airports policy on noise criteria has altered and dramatically changed. It will change even further when we have the statutory imposition of a ban on noisier aircraft from 1 January 1986.

I ask the Secretary of State to think again. The submissions that I have received are heartrending. I do not want to over-egg the pudding, but I have received a letter from the chairman of British Midland, the domestic airline of the year for the second time, in which he states:

"We are faced with very real hardship if there is an implementation of any unnatural restriction on air transport movements at Heathrow."

He ends by saying:

"the capacity of the runways and the terminals are far greater by virtue of improved technical and working practices than the British Airports Authority were prepared to concede. Indeed, the Civil Aviation Authority have now determined that the capacity, on equipment currently available and not allowing for any improvements which may subsequently take place, is now 330,000 air transport movements per annum. If implemented, this latter figure could see the problem through for at least five/seven years."

I do not dissent from that view. It was, in short, the view of all the private sector independent carriers operating into Heathrow—not only British Midland but Air UK, Dan Air, Manx Airlines, Air Ecosse and Brymon. These are the independent carriers that the CAA's policy of enhancing competition, especially among domestic services, has encouraged to go to Heathrow. The travelling public has benefited. Those in the provinces have benefited. It would be crazy if these enterprising people among the private sector carriers, which the Conservative party is supposed to be encouraging, were the first to be victimised, as they would be if the British Airports Authority had its way. The BAA is the chosen instrument of the Bill because it will be imposing the limit, athough ultimately it will have to be sanctioned by the Secretary of State.

I refer right hon. and hon. Members to the BAA's press statement of 19 October:

"A quota on domestic flights into Heathrow Airport would be the fairest way of dealing with the difficult problem"—

it is difficult in the eyes of the BAA—

"of restricting air transport movements to 275,000 a year."

Mr. Robert Atkins (South Ribble): Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the reasons why Genair, the small company operating from, amongst other places, Blackpool airport to Heathrow, was put out of business was that its slot into Heathrow was removed and as a result it lost a great deal of business and eventually went under? Does not that enhance my hon. Friend's argument?

Mr. Wilkinson: I am sure that it does, and I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his intervention.

Lest the House should think that I am less than fair-minded and that I am obsessed with the independent carriers, I quote a letter from the managing director of British Airways of 25 October, long before the Bill appeared even in print. He gives four reasons why he suggested on behalf of British Airways that a limit of 275,000 air transport movements was not in the interests of BA:

"(i) There would be no difference discernible to the public in aircraft noise around Heathrow if unrestricted ATMs were permitted. (ii) The proposed, arbitrary limit would 'waste' Heathrow's runway capacity by holding operations below the level of 330,000 ATMs—recently assessed by the CAA as a wholly practicable level. (iii) The ATM limit is incompatible with HMG's airline competition policy. (iv) There is insufficient capacity at Gatwick to absorb an artificially created overflow of movements from Heathrow."

I thought, and I hope that it is still the case, that the first objective of our Government's policy was to facilitate the privatisation of British Airways. How remarkably strange and what perverted logic it is that, just before flotation, the Government introduce a measure that could hobble and inhibit British Airways. That is extraordinary, and it is another reason why we should not give the Bill a Second Reading.

The British Airports Authority itself has doubts. It might be instructive if I quoted from a letter from the director of Heathrow airport, a man known to me and a man of the highest professional competence. He said:

"The BAA was not consulted at all during the drafting of the Bill. As a result we have a number of major concerns. For example, the Bill provides for schemes including 'special charges to be payable by operators.' This would include slot auctions which we do not believe to be an appropriate solution to Heathrow's capacity problem. Such a scheme might permit, for example, the large airlines to act in a predatory manner, which would not be in the best interests of the air traveller."

I know that there is no mechanism in the Bill for imposing a limit, but that is a deficiency in the Bill. It means in effect that we are writing a blank cheque. We do not know the mechanism, and that is a fundamental deficiency which should have been rectified.

With the best of intentions, my right hon. Friend and his team have sought to justify the Bill on grounds of noise. I hope that I have demonstrated that the grounds of noise have been overtaken by events. British Airways has conducted a careful scientific assessment of the levels of noise disturbance to communities around the airport which can be anticipated at various levels of air transport movements a year.

I regret that my right hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne is no longer in his place, because the outcome of the survey is extremely interesting. I see the present figure for Staines, which my right hon. Friend mentioned. The noise and nuisance index for 1980 is 37. With 275,000 ATMs it is 29 in 1986, after the noise ban. That is considerably lower. With 330,000 ATMs a year, the figure would be only 31 after 1986 when the new noise regulations come into force. So even with the 330,000 air transport movements a year which the CAA believes in its professional competence to be possible within the current

[Mr. Wilkinson]

constraints of Heathrow airport, and with existing air traffic control equipment, the noise level would be very substantially lower.

This is an unworthy Bill. It has not been thought through. It pre-empts the decisions ultimately to be made about Stansted and terminal 5. It is damaging to the interests of my constituents and those who work in the civil air transport industry not only in Heathrow but perhaps further afield. For those reasons, I urge my right hon. and hon. Friends to vote against Second Reading.

5.48 pm

Mr. Alan Haselhurst (Saffron Walden): I am glad to be called immediately after my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson), who put forward a most succinct general argument against the Bill. Obviously I speak in the sense of defending the interests of my constituents. Most right hon. and hon. Members will recognise that. However, I remind them, as I did a previous House of Commons in an airports debate, that the core of my beliefs, such as they are, about airports matters was formed when I was Member of Parliament for Middleton and Prestwich and never dreamt that in a few years I might be the Member for Saffron Walden.

I hope that the House will accept that I have never adopted an "Anywhere but in my patch" approach to the resolution of the airports problem. I have always tried to find an objective way out of the problems which I hope can combine the protection of the interests of my constituents with the factual problems facing the civil air transport industry. I have never attempted to duck the need argument, to the extent that it has been proved.

Apart from being the Member of Parliament who represents Stansted, I try to remember that, in the Burkean sense, I am also a Member of Parliament. In conjunction with my constituency interests, I have to try to adopt an objective approach.

Today is not the day for discussing the details of airports policy. However, it may be that the only compliment that I can pay my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is that I am grateful for his announcement today assuring the House that the inspector's report will be published and that there will be a debate in the House before the decision is taken. We have sought that, and we are most grateful for it. We did not expect otherwise, did we?

It is not so much the Bill's contents but its timing and effect that I want to deal with today. The rush with which it has appeared before us is unseemly. I am uneasy in my mind that civil aviation policy is being formed at the charge. A consultation document was published in the summer, but there has been no debate. A White Paper was published during the parliamentary recess but there has been no debate. There was no intimation in the Gracious Speech, but a few days ago, that the Bill would come before us, yet here we are being asked to assent to what my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood has so justly described as a blank cheque. It is very suspicious indeed.

In representing the interests of my constituents in Saffron Walden and the surrounding area, I have tried all along to say to the Government that I cannot in the end deny the possibility that they may wish to come to a conclusion on airports policy which my constituents find hostile to their interests. Naturally, I hope that that will not happen, but I recognise it as a possibility. Because of that, I have tried to tell my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench that they should have the greatest care in the way that they handle the approach to that final decision. There is a lot of suspicion and there are many ruffled feathers in the Saffron Walden area. That is not necessarily because people believe in plots but because Stansted has the uncanny capacity to keep reappearing as an issue, whether it is because civil servants thrust it before Ministers with such determination or because Ministers find themselves independently persuaded. It keeps coming back. People suspect that there is a determination somehow in the machinery of Government that it should happen. Therefore, the handling of the matter is important. To avoid political difficulties among the Government's friends, it should be beyond reproach.

I thought that that point had been well accepted, but then the Bill came along. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State says that he cannot see any connection between clause 1 and Stansted or the general airports problem. I find that difficult to understand. I do not doubt my right hon. Friend's personal sincerity for one moment—let that be clear. But did no one suggest to my right hon. Friend or to his right hon. Friends that someone might see a connection between the Bill and the resolution of the airports policy? That possibility is utterly fantastic. I can only say that the Government were extraordinarily badly advised.

When policy was initiated I was given assurances about the nature of the inquiry. My right hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Mr. St. John-Stevas), when he was Leader of the House, said of the inspector's inquiry:

" I expect that he will wish to examine relevant alternatives to . . . Stansted."-[*Official Report* 18 December 1979; Vol., c. 391.]

On 21 February 1980, Mr. John Nott, the then Secretary of State for Trade, said:

" I must make it clear that the Government will reach their final decision only in the light of the inspector's recommendation. In 1980 I can simply set out clearly the constraints which surround our choice of action and then provide through this wide-ranging public inquiry the opportunity for the widest expression of views. The final decision must come at the end of that process."—[*Official Report*, 21 February 1980; Vol., c. 696.]

The inspector was most concerned about exactly what all that meant to him. In the meantime, the words and reassurances that I was receiving were becoming ever more generous and coming from ever more authoritative sources. The last word I took to be that of the Prime Minister who, in a letter to me in 1980, said:

"The inspector brings an open mind to the issues and has the benefit of hearing all relevant evidence presented and tested in cross-examination. I can assure you that, when the inspector has reported to me, the representations made and his conclusions on them will be carefully considered, and there will be no question of treating any particular alternative proposal as out of the question because it conflicts with Government policy as put to the inquiry."

Mr. Michael Barnes QC, representing the Government's point of view, addressed the inspector on the second day of the inquiry in the following terms: He said:

"I wish, at this stage, to comment on the Government's view of the status of its policies and their relevance to the Inquiry. The Government's view may be stated as follows. The issues which are before this Inquiry are so wide ranging that it would be nonsensical to assert that because an issue has been the subject of a statement of Government policy that issue cannot be open to question at the Inquiry."

He went on later to say:

"They"—

the Government—

"see the prime purpose of the Inquiry as being for all parties to deploy their argument and evidence and to enable all aspects of the issues and proposals to be considered in detail. It is only in the light of your recommendations that the Government will reach its final decision."

That perplexed the inspector a little, and on the 13th day Mr. Michael Barnes had to return to assist the inspector. He said:

"You will have the benefit of all the evidence being advanced and tested before you and you are in a position to judge afresh and independently the arguments advanced. The Government does not ask you to take any matter for granted and, within the normal rules which apply to these inquiries, does not seek to confine your consideration to any particular areas."

He went on:

"No argument which may be advanced to these inquiries will be ruled out from proper consideration by the Government merely because it runs counter to some aspect of Government policy. The decision on each of the three called-in applications is in no sense a foregone conclusion. The Government has done and will do everything within its power to ensure that the inquiries are as full and wide ranging as it has promised."

I do not want to weary my hon. Friends, nor my right hon. Friend, but the quotations could go on. Mr. Harris from the Department of Trade was also closely questioned by the inspector. The clear implication was that all those matters were sub judice within the inquiry. Even as recently as 24 November 1983, my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, North-West (Mr. Mitchell), Under-Secretary of State for Transport, said:

"I can assure you that the Government will not be influenced by the outside lobbying of any of the parties. What will matter to us is the Inspector's report on the evidence which was actually presented to the inquiries, which was properly tested by examination and cross-examination."

The point that I am trying to make, I hope not at wearisome length, is that from all that was said and made clear to me, and then to the inspector at the inquiry, no one could have imagined that the 275,000 ATM limit was anything other than one of the factors in the inquiry. Her Majesty's Ministers assure us that they are in a quasi-judicial position in relation to that inquiry. I should have no more imagined that a Bill would have been brought forward today to implement the immediate expansion of Stansted than that there would be a Bill to impose the 275,000 ATM limit at Heathrow.

If in the light of that the Government say that they never realised that there was a connection, I can only say that my hon. Friends see the connection and my constituents will all too clearly see the connection. If the 275,000 ATM limit is imposed by the Government using the machinery of the Bill, the prospects of having a fair and free decision on Stansted become negligible. That is what is at issue. That is why hon. Members are concerned tonight. I am astonished that my right hon. Friend and the Government cannot see that.

Mr. Jerry Hayes (Harlow): My hon. Friend properly and forcefully put the point that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is in a quasi-judicial position and therefore cannot reply to the debate on Stansted airport. In those circumstances, does my hon. Friend agree that the most decent, proper and sensible thing for our right hon. Friend to do would be to give the House a free vote on the matter?

Mr. Haselhurst: My hon. Friend's support is valuable and I hope that the Government will weigh his words.

The Secretary of State advanced in his defence the argument that if he did not have the Bill he would put himself in legal difficulties with the inquiry inspector. He suggested that the inquiry might have to be reopened. I do not follow that argument and I do not think that my right hon. Friend has any evidence for that claim. In the light of the quotations that I have given from exchanges at the inquiry, I do not believe that that argument stands up.

If we are being asked to believe that that is the Government's legal opinion, I remind them of another legal opinion that, until a short time ago, they assured us could not be overturned. We were told that it was impossible for the inspector's report on Stansted to be published before the Government made their decision. My hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Construction told me in a letter of 17 February this year:

"I cannot accept your suggestion that in the case of Stansted/T5 the report should be published before a decision is made."

When I asked my hon. Friend about that, he told me that his decision was the result of the overriding legal opinion given to the Government. Happily, the Government have found another legal opinion that has enabled them to make an announcement today. I strongly recommend that they consult their lawyers again and I hope that they will not find it necessary to reopen the inquiry simply because they do not implement the 275,000 ATMs limit at Heathrow.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport said that he had to act in this way to honour a pledge. I do not say to hon. Friends who have different constituency interests that I am careless of those interests, but a pledge is a pledge is a pledge and it does not help the reputation of the Government if they appear to be picking and choosing between pledges. Why does this pledge have to be honoured at this time? I do not deny that at the end of the inquiry process the pledge might be implemented, but why now? Why this pledge? Why not the other pledges given by the Government?

When I was asked to justify to my constituents the fact that the Stansted issue could be raised again, I was taken on one side by Ministers—arm around the shoulders—and advised, "It's the constitutional point, old boy." I was told that the Government could not be bound by previous decisions and that they had to look at everything afresh.

I told my constituents that it was a hard decision, but that there would be a public inquiry at which everything would be tested. Now that same Government ask me to tell my constituents that some pledges from the past can be retrieved and regarded as part of the Holy Grail. That is unacceptable. If circumstances have changed for the people of Stansted, they have changed for everybody.

I understand why my right hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Sir H. Atkins) and my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel) feel strongly about the pledge that they were given, but I ask them to accept that pledges were also given to the people of Stansted, and not once, but twice. They were told in 1967 that the development of Stansted would be an environmental catastrophe. What has changed? The late John Davies said in 1971 that the development of an inland airport would do "irreversible damage" to large tracts of countryside. People take these matters seriously and they are entitled to some consistency from the Government.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport is putting himself in the position of Humpty Dumpty in "Through the Looking-Glass". Humpty Dumpty said in a rather scornful tone:

[Mr. Haselhurst]

"When I use a word,"—
in this case the word might be "pledge"—
"it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less."
The Government are not helping themselves if they are trying to defend their honour in respect of one pledge while denying their probity in terms of their whole approach to this difficult and complicated matter.

The Bill is not necessary, it is not necessary now, it is not fair and it will prejudice the outcome of the Stansted inquiry. The Government may get their Bill, but they will not do so with my help. I fear that they will sour the atmosphere in which we shall have to address ourselves to the substantive matters behind the Bill.

6.5 pm

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): After that tremendous, rousing speech by the hon. Member for Saffron Walden (Mr. Haselhurst), it would be churlish of me not to congratulate him and many other Conservative Members on their spirited and almost unanimous opposition to the Bill. We look forward to seeing them in our lobby.

I noticed that the new chairman of the 1922 Committee was here earlier assiduously doing his job of listening to views, but I fear that, in spite of all the spirited and knowledgeable opposition of conservative Members, the Government will not withdraw the Bill. However, perhaps hon. Members such as the hon. Member for Saffron Walden will have assured themselves of a place on the Standing Committee where they can find other ways of ensuring the Bill does not get anywhere.

I wish to talk about Prestwick airport, Scotland's international airport and our transatlantic gateway. However, I should like first to mention airports policy in general.

The hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Ross) was generous in describing the Secretary of State's airports policy as being in disarray. I served on the Standing Committees on every civil aviation Bill in the previous Parliament and I know that, under the present Secretary of State, airports policy in the United Kingdom has degenerated from confusion into total chaos.

First, confusion was created because of the rivalry between the options of a fifth terminal at Heathrow and the development of Stansted. On top of that we have seen piled the additional uncertainty of the proposed privatisation of the BAA, the crazy suggestion that CAA airports in the Highlands and Islands might be sold and the unbelievable decision to set up another review of Scottish lowland airports policy.

I think that I can fairly claim to be an unbiased observer of the rivalry between the Stansted development and the fifth terminal at Heathrow. My eccentric view is that I am against both. I do not want a fifth terminal or more development at Stansted. I want all the efforts and resources of the BAA put into regional airports and Scottish airports, and more direct flights from those airports.

With that unbiased view, I find it incredible that the Secretary of State cannot understand that there is a direct link between the Bill and the Stansted inquiry. Surely one of the most material pieces of information at the inquiry would be an Act prescribing a statutory limit on the number of aircraft movements at Heathrow.

The proposed privatisation of the BAA is unbelievable. I disagree with the privatisation of British Airways, but I can at least understand the motivation behind it—competition between BA and British Midland and British Caledonian and so on. However, I find it impossible to understand the logic behind the privatisation of airports.

I live in Ayr. If I did not like the way in which Glasgow airport was run, would I choose to go to Manchester to fly to London? It is unrealistic to talk about such competition. I do not understand why an additional factor should be introduced to cause such confusion.

The Civil Aviation Authority proposal to sell off the highlands airports stretches credulity to impossible lengths. Even some Scottish Conservative Members find it difficult to understand what is behind the proposal. Only one highlands airport has ever made a profit. The others provide a vital lifeline for the highlands and islands. The suggestion is that a private operator should take them over and receive a subsidy from the Scottish Office. That will result in not a totally private operation but a subsidised service. The Secretary of State will tell us that he has had a large number of inquiries about the privatisation of the highlands and islands airports. I should be surprised if any of them materialised into real interest. Such airports cannot be run at a profit. Operators will be interested only in the subsidy from the Scottish Office.

The Government's airports policy is in chaos. I was deeply concerned when the Scottish lowlands airports review was established, but I was not surprised. There was no need for such a review. It was begun only because British Midland was rightly refused permission to fly transatlantic services into Glasgow airport. The review was set up as a sop to British Midland. I found that deeply offensive. It is also deeply offensive when officials at the Department of Transport say that the review must be completed within a particular time because they cannot keep Mr. Bishop waiting. For my part, Mr. Bishop can be kept waiting for as long as it takes to complete the review. The fact that he is having difficulties with his accounts and in keeping the airline running is none of our business.

The problem has been investigated by previous Governments. The present Government have rightly reaffirmed that Prestwick should remain Scotland's transatlantic gateway. Prestwick has tremendous facilities. A huge investment has been made in it. If the airport were closed, that major capital investment would be abandoned. Prestwick has a superb fuelling facility which is available at no other Scottish airport. Because of its underground tanks, aircraft can be refuelled efficiently and speedily. At Glasgow airport 12 separate tankers are needed to refuel a 747.

Prestwick has road and rail connections. They need to be improved, but when the A77 missing link with the A8 is built there will be a direct dual carriageway connection between Prestwick airport and central Scotland's motorway network. Prestwick also has a rail link. All that is needed is a railway station at Prestwick airport similar to that at Gatwick. Many people are fed up with Prestwick being given second best. Prestwick receives nothing like the investment of airports south of the border.

Mr. Bill Walker: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the charter airlines which fly thousands of people across the Atlantic to Scotland prefer Prestwick to Glasgow because of its superior terminal and refuelling facilities which are more effective and more efficient?

Mr. Foulkes: The hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) is a user of Prestwick airport and knows about aviation. His views are particularly welcome. The hon. Gentleman knows that Prestwick also has a magnificent fog-free record. Only the other week 747s were diverted from Heathrow, which was fog-bound, to Prestwick. When the Queen returned from Canada and the United States there was some question about whether her aircraft should be diverted to Prestwick because of weather problems at Heathrow.

Mr. Bishop would like Glasgow to be used instead of Prestwick, but that is unacceptable not just to the people of Ayrshire, who are worried about employment and want Prestwick to be developed, but to the people living around Glasgow who are affected by noise. They are worried about noisy aircraft passing over a heavily populated area 24 hours a day. Prestwick's main flightpath is over the sea. A subsidiary flightpath is over the countryside.

To convert either Glasgow or Edinburgh airports to take transatlantic aircraft would mean spending £50 million or more — money which could be spent in better ways. That sum should not be spent because the facilities already exist at Prestwick.

Some say that having three airports in the Scottish lowlands does not make sense. If we were starting from scratch, we would not build three airports in the Scottish lowlands, but we are not starting with a clean sheet. Three airports already exist. Glasgow and Edinburgh make a profit. Prestwick used to make a profit, but it is now losing small amounts. It could still make a profit. If we can sustain three profitable airports, we should do so. The situation in the Republic of Ireland is similar.

If Prestwick airport were closed, the British Aerospace project there would be put in jeopardy. Jetstreams are being sold to small commuter airlines throughout the world. Jetstream production is a success. If the runway is not open to civil aviation, British Aerospace will have to pay for it to remain open. It could not do that commercially.

Two recent events which should have influenced the Government make the review nonsensical. The first is the decision by the Government to establish one of the few new freeports at Prestwick. The success of the freeport depends on the airport being a 24-hour-a-day transatlantic gateway. If there is a question mark over the future of Prestwick airport as a passenger airport, the whole future of the freeport will be in jeopardy. It would be crazy for the Department of Transport to put in jeopardy a decision taken by the Treasury to establish a freeport at Prestwick. It would also be catastrophic for the area.

The second influencing factor is the decision by Highland Express not only to apply for a licence to fly from Maastricht airport in Holland to Prestwick from Stansted to Prestwick and on from Prestwick to North America—to both Canada and the United States—but to show its confidence in the future of Prestwick and its belief that it is a great airport by deciding to establish its headquarters there.

Prestwick is a popular airport with the airlines. Both Air Canada and North West Orient like it and would move only very reluctantly if British Midland's application is successful. It wants to stay at Prestwick. British Emerald Airlines has applied for permission to fly out of Prestwick, and British Airways Charter wants to fly out of Prestwick.

I hope that the Highland Express application will be considered quickly and sympathetically. We would be extremely concerned if it were refused. I know that the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale (Mr. Montgomery) was concerned about the refusal of the application by Singapore Airlines to fly to Manchester. With the regrettable exception of British Midland, which has commercial and internal reasons for not wanting to fly out of Prestwick, the other airlines are anxious to ensure that Prestwick is developed. It would be crazy to decide other than to keep Prestwick as Scotland's transatlantic gateway.

Clause 1 limits the movements at Heathrow. It has a contradictory effect for Scottish airports. We want the Glasgow, Edinburgh and Aberdeen services into Heathrow to be continued. However, we do not want them to be developed as feeders for the European and long-haul flights out of Heathrow. That would take away from the potential for direct flights from Scottish airports, both transatlantic and to Europe. We are in a cleft stick.

It was surprising to hear Conservative Members say in a spirited way that they could not support the Bill. It is perhaps less surprising to the House to hear that I, too, cannot support the Bill. I urge not only my hon. Friends but Conservative Members to vote against the Bill if they are genuinely concerned about its effect on regional and Scottish airports.

6.23 pm

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): Like my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson), the chairman of the aviation committee, I had an interest in aviation before coming to the House and I am still involved in it. Obviously, I am concerned about the future of the aviation industry. We cannot look at the airports in isolation and not realise the impact that the Bill will have.

Like the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes), I have been involved for many years in attempts to find a more rational approach to aviation in Scotland. Unlike the hon. Gentleman, I do not find all aspects of the Bill unacceptable.

I see nothing illogical in the Government's policy to sell the civil aviation airfields in Scotland, and nothing illogical in their being purchased by local authorities. In future, subsidies should come from the Scottish Office. It is a sensible way to handle the matter. Where social responsibilities are involved, the Scottish Office, which has such immense power and responsibility, should be concerned about such a vital part of our infrastructure.

I look forward to the day when the airfields will be operated for the benefit of the people by the people. I have been concerned for some time that the Civil Aviation Authority has closed some of the runways at some of the airports that will be sold. Anyone who has attempted a cross-wind landing in the Western Isles will know how fraught it is if the runway that allows one to land into wind has been closed. It means a cross-wind landing, sometimes with winds gusting at 30 or 40 knots.

The majority of dissent about the Bill centres on Heathrow. I cannot understand how anyone can think that an arbitrary figure for the number of take-offs and landings can be set at any given point in time, and then must last for ever. The changes in technology and the continuing improvements mean that safety, which is the paramount factor, can be incorporated into the new techniques. Therefore, many more aircraft will be able to take off and land in future.

[Mr. Bill Walker]

When I began to fly, the separation for aircraft was minimal. It might surprise hon. Members to know that I flew Tiger Moths. Forty or 50 aircraft would operate off a small grass airfield. There were no modern aids, and the air traffic controller was assisted only by a Very pistol and a light. With those two delightful pieces of equipment, he managed to keep the aircraft flying safely. We moved on into the age of the piston aircraft that flew passengers immediately post-war. In those days, Prestwick was the favourite airport in the United Kingdom. Anyone who has attempted to land an aircraft with passengers on board in some of the appalling conditions at airfields in Britain, knows that it is better to land at Prestwick. Of course, that airfield is on the great circle route, which means that it is closer to North America than airports in the south.

Heathrow is a massive public airport, where there is tremendous investment. We should be imprudent if we did not enjoy the maximum number of take-offs and landings possible with modern safety standards. We are a long way short of that, and the arbitrary figure is a long way short of that.

The encouraging aspect of the speech of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State—I understood him quite clearly—was that he and his Department would make the decision. It will not be made by a quango. Hon. Members who have heard me talk about quangos, in which we invest so much power, will know that I am no great lover of them. It is important that decisions should be made in the House if they affect such vital matters as whether to increase the number of take-offs and landings at Heathrow. I was grateful for my right hon. Friend's assurance that he is prepared to review that aspect of the Bill, so I will give him my support, even if reluctantly.

My support is reluctant because I have listened carefully to the speeches of my hon. Friends who serve on the aviation committee. I wholly agree with much of what they said. However, I want the Scottish airport problem to be dealt with.

We must recognise that at some stage the Government will wish to privatise the British Airports Authority, although this measure was not included in the Gracious Speech. I am in favour of that move. I suggest to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State that the most sensible and logical way of privatising that authority, assuming that the southern airports will be privatised as one trading bloc, would be to privatise the Scottish airports as one trading bloc. It would be possible to have a holding company with two trading companies underneath. The trading company for Scotland should be chaired by a Scot and the people involved in its running should be Scots. I would like more and more of these vital and important decisions to be taken by Scots. Some of the decisions that must be taken will be difficult. Individuals will be called upon to make unpalatable decisions. That is another reason why I believe they should be made by Scots. That point does not in any way weaken the case for privatisation.

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it would be much better if Scots who were elected by Scots within a Scottish assembly made the decisions on behalf of the people of Scotland?

Mr. Walker: It will come as no surprise to the hon. Gentleman that I refuse to accept that idea. I have never thought that the things I wanted to do for Scotland in this unitary Parliament were in any way prevented. In fact, the opposite is true. One gets much more done in this unitary Parliament, so Scotland benefits substantially. I have never believed that it was sensible to break up this marvellous unitary system that we enjoy. It would be criminal and stupid to do so. I hope that no one ever thinks that my suggestion that decisions affecting Scottish local authorities should be made in Scotland contradicts my views about this unitary Parliament and the way we do things here.

It will come as no surprise to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to hear that I should be happy to chair any future inquiry into aircraft noise, just as I chaired an inquiry into noise problems in my right hon. Friend's constituency where the airfield posed problems to the constituents. The Ministry of Defence invited me to chair that inquiry. I am sure that my right hon. Friend agrees that we came up with a solution that satisfied those who complained and everyone else. I am confident that the same can be done if this matter is approached sensibly and reasonably. I think my hon. Friends feel that way.

There are differences between the noise footprints of modern jet aircraft and previous aircraft. No one should doubt that there is technical evidence, showing that modern aircraft are quieter and that the noise problems are fewer. Decisions on the use of runway facilities and capital investment in our airports should not be taken arbitrarily by putting limits on movement that have nothing to do with the primary criterion, which is safety and nothing else.

6.33 pm

Mr. Anthony Steen (South Hams): If this enabling legislation is passed without any amendment, two principles of Conservative policy as enshrined in the manifesto and the Gracious Speech—denationalisation and support of private enterprise—could fly headlong into each other. The Bill must be viewed against the background of 18 months' debate about the privatisation of British Airways which resulted in a win for British Airways, a £17 million consolation prize for British Caledonian and a kick in the groin for the independents.

This debate provides an important opportunity to assess the Government's commitment to private enterprise. I speak for Air UK Ltd., Manx Airlines Ltd., Brymon Airways, Dan Air Services Ltd. and Air Ecosse, and I must declare an interest in British Midland Airways Ltd. Those are all British-based independent airlines linking the provinces with Heathrow and all have remarkable growth records.

Mr. Foulkes: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving the long list of airlines for which he is speaking. I shall not ask him how much he is paid for doing that. Was the hon. Gentleman not elected to represent in Parliament the interests of the electors of South Hams?

Mr. Steen: I have noted what the hon. Gentleman has said. I have managed to do that as well. As he knows, South Hams has Plymouth airport within its curtilage.

Because the private airlines believed that the Government would pursue their open skies policy, during the past 10 years they have sunk investment into aircraft and personnel. They have relied on the Government to provide the climate within which private aviation and enterprise could flourish with the minimum of rules and regulations. I am afraid that it looks as though those

airlines are being proved wrong. The Government are intervening in more aviation matters than any previous Administration did, and this Bill is another example of that.

The Bill contains the ingredients which could distort opportunity for the independents. They are already prevented from flying out of Heathrow to Europe in competition with British Airways. They are prevented from flying from Heathrow internationally in competition with BA, and now there is a real danger that they will be weakened domestically. The Bill, if enacted without any amendment, could erode the viability of the independents, which will be left wide open to predatory action by airlines such as the national flag carrier, which has a good track record for doing just that. The legislation will prevent the independents from operating on profitable routes and so cross-subsidising the marginally profitable routes in this country. The independents are, therefore, facing legislation which, unless positive discrimination is shown at Heathrow, could mean their decline and ultimate demise, leading to redundancy of aircraft and staff.

This enabling Bill gives enormous additional unrestricted and unfettered powers to the British Airports Authority. It gives unrestricted powers to the CAA, with more rules and regulations and more red tape. In effect, the Bill introduces a new tier into the aviation machinery. Just when the Government wish to take away one tier of machinery in local government, they want to put another tier into the aviation machinery. The only proviso is that the Secretary of State has the last word.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State believes that he can take this hydra-headed quango into his domain. I am sure that he is just the St. George to take that action, but will his successors be able to do that as well? The British Airports Authority has already spoken out against domestic flights. It is one of those hydra-headed monsters, and it has suggested a quota specifically angled at domestic flights as an answer to Heathrow's problems, seemingly oblivious of or uninterested in the fact that this dramatic growth area is bringing new life and wealth to our ailing regions.

Let us look at British Midland Airways' achievement —a company which I perhaps know best—and consider, for example, the transformation of the Anglo-Scottish trunk routes. The competition that British Midland has provided has increased the traffic by 20 per cent. and provided lower fares and far better service for the consumer. Both British Airways and British Midland have benefited. British Airways abandoned its Heathrow lead route on the basis that it would never be profitable. British Midland has turned that round, so much so that next March it will introduce a jet on that service.

Mr. Marton *rose——*

Mr. Steen: No, I shall not give way. I must get on.

One of the difficulties which the Government face is that they have to rely on information that is given to them by the British Airports Authority. The authority said that the maximum capacity at Heathrow in 1979 was 275,000 air traffic movements. It says now that the figure is wrong in 1984 and that it is 350,000. Since 1979 there have been technological advances which have improved landings, turn-rounds and take-off speeds. These improvements mean that many more aircraft can be handled safely. The authority says that technically there could be 440,000 air traffic movements a year. It is agreed that there could be 71 movements for 17 hours of the day every hour times 365 days. The maximum capacity of Heathrow is nearer 440,000 ATMs than 275,000.

On the basis of the authority's figures, the Government pledged themselves in December 1979 to limit air traffic movements to 275,000 when the fourth London terminal was opened. The figure seems to have been plucked out of the air. There is no reason why it should have been adopted , save that the Government said, when they agreed to 275,000 ATMs, that it created a balance between the utilisation of runways and terminal buildings and the noise nuisance to local residents.

It is the noise element which makes the Government believe that they cannot go back on their pledge, yet millions of pounds have been spent by the airlines since 1979 on reducing their noise profiles. Most of the aircraft that are handled at Heathrow have a noise factor that is lower than that of the aircraft that were operating in 1979. The case is so powerful that one wonders why the Government are considering introducing legislation that is based on out-of-date figures and ignoring quieter aircraft. I hope that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State will explain whether the limit of 275,000 ATMs has been fixed because of noise, and would be so fixed even if the noise issue was not in question and planes were silent.

The authority argues that as the growth of movements has been in the domestic sector—59,920 in 1979 to an estimated 76,400 this year—it will be appropriate for reductions to take place in the domestic sector. Is my hon. Friend aware of the make-up of the 76,000 movements? Is he aware that 23,000 of them consist of the shuttle flights of British Airways? Is he aware also that 10 per cent. of the shuttle flights are back-up services? If we add to the shuttle flights the other British Airways services, we find that they account for 40 per cent. of all domestic flights. That means that 40 per cent. of domestic flights are operated by British Airways.

The number of domestic flights has risen artificially as British Airways has tried to drive out its principal domestic competitors. If there is to be a reduction in the number of domestic flights, will my hon. Friend discriminate positively in favour of the private independents, rather than merely reducing each airline's quota pro rata?

Mr. Snape: I am aware that the hon. Gentleman must earn the fee that he receives from British Midland. However, it will not do for him and other Conservative Members to profess to espouse the principle of competition except when it has an effect on their direct commercial interests. The hon. Gentleman's proposal is outrageous. He knows full well that it would not be accepted even by the present Secretary of State, with his well-known eccentricities.

Mr. Steen: The hon. Gentleman does the independent sector a disservice. If 40 per cent. of domestic movements are by British Airways and there is a pro rata reduction for each airline, some of the independent airlines will not be able to continue. If that were to happen, they would be unable fully to utilise their aircraft. In effect, the hon. Gentleman is saying that he wants to kill off the independent airlines to ensure the survival of British Airways.

The Minister must discriminate in favour of the independent airlines if they are to survive. How does the

[Mr. Steen]

limit need to be imposed on domestic airlines, and why? At present, 275,000 ATMs excludes 20,500 which are part of the general aviation pattern. They were excluded from the 275,000 in the 1979 inquiry. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said that the 20,500 had been excluded. Is he aware that 72 per cent. of movements—14,897—were made by private jets? Those aircraft were taking up slots and using the runways when they could have been used by scheduled services. The BAA was at pains to say that the slots could not be used by scheduled services. I hope that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State will explain why they cannot be used by scheduled services.

As the noise nuisance to the environment is at the heart of the debate, perhaps my hon. Friend will ask the authority for full details of general aviation movements during the past year and the noise profiles of the aircraft involved. He might have an uncomfortable surprise when he learns that many private jets have a noisier footprint than the aircraft used for scheduled domestic services.

The Brymon Dash 7 flies from Plymouth to Heathrow and it is one of the quietest aircraft now in operation. Indeed, it is far quieter than any private jet. If domestic growth is curtailed in favour of private jets, the Government will be favouring the international playboy and the middle east potentate. Is he aware that Adnan Khashoggi flies pretty regularly in a private jet with a noise profile two and a half times greater than that of the Short 360, which carries 36 business men to and from Birmingham five times a day, linking the national exhibition centre with our national airport? Will my hon. Friend confirm that he will not follow the authority's recommendation of curbing the growth of domestic flights, which have created and sustained jobs and introduced new prosperity?

If the limit of 275,000 ATMs is, in effect, a noise limit, there can be no case for favouring rich men's private jets over scheduled domestic flights which link the capital with provincial cities and whose continued operation is vital to the revival of regional economies. It is not enough for the Secretary of State to say, "Leave it to me and I will fix it." He has not fixed it up till now. The independent airlines have not been given any public money and none of their debts has been written off. They have not been given any preferential routes, unlike British Caledonian. They are now being told that they will have to reduce their flights or take punishment at Heathrow. Having won through and secured an arrangement whereby they can fly alongside the national carrier, they find that their movements may be curtailed, and with that their profitability. Private independent airlines cannot absorb under-utilisation of aircraft and a reduction in flights.

There is a suggestion that airlines could be moved from Heathrow to Gatwick, Luton or Stansted. In no way are airlines like the pieces on a Monopoly board. They cannot be moved from Park lane to Bond street. It is like saying that British Rail should re-route train journeys from Manchester to Euston to Manchester to Waterloo, over the bridge. There is no way that that could work.

The future of the independent airlines is extremely precarious. They are operating an extremely high-risk business. They can survive through their own ingenuity and imaginative management, but they will not do so if they are expected to survive in a market distorted by Government legislation.

My message to the Government is that they must be aware of the likely consequences of their actions. British Airways will be privatised; British Caledonian has been saved. It would be an indictment of our party and our country if the six independent airlines which fly to Heathrow went into decline or, worse, out of business.

6.50 pm

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

My point of order is about something that came to light this afternoon via a press release from the Government. Can you advise me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, on how, at this late stage, I can apply for a debate on the fact that the Government have issued a press release to say that they will withhold £1 of supplementary benefit from families of striking miners in Britain? I should like to question the Government on why that was done, and why it was not in the normal circumstances. Why was it not done in last week's autumn statement? I should like you to make a judgment on that and see whether we can immediately have a debate in the House on this urgent matter regarding the suffering of miners' wives and families.

Mr. Michael Meacher (Oldham, West): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I wish to support strongly the request by my hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron). [HON. MEMBERS: "Disgraceful."] This is an extremely serious matter. It has been sneaked out without being brought properly to the attention of hon. Members and in a manner specifically designed to rule out debate by the House. I am told that the press release was made at about 5.30 pm. The first that we knew about it was on the radio. Neither the press release nor the written answer is yet in the House of Commons Library.

It is perfectly clear that the information has been given in that way to ensure that the matter is not debated. I understand that the measure is to be implemented under the very unusual device of a Privy Council order. [HON. MEMBERS: "Shame."] I believe that that is almost without precedent. I understand that it is for implementation on Monday, at the very shortest possible notice.

I appeal to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when the measure has clearly been long contemplated by the Government. Mention of it was omitted from the statement by the Secretary of State for Social Services on the uprating in July and, much more recently, from the Chancellor's statement only last week. It is clearly extremely provocative that it has been introduced in the middle of the strike. The reason for its timing can only be conjectured, but it is difficult to believe that it is not connected with the end of the Christmas bonus offer that is being made to miners. In view of the manner of its introduction, its provocative nature and the way in which the Government have designed it to prevent proper debate and a proper vote by the House, I ask you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to protect the rights of the Opposition and Back Benchers, and to ask the Secretary of State for Social Services to come to the House at 10 o'clock tonight to make a full statement of his intentions and to justify the means that he has chosen to introduce this highly provocative measure.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Paul Dean): I realise that the hon. Members for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) and for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher), who have raised this

matter, feel strongly about it, but I am sure that they and the House will recognise that it is not a point of order on which I can help them. However, I am sure that what has been said has been heard and that both hon. Members will use their ingenuity to raise the matter on another appropriate occasion.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. With great respect, the points raised concern the Chair more than the Opposition. I put that to you with the point in mind. The Chair is there to protect the rights of Parliament. Whatever political controversy may be raised and whatever depth of feeling there may be—and I share it—at a decision to take £1 a week out of the mouths of people on strike, this is a parliamentary matter, in that you must know very well that arrangements for financial statements are always made in the House. It would be unprecedented for a major statement involving £7 million a year to be made through a written answer. Further, as my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West said, if the Government have chosen to use a Privy Council mechanism for that purpose, they are using the Royal Prerogative to prevent a parliamentary debate.

With great respect, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is a matter for you. It is not for those engaged in the controversy. You are here to protect the House. I respectfully invite you to ask Mr. Speaker to consider the matter, because it is for Mr. Speaker and the House. Only when that aspect is dealt with is it a matter of controversy within a debate. I ask you to give careful consideration to it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The right hon. Gentleman will know that I have no power to alter the business of the House, but he will know equally that there is a well-established procedure in the House for drawing attention to matters that any right hon. or hon. Member feels are urgent—that is, by writing to Mr. Speaker. That is the correct procedure to be followed.

Mr. Benn: Further to the point of order. I am sorry to come back to the matter, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I cannot have made myself clear. The Chair is there to protect the House. This issue is about the rights of Parliament in respect of financial legislation. As you know very well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, until quite recently Mr. Speaker left the Chair during the Budget debate because he was thought of as a King's man. That is why he was not there. We have now changed the rules.

With great respect, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you speak as if this was a matter of political controversy that should be raised through the normal procedure by which political controversy is brought to the Floor. My point is that it is your concern, and yours primarily and alone, to see that the prerogative is not used to allow the Government to deny a debate on a matter of major financial concern which, incidentally and very importantly, will affect 140,000 families at this time of the year.

I beg you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to consult on that point because I believe that if Mr. Speaker is brought into the matter now it will be seen to be a parliamentary matter, not only a matter of indignation at the Government's meanness in the way that they have announced the measure.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I have already said to the right hon. Gentleman that I have no power to interrupt the debate. However, I have advised him that if he feels that there is an urgent matter to be debated, the correct procedure is to write a note to Mr. Speaker, who will of course consider it.

6.58 pm

Mr. Robert McCrindle (Brentwood and Ongar): I have good news for my hon. Friend the Minister in that the tone of my contribution will be considerably less strident than that of some of my hon. Friends. The bad news is that the content of my remarks will be as critical of the Bill as any contribution so far.

My concern about the Bill stems from three sources. First, I do not believe that the undertaking of 1979 needs to be implemented now without a further review of developments in relation to aircraft noise. Secondly, I do not believe that it would be sensible to implement the measures outlined in the Bill in advance of other developments in airport policy, decisions on which are known to be imminent. The third source of discontent is the mechanism for implementing the limit which lies at the heart of the legislation.

In my view, this measure is anti-customer and anti-small-airline. I believe that I am the first Member to refer in this debate to that very important person, the customer. In my opinion, any artificial limit at Heathrow would be wrong. First, it is not good for British Airways. A common strand in all the dissent expressed by Conservative Members today has been that we wish British Airways well as it approaches privatisation and we want it to be in a position to maximise its opportunities. The corporation's own opposition to limiting air traffic movements at Heathrow must make it clear to the Government that the limit cannot be in the interests of British Airways. To that extent, one aspect of the Government's aviation policy flies in the face of another.

I declare an interest as a consultant to British Caledonian — *[Interruption.]* If the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) will contain himself, I shall be happy to answer interventions. British Caledonian has no direct interest in the limit on movements at Heathrow, but it has a considerable indirect interest, as I shall explain later.

A decision at this time is not necessary because the undertaking of 1979, on which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State placed great emphasis today, included the promise that there would be a review of the situation. We understood that that would take place before the undertaking was implemented. My question to my hon. Friend the Minister, who has the unenviable task of replying to the debate, is quite simple: why does the limit have to be imposed without the review first being carried out? My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State seemed to be saying that the legislation must be passed and air traffic movements limited now and that only when the legislation was in operation would he fulfil the second part of the undertaking and carry out the review. That sounds suspiciously like the grand old Duke of York marching his men—in this case, those who live around Heathrow—to the top of the hill, only to run the risk of having to march them down again. He does not deny that a review was part of the undertaking. Surely it is infinitely preferable that that review should be undertaken in advance of any decision to impose the limit which lies at the heart of the legislation.

[Mr. Robert McCrindle]

I am concerned that this measure is not in the interests of the customer who wishes to travel from Heathrow. First, a substantial reduction in flights is almost inevitable. Just as terminal 4 is about to open, giving the impression that there is to be more comfort and opportunity for flights from Heathrow, the limit will prevent that improvement. Secondly, the operators forced to transfer from Heathrow will be mainly small airlines — and small domestic airlines at that. If foreign airlines are told that they must stop using Heathrow, there will be threats of retaliation. Any reduction in air traffic movements at Heathrow will thus have to fall almost entirely on British domestic airlines. Those airlines will clearly suffer most.

Even more insulting to the domestic airlines is the fact that they will be pushed out, at least in part, by the price mechanism. Such a policy sits oddly on the shoulders of a Government who are at pains to say that they believe in free enterprise and competition as it is precisely the practitioners of free enterprise and competition who are likely to be the victims of this legislation. It is also against the interests of the customer in that the flights most likely to be affected are those serving provincial centres. At the moment business men can fly from a provincial airport to Heathrow and on to a foreign destination. The legislation will prevent that, at least to some extent.

If those airlines are forced to leave Heathrow, where will they go? Will they go to Stansted? Surely it would be wise for the Government to wait for the very short period involved before the report on Stansted is received so that they know whether the alternative destination is to be Stansted. The other possibility is Gatwick, but the only runway there is already close to capacity at peak hours. Moreover, the Government's competition policy outlined in the White Paper of 5 October envisaged the use of Gatwick for the development of new services. I wonder whether the Minister recalls the lip service paid in the summer and early autumn to the great advantages of "dual designation" in terms of competition among British airlines. If those services are to be expanded at Gatwick, how can that airport cope with surplus movements transferred from Heathrow?

How will the Secretary of State decide which flights can no longer go into Heathrow? Will he require British Airways to transfer any of its services? There would certainly be strong opposition from British Airways if he tried to do that. Moreover, according to the recent White Paper, British Airways is to be permitted to transfer back to Heathrow some of the services that it now flies from Gatwick. That being so, British Airways will clearly not be the victim. Foreign airlines will not be asked to transfer from Heathrow because of the threat of retaliation. Therefore, it must be the domestic airlines. If I have missed something and there is some other way of achieving the objectives set out in the Bill, I hope that the Minister will explain it when he winds up the debate.

We do not know the mechanism whereby the legislation will be implemented. In effect, we are asked to take the Secretary of State on trust. I am sorry that he is not in the Chamber as I should like him to know that, despite all this criticism, I am really rather well disposed towards him. In personal terms, I think that he is a very agreeable man.

Mr. Snape: That is more a comment on his judgment than on his kindness.

Mr. McCrindle: I am sure that the Secretary of State will pay suitable attention to the respective remarks of the hon. Gentleman and myself.

We are asked to take all this on trust. In an ideal world, we might well do just that. The Secretary of State, however, having given full approval to an investigation by the Civil Aviation Authority into the future of British aviation, did not quite carry through that policy. I think that most people would concede that the White Paper which eventually emerged was a pale imitation of what the CAA had originally proposed. I doubt whether we can take it on trust as we are being asked to do.

I might be asked: what has changed since 1979? I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will take my answer on board. Runway separation standards for aircraft have changed. Forecasts of the maximum capacity of runways have been raised, so that the latest estimate for Heathrow is now 330,000 movements per year. Can my hon. Friend tell me whether that figure is correct? Does he agree that only a review such as the one I am calling for will show whether the figure is correct or not?

I readily endorse all measures to restrict the noise nuisance around Heathrow, but some consideration must also be given to the national economic requirements of millions of passengers and cargo shippers. If the Government agree with me about that, they must also agree that hasty action would be wrong.

Mr. Jessel: My hon. Friend blithely mentioned a figure of 330,000 movements a year—about 900 a day. How can he expect people living near the airport to tolerate that situation?

Mr. McCrindle: With respect, my hon. Friend has listened to only part of what I said. I made it clear that I understand the difficulties of his constituents, but I pointed out that standards have changed to some degree since 1979 because of the improvement in the design of aircraft and the reduction in the amount of noise emitted. The suggestion that 330,000 is a more appropriate figure is not mine; it was made by people who approach these matters from an infinitely more specialised and technical standpoint. Should we not be imposing tougher restrictions on noise rather than on movements? I feel that, in his assiduous defence of his constituents, my hon. Friend sometimes confuses those two matters. They must be kept in separate compartments. Have we been using the wrong yardstick? If so, it would be folly to pass the legislation and to tie our hands for a long time ahead.

I know that other hon. Members wish to speak. I say only that the proposals in the Bill are unnecessary, because, first, the emphasis should be on noise control rather than the control of air traffic movements. Secondly, a full-scale review should be undertaken before restrictions are imposed. Thirdly, the Government should dovetail their policy on air traffic movements with the decision which follows the appearance of the Stansted report. Fourthly, I point out that the pledge can be honoured without resorting to rushed legislation. The Bill is unnecessary, untimely, and opposed to the interests of the small airline and the consumer. The Government should rethink their policy.

7.14 pm

Mrs. Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): Unlike the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. McCrindle) I have no particular interest which I should declare. I do not speak for "Air Wales", Air UK, Dan Air or any other company.

The Secretary of State has said that he is taking powers to limit landings and take-offs at Heathrow. I am in favour of that, because for the past five years I have had to use Heathrow two or three times a week, although I live only 10 minutes away from a regional airport with excellent facilities, except flights to most European cities.

The right hon. Gentleman said that there is no deep-seated plot to box ourselves in over Stansted. In my view, there should be no development at Stansted and no further development at Heathrow. Heathrow cannot cope with the level of traffic which it handles at present. Those who have to use it frequently find it an unpleasant airport. Most services in this country suffer from the problem of over-centralisation. That is especially true in the case of air transport. Air traffic demand has remained overwhelmingly concentrated on four airports in the London area — Heathrow, Gatwick, Luton and Stansted. Those airports account for about two thirds of all terminal passengers using airports in the United Kingdom. Heathrow alone handles about half the total number of terminal passengers and over 60 per cent. of the international passengers using airports in Great Britain.

Outside the south-east, the problem has been one of over-provision of airport capacity and an inability to generate traffic. If there is ever to be an efficient use of the country's resources and an encouragement of the development of viable air services in the regions, we need to reassess and rationalise the future role of the regional airports. The only White Paper on air transport published in recent years appeared in 1978. According to the White Paper, the consultations that took place at that time confirmed what some Conservative Members have said today—that

"of all the problems associated with airports, the disturbance caused by aircraft noise remains the most serious".

The consultations also

"reaffirmed the particular severity of the problem around Heathrow."

The White Paper states:

"By 1990 the number of people affected around Heathrow is forecast to decline to less than 300,000".

That decline would be brought about mainly by the development of quieter aircraft. However, the White Paper warned:

"even so the problem will still be greater at Heathrow than elsewhere in the country."

Mr. Jessel: Is the hon. Lady aware that that assessment of the number of people affected is based on the noise and number index, which is under review as the formula of the measure of aircraft noise? Many people question the assumptions on which that formula is based. The review may lead to the devising of a different formula, which might produce different figures.

Mrs. Clwyd: Until that review takes place, the figures that I have quoted will stand. I shall be interested to hear the results of the review when they are published.

The transfer to other regions of some part of the growth in air traffic which might otherwise take place in the south-east would have two main benefits. It would help to relieve pressure on resources in the south-east, and it would contribute to the Government's regional development policies — such as they are. Unfortunately, there are further disincentives to an expansion in the number of flights using regional airports. For example, there are the charges levied by the CAA on carriers using small regional airports. Those charges are sometimes four times as high as those levied at the main airports. We should try to equalise the charges.

Air traffic could be decentralised to airports such as Cardiff and Bristol. Those airports both handle a similar volume and type of traffic. They concentrate mainly on charter services, scheduled domestic flights and a few international scheduled services. It appears that south Wales, the Bristol conurbation and the south-west of England in general could sustain only one category B regional airport. However, there is a significant difference between the facilities obtainable at the two airports. Furthermore, expansion of traffic at Cardiff would support the Government's regional development policies since the airport is in a development area, and close to a special development area. In south Wales and the south-west of England, the catchment areas of the various airports are small. Cardiff airport, with its modern but under-utilised facilities, should develop as the category B airport in this area.

I was disappointed in a reply given by a Minister last week. When I reminded him of the policy in the White Paper, he said that policy and investment were two different things. As that policy has apparently not been changed, it should be backed up by Government investment.

As a result of Labour Government policy, Cardiff airport was designated the airport for the south-west region and £5 million was spent on bringing it up to international standard. It would require a vast amount of money to bring Bristol airport up to the same standard and the money would be wasted as Cardiff airport already meets the area's needs. Moreover, Bristol airport is 200 ft higher than Cardiff and is therefore more likely to be out of operation because of bad weather or fog. Indeed, it is frequently out of operation for those reasons.

Cardiff airport is fully operational to a high standard. It plays a role in the economic viability of south Wales which cannot be ignored and it could help in the regeneration of the region. When industrialists look for suitable sites, they always impress on us the importance of good airport facilities. Although we have one of the highest rates of unemployment in the United Kingdom, we do not have such facilities providing for international flights. If Bristol were designated the south-west region's airport, a great deal of money would have to be spent to bring it up scratch and its use would affect the viability of Cardiff airport and the regeneration of the south Wales economy.

As in many other matters, it is vital that there should be further decentralisation of airport provision. Unlike other countries, we still concentrate the bulk of our air traffic in the London and south-east region. If we had Scottish and Welsh assemblies, I am sure that those two bodies would have implemented a vigorous air transport policy. Unfortunately, the Government seem unready and unlikely to do that.

7.21 pm

Mr. David Ashby (Leicestershire, North-West): East Midlands airport lies in my constituency, and several domestic airlines operate from it. I cannot help asking what there is in the Bill for domestic airlines such as British Midland. Such airlines already feel that the Government have let them down. The one opportunity which the Government had to provide real competition arose from the Civil Aviation Authority report of 1984, but the opportunity was lost in the scramble to privatise British Airways. Indeed, the opportunity turned into a cosy conspiracy, just as I foresaw, in which the two giants shared the spoils. The true independence of domestic airlines has not been enhanced and now we see from the British Airports Authority report and the Bill that the number of movements is to be limited.

What does the future hold for the domestic airlines? I cannot think that the Bill gives them much room for manouevre among the national airlines, as so many of the decisions emanate from the Foreign Office rather than from any other Department. Moreover, British Airways, like a petulant child, appears to be able to make a demand, and the Government just give in. There is no room for domestic airlines to expand. As my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen) said, Heathrow is vital for independent domestic airlines. Already a domestic airline has lost its slot into Heathrow, and that was the end of the company. Gatwick would be hopeless for domestic airlines, and Stansted would be even worse.

Another consideration is the business executive using non-scheduled flights. I do not agree with what my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams said about that because, in addition to the 275,000 scheduled movements, there are 20,000 non-scheduled movements of executive jets and the like. They pose no threat to anyone. They wait patiently for a gap in air space to enable them to land or take off. There is a maximum of 37 movements an hour into Heathrow. I can vouch for the patience of non-scheduled airlines, having sat for 35 minutes yesterday waiting to take off. Such flights are important, as business men have to travel all over the country. Time is often vital to them and they fly to many minor airports where scheduled airlines do not go. It is therefore crucial that they should continue to enjoy the service.

Field Aviation Services, which handles 60 per cent. of non-scheduled movements, has invested a great deal of money in its jet centre at Heathrow on the assumption that non-scheduled aircraft will be able to continue operating at present levels. It is not asking for any more movements, but it wants no fewer. It has done well and should be left alone. Such airlines cause no trouble and are of great benefit to everyone.

I cannot see that the Bill helps domestic independent airlines, and I therefore shall not be able to support it. I shall not vote against the Bill receiving a Second Reading, but I shall certainly not vote in favour of its doing so. I should like domestic airlines to be given much more protection.

7.27 pm

Mr. Terry Dicks (Hayes and Harlington): I am the hon. Member with Heathrow on his patch. Despite what has been said about it, Heathrow is the world's major international airport, and I hope that it stays that way.

I must be honest and say that I am suspicious about what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said. It will take some convincing to persuade me that the Stansted inquiry does not lie behind the Bill. Nor do I accept the argument about the pledge. Too many Governments have made pledges and been only too keen to renege on them when it is convenient to do so. It is nonsense that we must stay with the pledge.

My right hon. Friend said that the figures could increase anyway. Even if it were necessary to maintain the 275,000 flights limit, we do not have to rely on giving the Secretary of State extra powers which he can use when he chooses, especially when he does not have to tell us why or when he will use them. How will he use those powers? Will they affect domestic or international movements? It is not good enough that we have not been told.

Some background information about Heathrow is necessary. Estimated air traffic movements for 1984 show 195,000 international movements, which is 73 per cent. of all movements, and 70,000 domestic movements, which is 26·5 per cent. About 12,000 of those domestic movements, or 18 per cent., relate to aircraft with a maximum passenger load of about 40, and they are not always full. Aircraft with a maximum of 60 passengers represent 18,000, or 26 per cent., of all domestic movements. Aircraft with a maximum of 80 passengers account for 21,000, or 41 per cent., of domestic movements.

I do not believe that there should be a limit. There should be completely unfettered movement in and out of Heathrow. However, if we must have a limit, it is crazy to suggest positive discrimination for domestic flights. By definition, that means that there will be less freedom for international aircraft. Government interference will cause more problems than it will solve. My right hon. Friend should not seek any powers under the Bill.

I suggested to my right hon. Friend how there could be a limit without imposing legal constraints. I told him of four options which he could consider before he made his decision. He told me in response to each of those options that he did not have the necessary powers and that the Bill was therefore essential to make a limit. The Civil Aviation Act 1982, in section 68(1)*(b)*, states that the Civil Aviation Authority shall have regard,

"to the need to secure the most effective use of airports within the United Kingdom."

Under that general power the CAA could, if it so wished, reduce the ATMs of smaller aircraft — for example, aircraft which carry between 40 and 80 passengers. The Secretary of State could act on that without taking additional powers under the Bill.

Section 68 also applies to the reduction of domestic movements as international demand increases. Such an approach allows for a more flexible reaction than simply banning all small domestic movements, which will still have an impact.

My most important suggestion was to extend the ban on night flights without interfering with domestic movements — indeed, while allowing them to increase. Section 78(3) of the Civil Aviation Act 1982 gives the Secretary of State power to adjust the times of airport use. If we extend the ban at Heathrow from 11.30 pm to 11 pm and ban all night flights, we should at the same time have no restrictions on day-time flights. That would be to the benefit of all international airlines and some domestic airlines. I cannot see why that cannot be done. There would be an environmental advantage.

Many people living in and around my constituency are more worried about test-bed activities at night than about movements during the day. Five or 10 extra movements in an hour may make such a small difference that people will not notice it. That is a reasonable proposition. My right hon. Friend should consider it and could bring it into operation without taking new powers under the Bill.

We can use the price mechanism to reduce domestic ATMs. The British Airports Authority already has powers to introduce landing charges. I hope that in future the House will discuss the monopoly powers of the BAA. The way it treats its concessionaires at airports needs to be fully discussed in the House and made known to the public. It is no wonder that the BAA can make such large profits when it uses and abuses those who want to ply their normal trade in the airports' precincts.

At present the cost of landing an aeroplane is weight-based, and smaller aircraft pay much less than larger ones. A Shorts 360 pays about £80 to land and a B747 pays about £552. Both aircraft use the scarce resources of the runway and runway time. Why should they not pay the same price —the market price—to use them? Why should bigger aircraft pay more than smaller aircraft for using the same facilities for perhaps the same time? A flat rate landing fee would be fairer and reduce some of the domestic demand, which will please those who feel that it is necessary for it to be limited, although, as I said earlier, I do not. Landing fees on average account for only 5 per cent. of the costs. My right hon. Friend told me that the impact would be marginal. For smaller domestic flights over short distances the landing cost could be increased to 10 per cent. of the cost. The effect would then be greater than he suggested.

I thought that the Government believed in market forces. It is completely wrong for them to suggest that market forces could not work in this case. I am aware that some of my hon. Friends take a different view about domestic flights, but, as Heathrow is in my constituency, I know that the international aspect of the airport is of paramount importance. If we do not have the limitation suggested in the Bill and allow movements to increase, which my colleagues say can be done and which some hon. Members believe should be done, there is no reason why the international aspects of and the domestic feed into Heathrow should not continue side by side. The night ban would be a reasonable compromise with the environmentalists.

There is no justification for the Bill. Given my right hon. Friend's attitude, I have no choice but to vote against it. He is asking us for a blank cheque, but he has not told us why he wants it. I cannot believe that he is so naive as to enter the Chamber and say—as he said—that he is surprised at the interest or the potential outcry about the matter. How could he be surprised if he had been advised? He has an array of advisers. Are they all so naive that they could not anticipate our feelings? They must have known that the Bill would have an impact and that hon. Members would see the connection between the Secretary of State's actions and the Stansted inquiry.

It may be, as was suggested, that my right hon. Friend has a cavalier attitude, or that that was an aside to make us laugh, but I cannot believe that either. If he thinks he can lead us like sheep through the Division Lobby, he has got it wrong. The Government's policy on civil aviation is a dog's breakfast. I do not know where it is going or why, and I do not believe that the Secretary of State knows either. There is no unity in the Government's approach to civil aviation. The sooner the Government consider the entire picture instead of picking up bits and pieces, the better for everyone.

7.37 pm

Mr. Graham Bright (Luton, South): The Civil Aviation Bill is one of the shortest and, apparently, most straightforward measures which we shall consider this Session. Its provisions are simple, and the motives which prompted the Government to introduce it have been explained. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport has shown his determination to consider the environmental commitment at Heathrow, and we understand that.

The powers sought in the Bill are extremely important. They have important implications for the major air transport policy decisions which must be taken shortly. The Government must determine whether extra passenger handling capacity is to be provided in the London area, and, if so, where it should be located. Is there to be a fifth terminal at Heathrow, another runway at Gatwick, or a major expansion at Stansted in Essex? What is to happen to services in the regional and Scottish airports?

Any of the developments which have been canvassed in the south-east will affect the distribution of air traffic services throughout the United Kingdom for decades to come. A decision on this issue will go a long way towards resolving the form in which the airports are owned by the British Airports Authority and the Civil Aviation Authority. Some local authority airports may be transferred to the private sector. Because the Bill deals directly with the distribution of air traffic, all those matters inevitably arise for consideration.

My hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) and I produced a booklet some three years ago called "Airports U.K.". It set out, I believe for the first time, an overall airports policy for the United Kingdom. With the Bill, I believe a policy is encroaching upon us almost by default. I accept that the Government have been committed to limiting air traffic movements at Heathrow to 275,000 a year since the decision to build a fourth terminal was taken. The growth in the number of domestic services since 1979 plainly meant that pressure to enforce the limit would soon arise. I fully appreciate the environmental considerations which the Government have had to bear in mind.

Mr. Jessel: Is my hon. Friend aware that the inspector reporting on the fourth terminal recommended a limit of 260,000, and yet the Government went above that to 275,000?

Mr. Bright: I believe that the Government did the right thing. It is possible to go even higher, as I shall explain. Those are not the only considerations. The runways at Heathrow appear to be capable of taking up to 330,000 air traffic movements each year. That was the consensus of the evidence given recently to the Select Committee on Transport.

Furthermore, the new noise regulations, in effect from January 1986, and the replacement of aircraft such as the B707 and the DC8 by the wide-bodied quiet jets means that by 1990 a drop of 85 per cent. — that is an incredible figure—in the number of people affected by noise intrusion will have occurred. Leaving aside the question of whether quiet, small aircraft such as the Dash

[Mr. Bright]

7 and Short 330 should be counted at all—I do not think they should be; I believe that we can slot them in as they have done so successfully at the Washington national airport—there is no doubt that Heathrow's true capacity will be under-utilised and the noise problem will be substantially alleviated, whatever the limit.

The difficulty is that throughout the public inquiry into the proposed expansion of Stansted airport and, more recently, in its evidence to the Select Committee on Transport, the BAA has consistently argued that a limit of 275,000 ATMs a year at Heathrow rules out the development of a fifth terminal there. If that is so—I know that the major airlines, including British Airways, dispute that—the House will be closing one of the options before it has had a proper chance to consider it. It is vital to know the Government's view on that matter.

The BAA believes that no runway development at Gatwick is practicable and therefore Stansted's expansion is inevitable. I look to my right hon. Friend for a categorical assurance that the limit he is proposing for Heathrow does not preclude the development of a fifth terminal there.

Mr. Steen: Is my hon. Friend aware that if the movements at Heathrow are increased from 275,000 to 295,000—an increase of 20,000—that is only 0·03 of the NNI?

Mr. Bright: I am aware of that. If my hon. Friend had been listening he would have heard me say that towards 1990 there will be a substantial lowering of that figure, even with an increase of up to 330,000.

The House must be able to discuss these issues freely in the future. That is important. It would be intolerable to find that Stansted's expansion was the only available option as a result of decisions that we had taken under clause 1. It has been official policy for some years to prevent new international services being introduced at Heathrow. For the London area, they must go to Gatwick. Differential landing charges at the two airports are meant to encourage the process of transfer, just as the much lower charges at Stansted are intended to stimulate the movement of charter services from Gatwick to the Essex airport. Clauses 1 and 2 will undoubtedly buttress that policy by obliging many of the new and competitive domestic services—they are competitive—to leave Heathrow. The policy at least has the merit of consistency.

What has been overlooked, however, is that Heathrow's range of international services and its interlining facilities have given it a monopoly in the United Kingdom's airport system. Gatwick's network is far too restricted to offer domestic airlines any alternative. The major international airlines have the resources and protection of their countries' air service agreements to ensure that they will be relatively unaffected by the overall limitation of air movements at Heathrow or by the allocation system suggested in clause 2. It will be mainly our domestic carriers, whose movements at Heathrow have grown so dramatically over the past five years as a result of increased competition, which will be forced to move to Gatwick. Their development will be hindered because Gatwick's network of international scheduled services is so much poorer. That is a high price to pay for adjusting our pattern of air traffic distribution to suit the BAA.

The policy ignores the fact that there is a fourth airport situated in my constituency of Luton, South which already plays an important role in the London system. There are four times as many passengers going through Luton airport as Stansted. We have a nice new terminal, and we make a profit. We have the capacity now to handle up to 5 million passengers a year. With new access and additional terminals and landing facilities, which could be constructed at a fraction of the cost of the proposed Stansted development, we could take up to 10 million passengers a year.

Luton airport, having escaped a takeover by the BAA in the 1970s, is now having to resist the heavily subsidised incentives offered by the BAA to attract traffic away to Stansted. There is nothing fair about that competition. It exists because the BAA can cover its losses at Stansted and offer cut-price landing and apron charges by cross-subsidisation from Heathrow. Airlines and passengers are over-charged for the services which they receive at Heathrow to cover the losses at Stansted and in Scotland and to enable the financial targets set for the authority to be met. The BAA's strategy involves discrimination against the one south-eastern airport of any appreciable size which it does not own—Luton—which undermines entirely its claim to be the disinterested guardian of the national or even the south-eastern interest in airports policy.

For that reason, I am worried about the method of allocating air movements outlined in clause 2. It opens up the possibility that the monopoly element in the BAA's revenues at Heathrow will be even more vigorously exploited. The only rationale for that would be to fund a major investment programme of the kind necessary for the development of Stansted. The fact that air traffic movements will be below their technical limit, and that it is proposed to auction them, suggests strongly that airlines and passengers using Heathrow are to be milked once again. The penalty will be paid at Luton, Manchester and elsewhere in Great Britain. The existing discrimination by the BAA against Luton is unacceptable. If Stansted is chosen for major development, Luton will have to face the prospect of closure. About 7,500 jobs are dependent upon it.

I hope that my right hon. Friend will recognise why anxiety about the pattern of air traffic distribution runs deeply. The powers which he now seeks will have to be exercised to accommodate decisions on the future expansion of our passenger handling facilities. That is why I ask him for clear and unequivocal assurances that none of those issues has yet been settled. It is also the reason why the House needs to be extremely careful before accepting a mechanism which would increase the BAA's power to exploit passengers and airlines using Heathrow to fund the development of other airports.

Those points must be clarified before our support can be given tonight. Provided that we have those assurances, we can debate the major policy issues freely when they arise, without binding commitments. Nothing else will be fair to the House and the country.

7.50 pm

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Stretford): I apologise for not being present for the whole of the debate. Unfortunately, I had

to attend a Select Committee meeting, and I am sure that Conservative Members will appreciate the difficulties of being in two places at once.

Those parts of the debate to which I have listened have been interesting. We have heard fierce and severe criticism of the Government from the Conservative Benches. The hon. Member for Luton, South (Mr. Bright) will forgive me if I do not comment on his remarks, but I recognise the validity of many of the points he made. Many of them are parallel to the points which would be put forward in respect of many other airports outside the south-east.

The Government's present airports policy is one of almost total confusion and lack of consistency. We recently debated the CAA report and we now have an airline policy almost by default. However, that has not been integrated in the context of an airports policy. Even at this stage we should be considering such integration. It is important to recognise the need for a consistent airports policy, but that will not arise through piecemeal measures such as this Bill.

The Bill kicks into touch the possibility of a proper review of airports policy on a national basis. In any case, whatever the Government's airports policy is, it is undoubtedly contentious. It is almost exclusively concerned with the south-east and almost totally ignores regional airports such as Manchester international. The status of that airport seems to have diminished considerably from the days when it was given gateway recognition. It is as if the Government now see it as almost irrelevant to their airports policy.

We in the regions deeply resent the marginalisation that has taken place in this respect, and should like to know how airports such as Manchester figure in these plans, given the worries arising from the Bill.

The Secretary of State said that this was an innocuous measure which we should not fear. He told us that it was merely the delivery of a commitment made some time ago in connection with Heathrow airport. But the Bill is not innocuous. It is extremely dangerous, particularly for airports other than Heathrow and Stansted.

I personally would not argue against the principle of a limit on the number of movements at Heathrow. There may well be ways of defining such limits, but that should be done in the context of an overall review of airports policy. By doing so, such limits would take account of the national interest and the need for an airports policy. Such limits should also have regard to operating a technical capacity within air transportation during the last five or six years. The limit of 275,000 movements for Heathrow was established in 1978, and the CAA is now on record as stating that in any case it could be increased to 330,000 movements to maintain consistency. But seemingly there is no recognition of that.

The fact that no limit is written into the Bill makes some of us suspicious. We do not know what limits the Secretary of State in his wisdom might set or operate. Our great fear is that the Bill is an attempt to use the limits as a way of justifying Stansted in advance of the inspector's report —the simple argument being that with Heathrow limited it is necessary to expand Stansted to allow any adequate flow of air traffic.

We welcome the announcement that there will be a debate on Stansted. I deeply regret that that debate will be purely consultative and that the House will be unable to make a decision, given that the development of Stansted is so contentious. There is a fear that limits may be reduced at an early stage to justify Stansted and that once Stansted is established they will be lifted. That will allow Heathrow to expand even further—a move that would be grossly detrimental, if not disastrous, for the regional airports, particularly Manchester international.

Many hon. Members from the north-west are also suspicious of the activities of the BAA. We have all seen the sweeteners from the BAA, such as car parking passes and so on, as well as the publicity justifying its advocacy of Stansted. However, none of this has been concerned with the real worries of Manchester. Consequently, most of us in the Manchester region feel that the BAA is hostile to Manchester international airport on the ground — perhaps logical — that the BAA does not control that airport, which is a successful example of municipal enterprise.

The BAA will shortly be privatised. Given its hostility to Manchester, we are naturally concerned that its major objective will be to make money. To make the maximum amount of money, the BAA might simply decide to give preference to the large international carriers at Heathrow —a decision which will have a number of detrimental consequences for the regions, and specifically for Manchester.

Whether that advantage is given to the international airlines, either by a quota system or price system, it will inevitably be disastrous for the smaller regional airports which, for example, depend on the Carlisle-Heathrow service as their main service. That service could be killed off because the regional airports will not be able to operate on price or other grounds.

Although Manchester airport is big enough to withstand such a decision, even it would be seriously and detrimentally affected. If more space at Heathrow were given for international services, there would be less incentive for the international airlines to go to Manchester. Much as I regret it, I appreciate that Heathrow is more attractive to the international airlines.

The Secretary of State has recently spoken about Manchester being allowed to expand its international routes if the international carriers are at the same time prepared to forgo services from Heathrow. Naturally, we know that no international carrier will give up a service from Heathrow in order to have a service from Manchester. I regret it as a Mancunian, but recognise that that would be the reality. Therefore, an expanding Heathrow would mean less capacity to develop international services from Manchester airport, and that would be bad for the travelling public within the Manchester catchment area.

The BAA's development of Heathrow for international services would either squeeze out the shuttle service from Manchester to Heathrow or increase the cost. An increase in cost is more likely, thereby establishing a poll tax on those who wish to travel from Manchester to Heathrow. That again would not be in the interests of the public in that area.

All hon. Members will be aware that the recent CAA report on airline competition was contentious. We saw especially the way in which the report had to be overridden by the Secretary of State as a result of the pressure from right hon. and hon. Members who felt that the CAA had made a mess of it. Yet, with this Bill, once again we intend to trust the CAA with powers, granted with some regulation by the Secretary of State, which in the past the House has been unhappy to see the authority exercise.

[Mr. Tony Lloyd]

Those who come from the Greater Manchester area are suspicious and deeply unhappy about the Bill. We argue that from Manchester's point of view and from that of the air travelling public's need of an overall national airports policy we want to see a positive decision to transfer airlines to Manchester before any decision is made about airports policy. The Bill sabotages both a proper review of airports policy overall and any arguments in favour of the transfer of those routes.

The justification has been made before today of the ability of Manchester airport to generate additional services which could and should be given to Manchester. I have details of the 5,500 additional movements at Heathrow which could be saved. Their transfer would allow Manchester to carry to 24 destinations, many of which it is unable to offer at present. It would also involve domestic savings at Heathrow. It is in the interests of relieving the present congestion at Heathrow and the future development of Heathrow for Manchester to be given the additional services.

We know that the market exists. The minimal surveys which simply look at the travelling public who already go by domestic airlines to Heathrow and then travel on to other destinations are sufficient to justify the existence of direct services from Manchester. We also know from previous experience that when new services have been introduced from Manchester, such as the Qantas service to Australia, the estimates have been exceeded four times over because the market has proved to be massively bigger than the original estimates.

Should the Secretary of State allow airports policy to develop in the anarchic way that it seems to be going at the moment, the result will be the further development of services between Manchester and Amsterdam which at the moment are totally unregulated. The result is that Amsterdam will become Manchester's international airport and not Heathrow. That is worrying from the national point of view, but Manchester would be forced into accepting that if the Secretary of State was not prepared to reconsider the Bill and the need for a global review of airports policy.

We urge right hon. and hon. Members who have grave doubts about the Bill to vote against it to ensure that we have an adequate debate on Stansted and a proper review of our airports policy.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ernest Armstrong): Order. Perhaps I can help the House. I am anxious to call those hon. Members who have been present throughout the debate and trying to catch my eye. I appeal for brief speeches from those hon. Members whom I am able to call.

8.4 pm

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): I congratulate the hon. Member for Stretford (Mr. Lloyd) and assure him that, although he has not been present for the entire debate, his remarks were consistent with those of other hon. Members on both sides of the House.

In my innocence I thought that one way of improving my chances of catching your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, would be to say that I was opposed to the Government's proposals. In this case that has proved to be somewhat counter-productive. Yet it must be almost unique that in such a debate only two hon. Members have spoken in support of the measure. However the voting goes at the end of the debate, I am sure that my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Treasury Bench will have got the message.

I make one remark in support of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, who is somewhat short of support. The Government have been accused of a lack of consistency in their airports policy. I assure the House that that is not the case, because the Government do not have and never had an airports policy. That is why I was obliged to my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, South (Mr. Bright) for drawing attention to the document "Airports U.K.", compiled by us, which we felt might give the Government a few ideas. I am afraid that it is out of print, but copies are still available at £2·50.

I am pleased to say that some of the recommendations in that document have been picked up and are now Government policy. Possibly the most prominent suggestion was the one that the British Airports Authority should be denationalised. I, too, noticed the absence of that undertaking in the Queen's Speech, but it is in the manifesto upon which we were elected in 1983. I hope that that omission will be put right at a later date.

I do not want to cover ground already gone over by my hon. Friends, but I endorse what they have said in summarising my view of the Bill, that it is unpopular, premature and unnecessary. I have a certain sympathy for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in having stirred up this hornets' nest when he felt that it was an innocuous measure and also for my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary, making his first appearance as a Government spokesman on a Bill, who no doubt thought that he had an easy measure on which to cut his teeth but has got stuck with a very tough nut.

This has happened because the Government are a bit out of touch. There has been no shortage of messages from Back Benchers over the last four years that the drift of Government policy on airports was in the wrong direction. There have been endless early-day motions, Adjournment debates, letters to Ministers and pamphlets from hon. Members and people outside the House. Consistently the Government have failed to recognise the message. It may be, of course, that we change our Ministers too frequently. That is always an accusation that can be made of any Government. The minute that a Minister begins to develop knowledge of and expertise in a subject — shipping, overland transport and civil aviation are technical subjects —he is moved to another job.

It may be that we missed the opportunity to say more about airports during our debates on civil aviation in the summer. Perhaps we were diverted by the battle between British Airways and the private operators about licences and routes. However, that accusation cannot be levelled at my hon. Friend the Member for Saffron Walden (Haselhurst), who has always made very spirited speeches on airports policy. Although he represents Saffron Walden, the constituency containing Stansted, his speeches have not by any means been parochial. An hon. Member who speaks about his airport, as my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, South did, is not being parochial. All the speeches made by hon. Members in this debate have taken the wider view.

When we debate our airports policy we are discussing not just parochial matters, but the overall policy for our

civil aviation industry. It is not our airports which are at stake. What is at stake is the future of our civil aviation industry if we fail to get our airports policy right.

Civil aviation is a success story. It contributes tremendously to our balance of payments. It is the one industry in which Britain is highly successful. Yet the Government are doing their best to kick the ball through their own goal. It is the one industry that we should be doing everything to support.

I am a little sceptical when I see the White Paper on airline competition policy prepared by the Department of Transport—it came out rather late during the recess and should have been published before the House rose for the summer so that it could have been debated—in which our airports policy comes in as a bit of an afterthought in paragraph 32. It is the last point made before the conclusion. In its White Paper the Department of Transport says:

"The Civil Aviation Authority recommended that the Government review its airports policy particularly in order to give airlines more opportunities of using Heathrow for domestic services."

That is a bit of an understatement because in its final report the CAA made recommendation No. 7:

"The Government should look again at the possibility of increasing available capacity at Heathrow and Gatwick".

That could not be a firmer recommendation. Yet the Government already seem to be diluting that in their White Paper. That is not wise or consistent.

There has been much talk about the so-called pledge on movements at Heathrow. The paragraph from the White Paper on airports policy, part of which I have already quoted, says:

"The Government has reaffirmed the intention announced in 1979 to impose an annual limit for environmental reasons on air transport movements at Heathrow, when Terminal 4 comes into operation next year."

Terminal 4 does not come into operation until October or November, so I cannot see what the hurry is.

Nevertheless, it is debatable whether that limit is a real pledge. It is much more a planning condition that was made at the time by the then Secretaries of State for Trade and for the Environment. It was cooked up as a sweetner for the opponents of terminal 4 which became a condition for the planning consent. I do not accept that the Government are honouring a pledge in bringing forward this enabling measure, which is all it is.

We are for ever making the point that one Administration cannot bind a successor. That is a constitutional point. Yet there is a much more important principle at stake in the legislation, which is that one does not set up a public inquiry and then prejudge its outcome. That is pointless.

Hon. Members have also referred to the privatisation of British Airways, but no one has mentioned it in detail. We have just had the prospectus for the sale of British Telecom's shares. Some of us were interested in its length. If the privatisation of British Airways proceeds, and if that happens before the Government have passed judgment on the results of the Eyre inquiry, the findings of that inquiry, which will amount to 2,500 pages or more, will have to be attached to the prospectus. Therefore, the privatisation of British Airways looks at the moment as though it will carry with it the longest prospectus in City history. That is another good reason for not proceeding with this measure.

The only limit on movements at Heathrow should be that required for safety purposes rather than some arbitrary figure. I hope that when my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State replies he will tell us how the figure of 275,000 ATMs was arrived at. Perhaps he will also let us have his views on the figure put forward by the CAA that the physical limit at Heathrow is 330,000 ATMs. There is a wide discrepancy. Incidentally, that figure is also confirmed by a further CAA report entitled "Runway capacity at major airports", published last September. It is based on the 38 million passengers who will pass through Heathrow once terminal 4 is in operation.

Mr. Wilkinson: With air transport movements being only fractionally under the 275,000 limit, how is it possible for there to be about 25 million passengers a year going through Heathrow now when the CAA is supposing that 38 million should be going through when terminal 4 comes into operation? Does it imagine that the Government will do the sensible thing and not have an arbitary limit of 275,000 ATMs a year?

Mr. Colvin: My hon. Friend is right. Perhaps my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State will answer that question when he sums up. It is an interesting one.

It has been suggested that if the limit is imposed Heathrow services will easily be able to transfer to Gatwick. Paragraph 31 of the CAA report, "Airline competition policy", produced in the summer, says:

"While transfers of one sort or another from Heathrow to Gatwick would, if carefully selected, contribute to the development of the Gatwick hub and of the scheduled airlines based there, they would also accelerate the time at which the single Gatwick runway reached its capacity. An increase of 28,000 movements over the 1983 level would take the overall movement level up to the runway capacity."

There again, we are hoist with a planning condition on which, in order to obtain planning consent for the second terminal at Gatwick, some sort of undertaking was given that there would not be a second runway. That is a good example of planners deciding that such conditions should be applied. As as ex-planner, I can say that one is consistently living with the mistakes of previous planners. If they are wrong, particularly when circumstances alter, there is every reason for changing them.

My main reason for disquiet about the Bill is that it prejudges the decision on Stansted, which, it would appear, is the only place capable of accommodating future growth. But Stansted will not be ready until the 1990s—no doubt, well into the 1990s. Nor, for that matter, will terminal 5 be ready. Opinions vary as to the precise date, depending which camp one is in. Therefore, it would be wrong and impractical to impose an arbitrary limit on Heathrow instead of allowing the airport's business to expand to its natural capacity, thus obtaining a proper return on the resources already invested there.

Where will the flights go? If they cannot go to Heathrow or Gatwick, and Stansted has not been developed, they will go to the continent. There is no way that they will start using regional airports in the United Kingdom. They will go to Schiphol and Frankfurt. I am afraid that Heathrow is the only place that can take, certainly in the short term, the additional demand that we expect and it should be allowed to do so.

Two other factors have been mentioned, and they both relate to what have been described as the changed circumstances. The first is noise, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has said that he will take into account

[Mr. Colvin]

the relevance of quieter aircraft. But when planning consent for terminal 4 was granted, the Departments of Trade and Industry and of the Environment promised that there would be a review in the light of the prohibition on noisy aircraft in January 1986. That is the date on which the prohibition applies to both United Kingdom and American aircraft. It does not apply to European continental aircraft and others until 1988 or beyond. I would argue that those are changed circumstances.

Equally important is the change in size. We must take account of the growth in size of airliners and the number of passengers they carry. In 1980 the average number of passengers per flight into Heathrow was 109. With four terminals at Heathrow that is a throughput of 38 million passengers. The total number of movements required would be 348,000. That is clearly far too many. They could not be physically accommodated. But by 1990 the average number of passengers from aircraft is estimated to be 193 and that would require only 196,000 movements. That illustrates not only the scope but the need for a fifth terminal at Heathrow. Otherwise, we shall not get a proper return from the investment that has already been made in runway capacity at Heathrow and all the other facilities. It would be a direct breach of clause 3 that the Secretary of State wants to see made law.

Clause 3 provides that the Secretary of State may give directions to the CAA

"to secure the most effective use of aerodromes within the United Kingdom".

How will Stansted look then? We shall have a lot of spare runway capacity and we would need the fifth terminal at Heathrow simply to get up to the 275,000 movements limit.

As for the so-called mechanism, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has said that this is not a CAA scheme and that it will not be a BAA scheme. He says that the mechanism will be his scheme and that he will do his best to discriminate in favour of British domestic carriers.

However, most movements are international and are subject to bilateral agreements with other countries. My right hon. Friend has already shown his determination to get to grips with the bilaterals and to come to terms with foreign operators. However, if he starts pushing around foreign operators at Heathrow, he will get some dusty answers. What will Lufthansa and Air France say if they are told that they cannot operate flights into Heathrow? I suggest that our own operators, rather than the foreigners, will get the push.

Therefore, the imposition of a limit of 275,000 movements would be to the benefit of foreign carriers, at the cost of our airlines and particularly the domestic operators—the operators which my right hon. Friend has professed to support and the businesses which our new civil aviation competition policy is designed to help.

I ask the Government to use the time between now and the Committee stage to rethink some of the provisions of the Bill. The Government will get the Second Reading, but I warn them that there will be a long time between now and the enactment of the Bill and that they should remember that the Maplin Bill was defeated as late as Report. The Secretary of State has time to think again. I hope that he will do so and that he will take on board the comments made in the debate and, in particular, note the consistency of opposition to the Bill.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I appeal for extreme brevity, because otherwise it will be impossible for me to call all the hon. Members whom I should like to call.

8.23 pm

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Cannock and Burntwood): It is a great pleasure for me to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin), who is a former chairman of the parliamentary aviation committee. I am the tail-end Charlie as secretary of the committee and the final committee member to speak in the debate.

We all agree that 1984 is likely to go down as one of the most fateful years for the United Kingdom civil aviation industry. Many of us believe that the White Paper on airline competition represented a lost opportunity to create a framework for the industry into the 21st century. Many comments have been made about the effect of that on the independent operators.

We are embarked on what must be the final round of crucial debates on airports policy. Perhaps we should bear in mind that Lady Bracknell might have said that to lose one opportunity may be regarded as misfortune, but that to lose another would look like carelessness.

The debate on airline competition was heavily circumscribed by the apparent pledge by Sir John Nott, in a private letter, that British Airways would not be required to divest itself of routes before privatisation. In a similar manner, our freedom of action over airports policy is to be curtailed by the Bill and by the pledge that there will be no second runway at Gatwick.

My hon. Friend the Member for Saffron Walden (Mr. Haselhurst), who spoke with such eloquence and impartiality in taking the wider view, despite his special interest in the matter, can justifiably claim that his constituents have the right to feel that they have also received a pledge.

Airline and airport policies are areas which call for long-term planning and for the widest possible debate. About 40 million people use London's airports, yet no one wants a runway at the end of his back garden. I must say to my right hon. Friend that if the Government are to deliver on all the pledges given in haste and without the approval of the House, there is little point in Parliament's having a debate at all. We may as well let the men at the Ministry and the quangos take all the decisions.

I join my hon. Friends in expressing incredulity at the claim that the limit on movements at Heathrow has nothing to do with the continuing debate about airport capacity in the south-east. Indeed, I would go as far as to say that it is central to that debate. If we agree to put this arbitrary limit on the statute book, we shall be tying one hand behind our backs and, with a commitment to deny a second runway to Gatwick — surely the most obvious and logical development—we effectively tie the other hand.

I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel) is keen to take part in the debate and I say to him that I understand—we all understand—how passionately each community feels about the pledge that it claims to have received. However, we must remember that wider issues are involved. I do not have an airport in my constituency and I can speak with what I hope will be regarded as a genuine interest, untrammelled by constituency interests.

It is a tribute to the integrity of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State that he seeks to fulfil a promise which he believes was made. However, times and circumstances change and, just as no Parliament can bind its successor, so we must reserve the right in the national interest to review earlier decisions. My hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) said how important Heathrow is as a national asset. We cannot lightly play with it, but, if circumstances change, decisions that can be changed must be changed.

When the Government introduced the idea of the 275,000 movements limit, they proposed that there should be a review of that limit in the light of the new noise regulations which are due to come into force shortly. My right hon. Friend has told us that that pledge took into account the new regulations, but I suggest that it did not take into account the fact that there have been about 20,000 additional domestic movements as a result of the Government's policy on deregulation. Those extra movements involve aircraft which are not as noisy as those which are causing the problems.

My right hon. Friend has assured us that the Bill has been brought before us not only to redeem a pledge, but because Heathrow is full up. We are told that it has run out of runway capacity. I simply do not believe that to be true. Nor do the airlines that use Heathrow, 45 of which have protested to my right hon. Friend at this imposition. Nor does IATA, which yesterday released a critical statement from Athens about the Bill. I spoke to the chairman of the Heathrow scheduling committee this morning and he told me that the committee has planned for 283,800 ATMs for the year ending 31 October 1985. What will happen to all those agreed schedules?

Even according to the CAA's figures—assuming the present mix of 18 per cent. small and light traffic and 30 per cent. heavy aircraft — the capacity is 330,000 movements, a full 20 per cent. more than the proposed limit. We are, therefore, being asked to approve a measure which will lead to a major national facility operating at 20 per cent. below capacity. Ministers have much to say about that sort of inefficient use of resources in other areas of the economy.

In my view, and in that of the professional operators, including the Heathrow scheduling committee, the 330,000 limit understates the true position, because I believe that the CAA has taken an ultra-cautious view of runway utilisation. There is increasing demand for more frequent services, which has boosted demand for feeder liners, such as the SD330 and 360 and the Dash 7, which are not only much quieter, but do not need the full 12,000 ft main runways at Heathrow.

If the Government give the go-ahead for the docklands STOLport, that will take some commuter traffic from Heathrow. However, more imaginative use could be made of the Heathrow site itself.

At the meeting with the CAA in July this year we were told that the use of runway 23/05—the 7,500 ft long south-west/north-east runway — as a separate access landing system was not on. The Select Committee on Transport said in July this year:

"A study of the proposal had concluded that 'the loss of runway capacity on the two parallel runways at Heathrow associated with one arriving and one departing STOL aircraft per hour on the cross runway 23/05 would be 2·8 movements per hour.' The BAA therefore concluded that the use of this runway would decrease rather than increase the runway capacity of the airport."

I do not wish to seem uncharitable towards my friends in the BAA, but they are not the best judges and they are not impartial, given their fervent espousal of the Stansted cause. I had to take their view on trust until September of this year, when I spent 30 minutes in the control tower of Chicago's O'Hare airport, the busiest airport in the world. About 650,000 movements will take place there this year — three times the number at Heathrow. The site is larger and there are four parallel runways at O'Hare, but we can learn some lessons from the American experience.

At Heathrow runway 23/05 is already used when the cross-wind component on 28 is too high. I see no reason why 23 should not be available for take-offs and landings without safety being impaired. At O'Hare one radar screen is devoted to the parallel approach. The full-time job of two controllers is to monitor the parallel approach to ensure that no aircraft strays from one approach to the other. I asked the controllers whether they had any problems and I was told that it was the most boring job in the tower because they never had any problems. A similar scheme could be used at Heathrow.

If that proposal is too taxing, will my right hon. Friend examine the possibility of a new STOL runway and terminal to the north of Heathrow between the A4 and the M4? Such a proposal has not been considered. The Minister owes it to the House, given the strength of feeling among all hon. Members, to commission an independent report before continuing with the Bill.

I am profoundly unhappy with the proposals. Not only is the 275,000 limit arbitrary and wrong, but we are asked to give my right hon. Friend a blank chitty to secure from the BAA proposals for implementing the limit. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. McCrindle), I fear that the vital United Kingdom domestic feeder network into Heathrow will be the casualty and that those who have brought enterprise and innovation to the United Kingdom airline industry — including some regional British Airways operations, particularly that at Birmingham—will be the casualties.

My constituents who use Birmingham international airport will suffer. The west midlands is a vital industrial area. Birmingham international is needed because of the access which it gives to international markets. If implemented, the proposals will result in the loss of domestic feeder services at Birmingham and other regional airports. They are vital in providing a link to the world-wide network out of Heathrow.

I shall not say too much about the Bill's other proposals, because I am so against them. The chairman of the United States Civil Aeronautics Board has spoken against auctioning slots because that will keep out those who most need to be kept in — the airlines which provide the feeder network. He opposed buying and selling landing slots because smaller operators would be pressured out of prime time operations, which might also affect small community services. The United States has experience of deregulation and we can learn from what has happened there.

On the evidence, and from what I have heard tonight, unless I hear something satisfactory from the Minister I shall have to follow my hon. Friends and vote against the measure, which is not in the national interest.

8.32 pm

Mr. Tom Sackville (Bolton, West): I am not convinced of the need for movement limits. Many hon.

[Mr. Tom Sackville]

Members with experience have spoken convincingly about there being no need for limits. Even if they were needed, north-west Members with an interest in Manchester international airport would be concerned about how they were imposed. About 10 per cent. of Heathrow's traffic has its origins or destinations in the Manchester area. Basing limits on domestic movements will have a detrimental effect on north-west consumers, the business community and, indirectly, on the area's economy. If the limits are imposed in a balanced and fair manner and spread over the five higher-volune international routes, considerable benefit could be gained for Manchester international airport.

A large number of flights could be transferred to Manchester from Heathrow to fulfil demand originating in Manchester. For example, it is estimated that there could be five additional weekly return flights to Geneva, four to Munich, five to Dusseldorf, seven to Paris, seven to New York and two to Los Angeles.

Heathrow would benefit from 5,500 fewer international traffic movements as well as 1,700 fewer domestic movements as a direct result. We do not know what the Secretary of State intends to do. The Bill has been described as a blank cheque. We must know what the Secretary of State intends before we can make a serious judgment about the Bill. I ask the Minister to try to fill in some of the blanks tonight so that we may have a better idea of whether we can support the Bill.

In the north-west we are understandably sensitive about the Government's attitude to Manchester airport. In the last two years the Government have not appreciated the regional economic aspect of airports policy. We were particularly disappointed by the recent refusal of the Singapore Airlines' request for routes direct into Manchester. We need such a service. The request was turned down to protect British Airways' interests.

Decisions must be taken within the context of regional airports policy and not on the basis of the profitability of south-east airports. Nothing in the Bill encourages me or other north-west Members to support it. I hope that the Minister will tell us more about the limitations. We shall listen with interest. Perhaps we can learn what the proposals mean for Manchester and whether there is any point in supporting the Minister tonight.

8.40 pm

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, West (Mr. Sackville) will forgive me if I do not follow him because of the shortage of time. I wish to refer to a point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin), who said that we had to live with the mistakes of the planners. Douglas Jay, who was a Member of the House from 1945 to 1983, told me that when he was a civil servant at the then Board of Trade in 1944 he and two other civil servants decided, in the space of half an hour, to put an airport at Heathrow. That is in sharp contrast with the massive, agonising procedures, inquiries, debates and lobbying that take place over years and years in the present generation.

There have been impressive speeches in this debate. My right hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Sir H. Atkins) spoke vividly about the impact of aircraft noise on communities close to Heathrow. Some five hours ago he referred to 275,000 flights a year meaning 753 flights a day, and spoke of what that meant to those living near the end of a runway. On a typical day, there is a flight every two or three minutes. We cannot ignore the impact of that. It impairs the quiet enjoyment of people's homes and gardens, especially in summer when people spend time in their gardens or have their windows open. It interferes with the work of schools, hospitals, offices and churches.

Most people are annoyed when interrupted every two or three minutes. If people are talking or using the telephone, they must stop. The annoyance does not last for only a few seconds: it continues for up to three quarters of a minute, and then happens again two or three minutes later. Many people find that absolutely intolerable, so some restraint must be imposed.

All hon. Members, including Opposition Members, are concerned with welfare. The House cannot ignore the social evil that hurts those living around Heathrow. The consultant psychiatrist to the West Middlesex hospital has shown that it is detrimental to mental health. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said earlier this year that the Government were "determined to bring relief" to those affected by aircraft noise. Relief means less noise, not simply keeping it at its present level. It is no good proposing policies that merely continue the existing noise level. Those living around Heathrow need a substantial and permanent reduction in noise.

There is a strong feeling that aircraft noise should be reduced and that a limit of 275,000 movements a year —753 a day—is too great. Terminal 5 must not be built. My hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) has asked me to speak for him also. The Government have given a pledge. There is no point in mincing words—a pledge is a pledge is a pledge. Those living around Heathrow expect that pledge to be kept.

A great deal of the argument about noise has rested on the assumptions contained in the formula for the so-called noise and number index—the NNI. I was pleased to note in a letter from the Department of Transport that the NNI is being reviewed. That is right, because it is out of date and leads to inaccurate conclusions. The NNI is a formula for assessing noise nuisance that dates from 20 or 25 years ago, when the number of flights was far fewer. It contains two components—one for noise and one for the number of flights. The formula gives more weight to the average peak loudness of each flight than to the frequency. That did not matter during the 1960s when both the elements in the formula were increasing together. As we went through the 1970s, the number of flights continued to increase but a growing proportion of aircraft became quieter—a trend that has continued into the 1980s. Therefore, to give more weight to loudness than to frequency, when the frequency annoys more than the loudness, is quite wrong.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne said, the number of flights causes the greatest annonyance. If someone is sitting in his garden or is trying to use the telephone in his house, a 747—a relatively quiet aircraft —can be as annoying as a louder aircraft. In the 1960s the number of flights was far fewer, so it was right to give less weight to frequency. However, the position has changed and the frequency is now very important. It is ridiculous for hon. Members to say—as did my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen)—that

the noise nuisance around Heathrow would become 85 per cent. less based on the formula. That is to base projections on an outdated formula.

I realise that, with time so short, I should not mention road congestion, but that is also a major factor around Heathrow. The Department of Transport's technical evidence in paper No. 25 to the Heathrow inquiry said that both the M25—which is not yet complete, but will be in one year—and the A4-M4 Cromwell road radial route will be overcrowded. If both the main radial and orbital routes are severely overloaded, that will mean much more traffic on the lesser main roads in west London, which will damage the environment of those living, working and trading in the area.

Mr. Patrick Ground (Feltham and Heston): Did not the report also state that the A4 was unimprovable?

Mr. Jessel: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The A4 is heavily congested now at peak hours, and will become severely overloaded and congested throughout the day if there is no restraint on the traffic through Heathrow. Heaven knows, we have not yet begun to see the effect of terminal 4 — let alone a fifth terminal. When the 275,000 movement limit is imposed——

Mr. Hayes: My hon. Friend referred to traffic congestion. If the Bill is passed, and the logical area for expansion is Stansted, will my hon. Friend accept that, although there is a beautifully free run down the M11, it stops at Redbridge? What happens then?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the House that interventions make it difficult for hon. Members to respond to my request for brevity.

Mr. Jessel: I am not familiar with the M11.

The number of passengers currently going through Heathrow is 26 million a year. With the fourth terminal in operation, it will be 39 million. If there is no limit on the number of flights, and if a fifth terminal is built, the number will rise to 52 million — double the current number. The western side of London cannot take that. There should be a sharing out of the traffic. It is essential to the environment of those living in western London that the Bill is passed.

8.49 pm

Mr. Stuart Randall (Kingston upon Hull, West): I am pleased to be able to participate in this debate which is really about the future structure of the aviation industry. Clearly, this subject has caused many interesting reactions among hon. Members. The hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) said that we were stirring up a hornets' nest and that the Government were out of touch. The hon. Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Mr. Howarth) said that he would probably vote against the Government. One certainly gets the impression that the Government have it wrong and are out of touch with the feelings of the House and the various airport authorities.

I have a particular interest in this matter, because I represent a constituency in Hull which is close to the Humberside airport. That successful airport is beginning to expand. It is crucially important to the local economy because of the industry that is developing. Anything that impairs that development would be regarded seriously by all of us.

Today, all hon. Members who represent the Hull region received a telex from the airport manager of Humberside airport in which he expressed his strong reaction to this measure. I note that my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) is in the Chamber. He received a copy of that telex, which was also sent to my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara), who is abroad. The airport manager said:

> "To say the least, the Bill is badly timed and would do little but close off options relating to the future development of the London airport's system at a time when the inspector's report on Stansted/Heathrow terminal 5 is awaited."

He continued:

> "it could have serious implications on the future development of Humberside airport."

It is worrying when a man in that position has to send such a telex. I am sure he feels that there has not been adequate consultation on this matter.

Clause 1 empowers the Secretary of State to impose a limit, or limits, on the number of aircraft movements. There is a limit of 275,000 movements at Heathrow, and I understand that the movements at that airport are almost up to that level. The airport is congested with air traffic. Any extension of Stansted would result in more demand being sucked into the area.

Mr. Alfred Morris: Is my hon. Friend aware of the proposition put to the Department of Transport by the Manchester international airport authority that the transfer from London to Manchester of 5,500 international movements would save 1,700 domestic movements? Is not that kind of thinking a much better way forward than this Bill, which has been so comprehensively savaged by Conservative Members?

Mr. Randall: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for pointing that out. I was aware of the figure of 1,700 domestic movements. Not only Manchester airport, but the north of England regional consortium, which is a consortium of local authorities, has put forward some cogent arguments and clearly expressed the case for extending the regional airports. The point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) applies in this case. I believe that the legislation will have a devastating effect on the regional airports. The figure of 1,700 domestic movements shows the powerful case for moving traffic to the regions and the magnitude of the traffic involved.

The hon. Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel) suggested that we should not bring traffic into this debate. I believe that a profound argument can be made on the vehicle traffic around the airport. Clearly, an excess number of flights into Heathrow generates unnecessary traffic.

The Secretary of State said that the consultative document suggested that the airports should be allowed to compete for slots. I understand that airports such as Manchester, Birmingham and even Humberside could compete for movements. What does the suggestion do to help the smaller airports, which operate small planes to keep down their overheads, to expand and develop? Clearly, that proposal would have a serious effect and limit the development of services in the area. The Government should be creating the right legislative environment to enable the small airports and airlines to develop and thrive. Does the Secretary of State really want the regions to suffer? The Government are supposed to have a regional policy. It is odd that they are talking about providing the opportunity to ensure economic development in the

[Mr. Randall]

regions, yet at the same time ensuring that parts of the infrastructure — aircraft movements, and so on — are constrained.

Earlier in the year, one of the airlines in the Humberside region—Jenair—went into liquidation. At that time, the alternative airline — Air UK Ltd. — which works from Humberside, was unable to operate the Humberside-London route. It was difficult for the airline to do so because of the arrangements at that time, but the new arrangements would make that operation possible. That aspect makes us realise the significance of the link between Humberside and London. Without that route which provides so much revenue and is growing considerably, the economics of the airport were severely hampered. We must ensure that licences are available to allow that operation to take place.

In the operation of smaller businesses with smaller aircraft, Humberside has shown tremendous enterprise in developing links with Denmark and Amsterdam. It is interesting that British Airways helicopter flights to oil rigs have proved to be an expanding business and led to a further extension of the airport facilities.

It is thought by many that fishing is Hull's sole industry. In fact, there are a number of multinational companies in the area. Fishing is still important, but Hull has lost much of its distant water fishing fleet. The House will be aware that Reckitt and Colman has its head office at Hull. Failure to provide multinationals with comprehensive airline schedules would be inconsistent with the region's development. Humberside county council controls the airport, and it has proved to be enterprising in making great efforts to develop the airport.

The Government's approach to the Bill is ill thought through. The Bill does not command the support of the House. I hope that the Government will seriously rethink their policies and ensure that they create the right legislative framework to provide the opportunities necessary for smaller airports in the region to thrive.

9 pm

Mr. David Maclean (Penrith and The Border): Many concerns have been expressed on both sides of the House about the Bill, especially from the Conservative Benches. Many suspicions have been voiced and there is a feeling that the Bill's timing was linked with Stansted developments. There are also suspicions about the Government's motives for producing the Bill.

I cannot add to the eloquent speeches of my hon. Friends the Members for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) and Saffron Walden (Mr. Haselhurst). As I know that some of my hon. Friends still wish to contribute to the debate in the few minutes that remain, I shall make only one brief point.

Over the past few years the British Airports Authority has made various forecasts of passenger usage at Heathrow which have proved to be wrong by being on the high side. There is no reason to believe that the BAA's forecasts will not be wrong in future. It projected, for example, that by the 1990s it will have a shortage of usable space of about 15 million passengers per annum. Lo and behold, it has suddenly discovered that that capacity of 15 million passengers can be taken up by Stansted airport, which is designed to cater for 15 million passengers per annum.

The authority has stated that 80 per cent. of passengers coming to Heathrow and Gatwick — I believe that the figure is on the high side but let us accept it for the moment — intend to stay in the south-east. That means that at least 20 per cent. intend to go to other destinations in the United Kingdom. Nothing has been done to push out the 20 per cent. to other regional airports. It is unfortunate that the Government have not been able to do more to untangle us from the host of bilateral arrangements and agreements of the sort which prohibit Cathay Pacific or Malaysian Airlines System from operating lines and routes out of Manchester.

If regional airports were allowed to expand to their full potential—as well as Manchester and Birmingham, for example, I include the next tier of smaller regional airports such as Dundee, Leeds, Newcastle, Norwich and the splendid little service operating from Carlisle, which is affectionately called the flying postbox but which performs a vital service—many benefits would accrue. However, if these small regional routes are strangled at birth, we shall do untold and unnecessary damage to the regions. The smaller regional routes can survive and compete. They can provide a good service in addition to the main services that are provided at Heathrow.

This is a thoroughly bad Bill and I shall not vote for it when the Division takes place.

9.4 pm

Mr. Peter Snape (West Bromwich, East): I have been a member of this place for almost 11 years and this is the first occasion in my experience when a Bill has been met with virtually universal condemnation on Second Reading. If my arithmetic is correct, no fewer than 22 hon. Members have participated in the debate, apart from Front-Bench spokesmen. Only two hon. Members have spoken in favour of the Bill, the hon. Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel) and the right hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Atkins), who was kind enough to send me a note telling me that he could not be present for the Front Bench replies. The other 20 hon. Members, from both sides of the House, have been unanimous in their condemnation of the Bill. Not surprisingly, I am on the side of the majority.

Like the 20 good men and true whom I mentioned, I consider that this is the wrong Bill and that it is being introduced at the wrong time, for the wrong reasons. Again like the majority of hon. Members who participated in the debate, the Opposition think that it is right to express their concern, particularly about the future of regional airports, and about the future of aviation in general if the Bill eventually gets on to the statute book.

As recently as 31 July this year a consultation document was issued on air traffic movements at Heathrow. For the Government to bring forward this piece of legislation now is not just muddle-headed, but — I choose my words carefully—arrogant, to say the least. I honestly cannot believe that the Secretary of State could not perceive the row that the introduction of such a Bill would engender. Inevitably, people will say that the Bill is deliberately designed to pre-empt the Stansted inquiry.

If the Secretary of State knew that that conclusion would be drawn when he brought forward the Bill, he is guilty of doing the House and his party a great disservice. If he did not know that, he is guilty of enormous naivety, not normally a vice—if that is the right term—which I attribute to the right hon. Gentleman. [HON. MEMBERS:

"Where is he?"] My hon. Friends ask where he is. I am sure that wherever he is he is beavering away for the good of the nation, although I am bound to say that on his track record, if he is writing any legislation about any of the matters under his control, controversy cannot be too far away.

The Bill has appeared without consultation with the BAA, as hon. Members on both sides of the House have said. Like the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson), I have a copy of the letter written by Mike King, the airport director at Heathrow. I hope that I do not prejudice the hon. Gentleman's future career, but I thought that his speech was not only lucid and courageous—we have come to expect both those attributes from him when he speaks on these matters in the House—but the most blistering indictment of the legislation that I heard in the debate. I shall quote, as he did, from that letter, the second paragraph of which states:

"The BAA was not consulted at all during the drafting of the Bill. As a result we have a number of major concerns."

That shows the depth of the Secretary of State's arrogance in introducing a measure such as this.

Until the speech by the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. McCrindle), I was waiting for a mention of the passenger — the consumer. One or two Conservative Members referred to the concern—I make no complaint about this—felt by the airlines about the scope of the proposals, but until the hon. Member for Brentford and Ongar spoke no one had mentioned the interests of the consumer. It must be admitted that it is not easy to ascertain consumer's views. It is less easy to ascertain their views if one rushes in with such legislation within a few weeks of a Queen's Speech which made no mention of such proposals.

Mr. McCrindle: In an attempt to ascertain the view of the customers, as I referred to them, does the hon. Gentleman accept that the Air Transport Users Committee, which is the only representative body of those who use airlines, has come out strongly against the proposals in the legislation?

Mr. Snape: I do not generally cite the views of that committee, as I do not regard organisations with air vice-marshals and the like as full-time officials as typical of the ordinary passenger or consumer, but on this occasion I am prepared to concede that even that body happens to be right in its view.

What a sad end this is to the bright new dawn—the new golden age of aviation—heralded by the Secretary of State just a few short months ago. At that time he was bringing politicians together on these matters. Before the summer recess my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) and I stayed here until 4 am to participate in a debate in which the Under-Secretary of State was adamant that decisions of this kind rightly fell within the purview of people other than politicians. He believed that the Civil Aviation Authority would be taking these nasty decisions while the Secretary of State remained Mr. Clean and, above all that, a distant, somewhat ethereal figure looking down on his children below as they made their decisions.

Mrs. Dunwoody: He is certainly distant now.

Mr. Snape: Yes, he is certainly distant in terms of attendance in the Chamber, but whether he is ethereal may be better judged when the results of the Division are announced.

The burden of the legislation will fall almost entirely on the domestic airlines, as hon. Members on both sides have said. We all know that there can be no question of auctioning off international arrivals and departures at Heathrow to the highest bidder. If the Under-Secretary of State agrees with me on nothing else, he will be the first to concede that if we tell Alitalia—to pick a name at random—that unless it pays £X the 4 o'clock flight to Rome will not leave, a reciprocal reaction can be expected from the Italians. The burden of paying for the slots will thus fall exclusively on the domestic airlines.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar and his hon. Friend the Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen), who is no longer present, on their albeit paid defence of the airlines. Under the rules of the House there is nothing wrong with that. Indeed, one likes to see Tories living up to the view so often expressed by their party that there must be greater productivity and that the working men and women of this country must go out and earn their corn. I congratulate both hon. Members on having earned theirs today. Having listened to the glittering list of airlines represented by the hon. Member for South Hams, I am amazed that there is anything left for the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar.

The main aim—indeed, the only aim—of the Bill is to get the Secretary of State off a hook of his own making. Since he started to dabble in these matters the fanfares have been one thing, but the realities have been something else. He talked about an open skies policy for travel to the United States. When the Opposition warned him of the dangers, we were accused of being against cheap fares. They are not exactly cheap now—or if they are, one has to pay a surcharge at the airport, thanks to the activities of the Secretary of State.

The right hon. Gentleman's achievements, if they can be dignified with that term, in the American market have been simple and stark. He has managed to give the British monopoly of cheap fares to a one-aircraft airline called, appropriately enough in his case, Virgin Atlantic. That airline and People Express are the only airlines through which it is possible to book a cheap flight to the United States. That is not an open skies policy to boast about. An airline with one aeroplane has a monopoly of cheap flights to the United States. The grand initiative of a few months ago has run into the sand under the guidance of the right hon. Gentleman.

Deep concern is felt on both sides of the House about the future of regional airports. The difficulties faced by, for example, Manchester were starkly set out by my hon. Friends the Members for Eccles (Mr. Carter Jones) and for Stretford (Mr. Lloyd) and by my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris). The hon. Members for Altrincham and Sale (Mr. Montgomery) and for Bolton, West (Mr. Sackville) also referred to the fears of successful international airports such as Manchester.

Only today, presumably together with other hon. Members, I received a submission from Manchester airport which pointed out the dangers of the Bill. The submission stated:

[Mr. Snape]

"The Bill provides for the BAA to put forward a scheme for the implementation of the movement limit including any reference to the pricing or surcharging of movements. Although the Secretary of State must approve this scheme"—

that is no great consolation—

"the very fact of the BAA being asked to prepare such a scheme strengthens their hand . . . This effectively allows BAA to, if they get their way, place a tax on particular airports by pricing out domestic movements."

I always thought that the Conservative party believed in free enterprise and competition. Of course, Herbert Morrison said long ago that that is only what they profess to believe in. Actually, they believe in monopoly capitalism—money in any shape or form.

We have heard a great deal from our absent but well-beloved Secretary of State—[HON. MEMBERS: "Where is he?"]. If the right hon. Gentleman arrives in time, I shall have a few words to say to him. The concern expressed by organisations such as Manchester international airport shows up the Government's apparent lack of Tory principles. The Government boast about their desire to abolish as many quangos as possible, yet, at the same time, they hand over more and more powers to those quangos. It is no secret—although it has not yet been mentioned by Conservative Members — that the Government believe that, if during the run-up to privatisation BAA became even more prosperous, that could be a good thing.

The Secretary of State has had his knuckles rapped after the mess-up over British Airways and the fragmentation of the brave new BA world that we were promised. He must have been asked to step round to his old office at the Treasury, where he must have ended up on the mat in front of the Chancellor of the Exchequer. I do not suppose that that confrontation was anything but painful for the Secretary of State. Another mix-up on similar lines, prejudicing the prosperity of the BAA, will no be very acceptable to the Prime Minister. I am sure that if she has heard about the week that the right hon. Gentleman has endured, she will be worrying about the wisdom of appointing him in the first place. We shall return to the right hon. Gentleman who has now condescended to join us. He might be a little jet-lagged if he has just flown in, whether on Virgin Atlantic or any other airline. We will give him time to recover.

Manchester international airport is not alone in expressing its anxieties about the effects of the Bill. Other airports and some hon. Members have been equally outspoken and worried. My hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, West (Mr. Randall) illustrated starkly the fears of Humberside airport, which are especially apposite bearing in mind the collapse of Jenair only a few months ago. Its collapse was virtually caused by the withdrawal of one slot from Heathrow. If such an event causes the collapse of an admittedly fairly small but nevertheless essential airline, it is easy to imagine what will happen to small airlines if there is a wholesale interruption, reduction or abolition of slots into Heathrow. The principle of interlining is what such airlines depend on for their profitability.

I should have thought that "interlining" was a buzz word which would appeal to Conservative Members. They are always going on about profitability and private enterprise and how inefficient the state sector is, yet some of them intend to support a Secretary of State who appears, perhaps by accident in his case—it would be unfair to accuse him of plotting anything, because he always gives the impression that he never knows what will happen—to want to cripple the profitability of independent airlines and terrify people who have the problem of running regional airports.

Yet another submission that I received today came from Birmingham airport. The hon. Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Mr. Howarth) mentioned it. It draws attention to the fact that it has spent more than £60 million on a bright new airport terminal. It has discovered, it believes to its horror, that the Bill will have a crippling impact on its profitability. The airport's director of finance wrote:

"The imposition of a ceiling on ATMs out of Heathrow will have a major effect on regional airports. Domestic 'feeder' services from Birmingham and other regional airports are vital in providing a link to the worldwide network of services at Heathrow. Such a ceiling could severely restrict these 'feeder' services thereby reducing the opportunities for international, particularly business, travel from the regions."

I realise that the Minister is not responsible for the Bill—he has not been in the Department long enough to be responsible for it—but I hope that during his summing up he can come up with something that will go some way to assuage the fears that are rightly felt by people at regional airports. The director of finance at Birmingham airport concludes his letter by asking me to put the following question.

"What assurances are therefore given by the Secretary of State that domestic 'feeder' services will not be threatened by the imposition of the ceiling and that the Government will ensure that regional airports are fully utilised, as an aid to achieving any ceiling before more development"—

such as Stansted—

"is authorised"?

The hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) said that he wanted to know where the target of 275,000 ATMs came from. The House will be aware that in 1978 an inquiry was held into terminal 4 at Heathrow. A ceiling of 260,000 ATMs was recommended. However, all actions of recent Conservative Secretaries of State for Transport have been designed to push up the domestic content of ATMs at Heathrow.

Not long ago the Secretary of State was bragging—as Conservative Members have been doing—about his success in duplicating airlines on domestic routes. From what the right hon. Gentleman said, one would have thought that egg and bacon in the morning was unheard of in Scotland until British Midland started its shuttle in competition with British Airways from Heathrow. The Conservative party can judge whether such competition is desirable, but it is precisely that competition that has pushed up the domestic content of ATMs at Heathrow to the present level, which the Secretary of State says is so high that he must have this panicked legislation to cripple independent airlines to combat it. Yet he was responsible for it in the first place.

I am familiar with this Government's Ministers being a collective of Pontius Pilates where legislation is concerned. They are in favour of private enterprise and competition except when it adversely affects their Departments, as are Back Bench Conservative Members except when it adversely affects their constituencies. The Secretary of State has no excuse for bumbling his way through his introductory speech to this appalling piece of legislation or for trying to shuffle blame on to other people. The blame lies fairly and squarely on him.

Many hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Leicestershire, North-West (Mr. Ashby), have expressed anxiety about the future of the East Midlands airport. My hon. Friend the Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) talked about the problems and the dangers that the Bill will bring to almost every airport in Scotland. I am delighted to see him considering these matters with great expertise. I hope that the Minister will answer those points when he replies.

The powers in the Bill are dangerous and dictatorial. I appeal to Conservative Members to hesitate before voting for legislation which gives the Secretary of State a chance to impose almost any limit that he wishes at Heathrow and elsewhere "as he thinks fit".

The legislation has been referred to as an enabling measure. Some political activists in my party continually refer to enabling legislation. They expect people like me who are elected to the House to pass enabling measures within a few days which will abolish the House of Lords or capitalism and all its evil works, or which will ensure that England wins the next World Cup or that the sun shines every August. I confess to those people that I do not know what an enabling Bill is and that I do not believe that in a British democracy the Labour party would be prepared to vote for one. Yet the Conservative party is being asked to vote for just such a measure tonight.

I know that voting for a Bill such as this will not bother the hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean), who is the first high profile Member that that constituency has had for about 40 years, but I hope that it will bother some Conservative Members.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State asked for the maximum time possible to reply to the debate. He deserves it, because no fewer than 20 of his hon. Friends will vote against the Bill, or at least not vote in favour of it. I do not know what the hon. Gentleman's persuasive powers are, but it is a pity that the right hon. Gentleman the Secretary of State for Transport is not replying, because we would get 60 of his hon. Friends in our Lobby, and then we would be home and dry.

I must not mock the right hon. Gentleman too much. In his way he has had a typical week. On Monday he went to the Bus and Coach Council and saw his plans for buses ripped apart by almost every speaker, including the Tory chairman of the Association of District Councils — a well-known militant and Left-winger. Yesterday the right hon. Gentleman went to the Conservative party Back-Bench aviation group and, as I understand it, was torn to pieces—these leaks take place—by no fewer than 19 of his hon. Friends. So convincing was he at that meeting that we now know that the chairman, the vice-chairman and the secretary of that group will all be in the Lobby opposite him this evening.

The great triumph of the week—a wet Wednesday for him — is when the right hon. Gentleman appears before the House with this piece of legislation, which has been attacked by no fewer than 20 out of 22 speakers. To describe the right hon. Gentleman as a walking disaster would be untrue. No wonder he is known up and down the country as "Nutty Nick". The fact is that he has proved to be a flying disaster.

9.30 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Michael Spicer): Having listened to almost every speech in what has been by any standards an impressive, not to say for me daunting, debate, may I say straightaway that the Government take seriously many of the points that have been raised. I shall do my best in the time available to answer the points in some detail.

I listened with great care and attention, first, to what the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) said. We had a little lecture on competition from the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape)—a strange source for such a lecture, but we welcome all converts. I hope to say a little about competition later.

I listened also with equal care and attention to what the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Ross) said. It turns out that on this occasion the Labour and Liberal parties are in agreement. They do not know whether they are for or against a limit at Heathrow, but they will vote against the Bill. I imagine that the Labour party will find some of its supporters in the Tea Room. They have not been much in evidence tonight, although some of them popped in. We all thought that was to listen to the forceful speech of my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen), but it turned out that they wanted to talk about something else. There would not have been much of a market for "slots" among members of the Labour party in the debate.

The matter became so embarrassing that at one point my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) intervened. He was perhaps referring to himself and some of our hon. Friends when he said that someone had to provide the opposition. I must concede that most of the opposition has come from my hon. Friends, and the House will forgive me if most of my remarks are directed towards the points that they have raised.

I have a suspicion that I shall not please all my hon. Friends. I should have to be a bit of a gymnast to do so. Let us take, for instance, the supposed effect of the Bill on domestic airlines. My hon. Friends the Members for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. McCrindle), for South Hams and for Leicestershire, North-West (Mr. Ashby) were in favour of domestic airlines at Heathrow, while my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. Dicks) was against them. Unfortunately, there is no way in which I shall win that one, except to say that the Bill is, in effect, completely neutral on the matter. It depends upon which of the optional methods of implementation my right hon. Friend chooses to put to the British Airports Authority.

There is no necessity today to talk of removing anyone, because the limit has not been reached. Even when terminal 4 comes into action, we shall have 7,000 ATMs in hand because of the cessation of the helicopter air link at that point.

Mr. Tony Favell (Stockport): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way to me on this important occasion for him. In common with many Members in the north-west, I have a lurking suspicion that the Bill could be a civil servants' plot in favour of Stansted. My right hon. Friend's assurance that there will be a debate on Stansted has gone a long way towards allaying those fears. Can we have his assurance that there will be a decision on the docklands STOLport application before the final Stansted decision is made? That is extremely important, because, as he will be aware, the inspector recommended 650 movements a week at docklands STOLport — 35,000 movements a year. That will go a long way towards solving the problems at Heathrow and putting Stansted to bed once and for all.

Mr. Spicer: The views of my hon. Friend the Member for Stockport, (Mr. Favell) have been consistent. As this is a planning matter, my right hon. Friend has a quasi judicial role, but the building of the STOLport would have only a marginal effect on this issue.

The hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich said that if a charging policy were introduced the rates would double. That falls into the same trap of assuming that a particular option will be chosen. My right hon. Friend said that there were real problems with the charging option. As charges are a low element in total airline costs, the effects of any charging policy are likely to be negligible.

Mrs. Dunwoody: As the Secretary of State has not said what he intends to introduce, it is virtually impossible for the House of Commons to take a decision. If charges are such a low percentage of the overheads, why do the Government intend to increase prices to keep airlines out of Heathrow?

Mr. Spicer: The hon. Lady cannot have it both ways. Her hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, East made all sorts of accusations against my right hon. Friend and said that he was arrogant, yet the hon. Lady is now attacking my right hon. Friend for consulting the House of Commons.

My hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale (Mr. Montgomery) and others spoke with great eloquence and sincerity about their pride in Manchester international airport. He and they are right to be proud. Over recent years Manchester airport has grown at a faster rate than any other airport in this country, if not in Europe. In 10 years, passenger throughput has more than doubled to about 6 million. That is considerably higher than the passenger throughput at Brussels. But within that success surely lies the answer to many of the anxieties and suspicions of hon. Members.

Manchester airport is a success and I have no doubt at all that it will go from strength to strength as the market expands. The hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich suggested that we should take—by "take", I assume she meant force — 5,000 movements from Heathrow to Manchester. That is not the way in which the Conservative Government do things. The nearest we have come to such a policy is to tell Singapore Airlines that we would be delighted for it to go to Manchester if it switched one or more of its daily flights from Heathrow.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: I was grateful to hear the Minister's praise for Manchester airport. He said what a success story it had been compared with other airports. Why then do so many members of the Conservative party want to see that great success of municipal enterprise given away into private hands?

Mr. Spicer: One of the basic beliefs of the Conservative party is that all sorts of advantages are gained through privatisation. It is not a matter of dispute between us that Manchester airport can grow and get even better. It is already a success story upon which we can build, and there is no point in being depressed about Manchester. The reverse is the case. We should be encouraged by it and look forward to its future growth.

My hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale referred to a matter which was also raised in a recent Adjournment debate—the possibility of United States airlines, under the Bermuda 2 agreement, being allowed into Manchester. The responsibility for identifying new United Kingdom gateways for United States originating air services rests in this case with the United States Government. They have made no such proposals about Manchester. If they do, we shall consider them when they arise.

My hon. Friend the Member for Saffron Walden (Mr. Haselhurst) made an extremely powerful and eloquent speech. I am afraid that time does not allow me to deal with every aspect of it, but part of his argument was that Governments had broken pledges in the past, so what was another pledge between friends? That way, surely, lies anarchy. No credibility could be attached to what any Government said, and that would be of especial concern in the planning process.

Mr. Haselhurst: Does my hon. Friend accept that that is a shameless travesty of my argument? I was trying to say that if the Government wished to argue that circumstances had changed in determining their airports policy for the future, not just some but all policies in the past should be regarded as wiped off the slate.

Mr. Spicer: I apologise to my hon. Friend if I caricatured or in any way misrepresented him. That was not my intention. My intention was to show that when a Goverment made a pledge it had to be taken extremely seriously in the planning process.

The main justification for the Bill is to enable the Government to honour a commitment given to the House on 17 December 1979 by Sir John Nott, the then Secretary of State for Trade, and this has to be a partial answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Hayward). Sir John Nott referred to the decision letter on the planning application by the British Airports Authority for the fourth terminal at Heathrow airport. The letter announced the approval of the application and included the statement that the Secretary of State

"proposes to specify a limit of 275,000 air transport movements to take effect from the opening of the fourth terminal. This limitation on ATMs will be subject to review in the light of progress on the prohibition of the noisier aircraft and the introduction of quieter aircraft."

That is extremely clear and categorical. That commitment is accepted by many of my right hon. and hon. Friends, not just by my right hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Sir H. Atkins) and my hon. Friends the Members for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel) and for Windsor and Maidenhead (Dr. Glyn), but by my hon. Friends the Members for Luton, South (Mr. Bright), for Brentwood and Ongar and for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Wells), who spoke against the Bill.

Mr. Colvin: Why did the then Secretary of State not accept the inspector's recommendation that there should be only 260,000 movements? May I suggest that it was simply because, in the intervening period of a year or so, there was already a trend towards larger and quieter aircraft—a trend which has continued and accelerated since and which, if projected, will get very near the 330,000 limit about which we have been talking?

Mr. Spicer: I defer to my hon. Friend's knowledge and experience. I would say only that the trends have been extremely cyclical, particularly for wide-bodied aircraft. One could not draw any conclusions from that particular recommendation, but I shall return to that point if I have time.

Mr. Hayward: My hon. Friend referred to a comment that I made earlier. He said that the 275,000 limit was referred to by the then Secretary of State in his statement on 17 December 1979. I am willing to be corrected, but I have been through that statement several times and, as far as I can discover, the reference to the 275,000 was made not in this Chamber but in a press notice that was issued separately. This Chamber never had an opportunity to comment on that figure.

Mr. Spicer: My hon. Friend makes a perfectly fair point but it is clear from *Hansard* that the Secretary of State referred to a decision letter, not a press notice, which was perfectly reasonable at that time.

In addition to providing the Government with the powers to implement the limit on air transport movements at Heathrow, the Bill has two other objectives. As has already been said, it amends the Civil Aviation Authority's licensing duties under the Civil Aviation Act 1982 to give greater weight to airports policy in the licensing process. It allows the CAA to write down its debt to the national loans fund in connection with the privatisation of the authority's aerodromes in the Scottish highlands and islands.

It is perhaps not surprising that the debate has concentrated on the proposed limit at Heathrow airport. That is an issue which, as the House has heard tonight, directly and indirectly affects the lives of many hon. Members' constituents, particularly those of my hon. Friends.

As I have said, the powers themselves are necessary to implement a commitment that the Government made when giving approval for the construction of a fourth terminal at Heathrow. That commitment was reaffirmed in evidence at the Stansted inquiries. Some of my hon. Friends have said that they accept that, but ask why the Government should introduce the Bill now. They have, in effect, asked whether this is part of some deep-laid plot —a word that has been used several times tonight—to build Stansted by stealth and, therefore, as some have suggested, to deprive Manchester airport of its inheritance.

Many of my hon. Friends have, directly or indirectly, taken that line. It is fair to say that that lay very much behind the thinking of my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood. The truth is more anodyne, if not downright dull. We are seeking to legislate now so that the necessary powers to implement the limit are available in time for us to announce the initial measures by the time the airlines meet next June to discuss the allocation of slots for the winter period following the introduction of the limit.

I give hon. Members the categoric assurance that the powers in the Bill will not in any way prejudice future decisions on Stansted. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced when opening the debate, the Government intend to publish the inspector's report on the Stansted inquiry when it is received so that the House may have the opportunity to give its views on that subject.

Mr. Adley: I do not know whether my hon. Friend was in the House in 1972. If he was, he may recall that on the Maplin Development Bill I moved a new clause enabling the Government to change things any time they wanted in the light of developments. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State came into the Lobby with me on that day. Therefore, in view of what my hon. Friend has just said, may I assume that on Report the Government will accept an amendment that is virtually identical to the one that I moved in 1972?

Mr. Spicer: My hon. Friend is both knowledgeable and experienced, but he is referring to legislation, whereas at the moment we are discussing the planning process, which is a different matter.

Several hon. Members have suggested that the limit should be raised because circumstances have changed since it was first proposed in 1979. My hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar mentioned that point. A number of hon. Members have also said that aircraft generally are becoming much quieter as airlines re-equip their fleets in preparation for the forthcoming bans on noisier aircraft. I accept that, but to review the commitment now would be to undermine the spirit of the original commitment.

Mr. Carter-Jones: Will the hon. Gentleman give way on that point?

Mr. Spicer: No. I must get on.

Mr. Carter-Jones: Give way.

Mr. Spicer: The Government recognised in 1979 that quieter aircraft would be introduced as a result of the forthcoming bans and took that into account when setting the limit at a level which is actually higher——

Mr. Carter-Jones: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Spicer: —than the——

Mr. Carter-Jones: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Minister is not giving way.

Mr. Spicer: I must keep going, because I have a lot to get through.

The limit recommended by the inspector in his report on the fourth terminal inquiry was 260,000. Nevertheless, it is clear that when the then Secretaries of State for Trade and for the Environment announced the air transport movements limit they also said that it would be subject to review. That has subsequently been confirmed by the Government on a number of occasions. One possibility that has been mentioned—we shall certainly bear it in mind when the time comes to review the limit—is to relate the limit more closely to the amount of noise generated. That must surely be the major objective of hon. Members representing constituencies under the Heathrow approach routes.

A number of hon. Members have made it clear that it must be accepted that an ATM limit is a fairly crude instrument for controlling aircraft noise at an airport. For example, 275,000 jumbo jet movements would undoubtedly cause more disturbance than 275,000 small, turboprop aircraft.

A control related to, say, the noise and number index —which I know causes problems for my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham—might reduce noise, but, at the same time, allow airlines to operate more flights into Heathrow. Presumably my hon. Friends representing constituencies around London believe that that would be the greatest gift to those living near the airport. However, I have to admit that a noise-related scheme would not be wholly straightforward. Monitoring and enforcement, in

[Mr. Spicer]

particular, would pose difficult problems, but I am happy to give an assurance that we shall give serious consideration to such a scheme if and when we have to review the limit.

Setting the ATM limit is one thing; ensuring that airlines have a fair and equal opportunity to use the limited resources of Heathrow runway capacity is quite another. That explains the need for the first two clauses of the Bill.

The scheduling committee at Heathrow, which relies on the co-operation of the airlines, has done an excellent job of matching the demand for slots with the capacity of the airport. However, until now the committee has had to cope only with the problems of excess demand at peak periods. If an airline has not been able to operate at a time that it preferred, there has always been the possibility of a slot at some other time of the day. The problem posed by the limit is, of course, a different one. The scheduling committee has not had to refuse an airline a slot altogether, and it is that prospect with which the Bill deals.

Whatever view one takes about the ultimate physical limit at Heathrow, and several variations of the limit have been proposed, no hon. Member on either side of the House has seriously suggested that such a limit might not ultimately exist, and no one has seriously questioned the fact that the present level of movements is well on the way to approaching that physical limit.

The only real arguments about Heathrow are about when we should impose a limit, and how. I beg my hon. Friends who are thinking of voting against the Bill or abstaining to think about that. Whatever one's answers to these questions, the powers in clauses 1 and 2 would be needed at some point in the near future, given the present growth in traffic. Whether we like it or not, we are nearing the time when physically no more room will be available at Heathrow.

Mr. Wilkinson: Does my hon. Friend accept that the professional advice of the Civil Aviation Authority is that runways are not a constraining factor? Since the CAA seeks an upper limit of 330,000 a year, is it not extraordinary that the Government should seek to impose their arbitrary limit against all the advice from the airlines, the CAA, the BAA and the director of Heathrow airport?

Mr. Spicer: My hon. Friend knows the business too well for me to think that he fully believes what he says. The limit of 330,000 is the total movement, from which one must subtract 20,000 business movements as well as other movements. There is a physical limit which must be applied.

Mr. Carter-Jones: The 275,000 figure seems sacrosanct. If we continue to make progress in noise control, will that figure still be sacrosanct?

Mr. Spicer: We have always accepted that a review might be necessary. My point is that ultimately Heathrow will hit the limit. According to most calculations, if one disregards business movements, we are only 10 per cent. off the generally accepted physical limit.

We shall announce our proposed scheme shortly. We have a number of options. We have not yet settled the precise mechanism. In the consultation paper of 31 July we made it clear that in our view the best form of allocation is that which relies to the maximum extent on market forces. At the same time, we recognise the genuine concerns of the airlines already established at Heathrow, some of which have operated services there for a long time.

My right hon. and hon. Friends have raised great issues tonight. They will have a chance on a future occasion to debate them. I hope that for that reason alone my right hon. and hon. Friends who so ably represent constituencies around Stansted, in the north and in London, as well as those who have simply spoken from the heart, will be able to support this modest but necessary Bill, the Second Reading of which I commend to the House.

Question put, That the Bill be now read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 232, Noes 154.

Division No. 14] **[10 pm**

AYES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arnold, Tom
Atkins, Rt Hon Sir H.
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*
Baker, Nicholas *(N Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Benyon, William
Best, Keith
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, John
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'to'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brinton, Tim
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Hon Peter
Browne, John
Bryan, Sir Paul
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nick
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Cash, William
Chalker, Mrs Lynda
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Clegg, Sir Walter
Cockeram, Eric
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Couchman, James
Crouch, David
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dover, Den
Dunn, Robert
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Evennett, David
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Fenner, Mrs Peggy
Fletcher, Alexander
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Glyn, Dr Alan
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Greenway, Harry
Griffiths, E. *(B'y St Edm'ds)*
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Harris, David
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hayhoe, Barney
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Hooson, Tom
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(G'ldford)*
Howell, Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jessel, Toby
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Joseph, Rt Hon Sir Keith
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knight, Gregory *(Derby N)*
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Lester, Jim
Lewis, Sir Kenneth *(Stamf'd)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter, *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Nicholas
McCurley, Mrs Anna
Macfarlane, Neil
MacGregor, John
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
McQuarrie, Albert
Major, John

Malins, Humfrey
Malone, Gerald
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Antony
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mates, Michael
Mather, Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Hal *(B'grove)*
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Mills, Sir Peter *(West Devon)*
Mitchell, David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Roger
Moore, John
Morris, M. *(N'hampton, S)*
Morrison, Hon P. *(Chester)*
Moynihan, Hon C.
Mudd, David
Murphy, Christopher
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steven
Onslow, Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Pollock, Alexander
Porter, Barry
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Prentice, Rt Hon Reg
Price, Sir David
Prior, Rt Hon James
Proctor, K. Harvey
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Renton, Tim
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rippon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Robinson, Mark *(N'port W)*
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Sims, Roger
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Spence, John
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, John
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, J.
Sumberg, David
Tapsell, Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Terlezki, Stefan
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, David
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Wall, Sir Patrick
Waller, Gary
Walters, Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Watson, John
Watts, John
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wiggin, Jerry
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Ian Lang and
Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd.

NOES

Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Adley, Robert
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Bagier, Gordon A. T.
Barnett, Guy
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Tony
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Boothroyd, Miss Betty
Boyes, Roland
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'rmline E)*
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Carter-Jones, Lewis
Churchill, W. S.
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Thomas
Clay, Robert
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S.)*
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cowans, Harry
Craigen, J. M.
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dicks, Terry
Dixon, Donald
Dormand, Jack
Douglas, Dick
Dubs, Alfred
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Ewing, Harry
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Favell, Anthony
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Fisher, Mark
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foulkes, George
Freud, Clement
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Golding, John
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Haselhurst, Alan
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Hayes, J.
Haynes, Frank
Hayward, Robert
Heffer, Eric S.
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart *(Vauxhall)*
Home Robertson, John
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Johnston, Russell
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Ron *(Carlisle)*
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
McCartney, Hugh
McCrindle, Robert
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McGuire, Michael
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
McKelvey, William
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Robert
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meadowcroft, Michael
Michie, William
Mikardo, Ian
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Miller, Dr M. S. *(E Kilbride)*
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Nellist, David
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Neill, Martin
Park, George
Patchett, Terry
Penhaligon, David
Pike, Peter
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, M.
Rhodes James, Robert
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Robertson, George
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, J. W.
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Ross, Stephen *(Isle of Wight)*
Sheerman, Barry
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Short, Mrs R. *(W'hampt'n NE)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Cyril *(Rochdale)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Stewart, Rt Hon D. *(W Isles)*
Strang, Gavin
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Tinn, James
Wainwright, R.
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert
Weetch, Ken
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Welsh, Michael
Wilkinson, John
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Wilson, Gordon
Winnick, David
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. James Hamilton and
Mr. Roger Thomas.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read a Second time and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 42 (Committal of Bills).

Supplementary Benefits (Strikers' Dependants)

10.12 pm

The Secretary of State for Social Services (Mr. Norman Fowler) *rose——*

Hon. Members: Resign!

Sir Kenneth Lewis (Stamford and Spalding): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I do not know what this is about, but I want to make a protest in terms of House of Commons procedure. I object to statements at 10 o'clock at night.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Do you not consider, Mr. Speaker, that on a matter of such importance, where the Government have acted in a sadistic and vindictive fashion, the Prime Minister should be answering questions——

Hon. Members: Sit down!

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Fowler *rose——*

Mr. Michael Welsh (Doncaster, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. This is a serious issue that will deprive the people of my constituency of certain moneys. It is important that we should debate the issue rather than receiving a statement. I ask you, Mr. Speaker, not to accept the statement. Let us debate the issue so the kiddies in my area will realise what the Government are doing.

Mr. Speaker: The matter is not debatable as such. I understand that a statement was especially asked for, and that is what we are about to hear.

Mr. Fowler: With permission, Mr. Speaker, I shall make a statement on the deduction made from benefit payable to the dependants of those involved in a trade dispute. In accordance with section 6(2) of the Social Security (No. 2) Act 1980, I today made an order stating that the specified sum under section 6(1)*(b)* of the Act will, with effect from 26 November 1984, be £16.

Hon. Members: Disgraceful.

Mr. Welsh *rose——*

Mr. Speaker: Order. *[Interruption.]* Order. I ask the House to allow the Secretary of State to make his statement. None of us knows what is in it. It is no good shouting at him.

Mr. Fowler: The specified sum is that amount by which the supplementary benefit provided for the dependants of people involved in a trade dispute is reduced. The uprating of the specified sum is a statutory requirement and——

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton) *rose——*

Mr. Fowler: And the formula by which the——

Mr. Heffer *rose——*

Several Hon. Members *rose——*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East) *rose——*

Mr. Terry Fields (Liverpool, Broadgreen): Animals. *[Interruption.]*

Grave disorder having arisen, MR. SPEAKER, *pursuant to Standing Order No. 27 (Power of Mr. Speaker to adjourn House or suspend sitting), suspended the sitting of the House for 10 minutes.*

Sitting suspended at 10.16 pm

10.26 pm

MR. SPEAKER *resumed the Chair.*

Mr. Speaker: I say to those hon. Members who are standing in front of the Table that this statement was specially asked for by the Opposition, and the House has a right to hear it. I ask those hon. Members, and those hon. Members who are standing by the Mace, please to resume their seats.

Hon. Members: No.

Mr. Nellist: It is not going to affect the Secretary of State's family.

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is a place where we argue out our differences. This kind of behaviour is quite intolerable.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Terry Fields: We are standing up for millions of workers.

Mr. Speaker: Order! I am not prepared to have an argument from hon. Gentlemen standing at the Table. I appeal to them once more.

Mr. Nellist: It is not going to affect his family.

Mr. Speaker: Order! This statement was asked for by the Opposition and, in my discretion, I granted it. I ask hon. Members now to resume their seats.

Hon. Members: No.

Grave disorder having arisen, MR. SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No. 27 (Power of Mr. Speaker to adjourn House or suspend sitting).*

Adjourned at twenty-seven minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 22 November 1984

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

HOME DEPARTMENT

Channel Islands (Ministerial Visit)

1. **Mr. Foulkes** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what subjects were discussed during his recent visit to the Channel Islands; and if he will make a statement.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Leon Brittan): The main purpose of my visit was to acquaint myself with the islands and I greatly appreciated this opportunity to do so. A number of matters were raised with me informally during the visit, including the United Kingdom request for a contribution towards defence and international representation costs on behalf of the islands.

Mr. Foulkes: I am grateful to the Home Secretary for that reply. During his visit to Guernsey, was his attention drawn to the cases of Maurice Kirk and Joseph Gillow? The right hon and learned Gentleman has powers to intervene under the Criminal Justice Act 1961 in one case and has general powers in relation to the Channel Islands. As Maurice Kirk is on hunger strike in appalling conditions in Guernsey prison, and as Joseph Gillow is unable to live in a house which he owns, how many more breaches of human rights must there be on the islands before the right hon. and learned Gentleman exercises his statutory constitutional rights and responsibilities and intervenes in the islands' affairs?

Mr. Brittan: The case of Mr. and Mrs Gillow, which involves Guernsey's housing laws, is before the European Commission of Human Rights. As regards Mr. Kirk, the administration of criminal justice in Guernsey is a matter for the island authorities.

Mr. Foulkes: The Home Secretay has powers.

Mr. Brittan: Statutory powers exist for the United Kingdom Government, but the practice is that transfers of prisoners from Guernsey to the mainland are made in accordance with agreements with the islands for adult males sentenced to 12 months' imprisonment or more, and that is not Mr. Kirk's position.

Mr. Watson: Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that the tax arrangements in the Channel Islands frequently have the effect of bringing into the sterling area foreign investment capital which would not otherwise arrive? Is it the Government's policy to encourage, rather than to abolish, these arrangements?

Mr. Brittan: I can confirm that the tax regime that is operated in the Channel Islands is a matter for the islands and that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer is satisfied that he has adequate powers to protect the interests of the United Kingdom. We are entirely content with the existing arrangements, which have the benefits to which my hon. Friend referred.

Civil Defence

2. **Mr. Pawsey** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to have completed an analysis of the answers to the civil defence questionnaires sent to local authorities.

Mr. Brittan: Before the end of December, when a report will be made available to the House.

Mr. Pawsey: How many authorities have not completed the questionnaire, and what action will my right hon. and learned Friend take to ensure that they do?

Mr. Brittan: All local authorities, except two, have completed and returned the questionnaire. It is expected that the two outstanding questionnaires will be returned by the end of the month. I imagine that my hon. Friend's concerns relate more to the answers in the questionnaires than to the questionnaires themselves.

Mr. Madden: Did the Home Secretary see the recent BBC television programmes which showed vividly the extent of death, devastation and destruction as a result of nuclear war? Does he agree that the programmes demonstrated clearly the futility of civil defence against nuclear attack?

Mr. Brittan: I could not disagree more. I did not see the programme, but we do not need a television programme to tell us that, in the event of nuclear war, the destruction will be horrific. We also do not need a television programme to be fully aware that even the most elementary civil defence preparations could save millions of lives and greatly reduce injury and suffering.

Mr. Kilroy-Silk: How can local authorities adequately answer questionnaires or plan for civil defence if the Home Secretary refuses to share with them his planning assumptions about likely targets in their areas, the casualties likely to result from an attack and other consequences? If the major air threat is from conventional attack, as the Home Office now asserts, will the right hon. and learned Gentleman tell us what is the evidence for that assumption, why it differs from the NATO strategy and how, once an air attack against this country has been launched, local authorities are expected to decide whether it is a conventional or a nuclear attack?

Mr. Brittan: All NATO countries make proper provision for civil defence, and we intend to do the same. My original answer showed that, even if the hon. Gentleman has difficulty in answering the questionnaire, local authorities seem to be doing so, which suggests that it has been directed to the right quarters.

3. **Mr. Charles Morrison** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the warning systems to be introduced to advise the public of the presence of chemical gases, liquid or spray will be the same as those in use by the United Kingdom's North Atlantic Treaty Organisation partners.

The Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Mellor): Within NATO there is no standard warning system. We are studying how such warning could be given, building on present arrangements to warn of air attack and radioactive fallout. This work is being undertaken in close co-operation with our NATO allies.

Mr. Morrison: My hon. Friend will appreciate that the background to my question is that the Soviet Union has 300,000 tonnes of chemical weapons and is continuing to add to them. Presumably there is some purpose attached to that. Despite what he has already said, will my hon. Friend ensure that the new consolidated guidance to local authorities covers protection of the public in the event of chemical attack?

Mr. Mellor: That aspect is being worked on. If those initiatives are successful, there will be an addition to the circular. My hon. Friend raises an important point in stating the Soviet Union's chemical weaponry capability. It is worth bearing in mind that we unilaterally renounced chemical weapons in the late 1950s, but that does not seem to have had much impact on the Soviets. One wonders where unilateral disarmament stands in that scenario.

Mr. Park: Do the civil defence responses referred to in the earlier question cover that aspect?

Mr. Mellor: Yes.

Mr. Neil Thorne: My hon. Friend has already mentioned that we unilaterally renounced all our chemical and biological weapons at the end of the 1950s. Is he aware that the military commanders are most concerned about the situation in relation to what the troops, especially in Germany, would suffer? Will he give careful consideration to the steps required similarly to protect the civilian population?

Mr. Mellor: Yes; that is precisely what we have in mind.

Immigration

4. **Mr. Meadowcroft** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the current waiting period for interviews experienced by applicants for entry clearance coming from the Indian sub-continent.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. David Waddington): At the end of the second quarter of this year, waiting time to first interview for applicants in the non-priority queue in Delhi was 10 months, in Bombay six months, in Pakistan 10 months and in Bangladesh 22 months. However, many applicants were placed in a priority queue and were interviewed in two months in India or Pakistan and in six months or less in Bangladesh.

Mr. Meadowcroft: Does the Minister agree that those figures hide the fact that a Government who profess to believe in the unity of the family actually divide families by making it more difficult for people to rejoin their families? Does he also agree that there is discrimination in that male fiancés have more problems coming here than female fiancées?

Mr. Waddington: Families are divided due to a decision of members of those families to emigrate. That seems to have been forgotten. It is nonsense to say that our policy is to divide families when in the past 10 years no fewer than 350,000 wives and children have joined men settled here. A large number of husbands and fiancés are in fact entering this country. The primary purpose test is certainly not impossible to pass, as only 25 per cent. fail it. So it is also absurd to say that we are imposing an insuperable barrier against the entry of husbands and male fiancés.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: Is it not almost contemptible of the Government to suggest, when one fiancé in four fails the primary purpose test, that that test does not amount to an unsurmountable barrier? Clearly, there is a high probability that fiancés will not be accepted. Does not the length of the waiting lists also show that the Government hold the fiancés of British citizens in contempt? Should not the Government devote more resources to the entry clearance procedure?

Mr. Waddington: On the question of resources, there are more people employed at our post in Dacca to deal with entry clearance than at any other post in the world. The time must come when one decides that one cannot concentrate any more resources on a particular matter.

On the question of husbands and fiancés, the Government decided some years ago that we simply could not afford large numbers of young men coming here and entering the labour market at a time of high unemployment. It would be absurd to say that young men cannot come here to work with work permits, but that they can enter the country by using marriage as a device.

Civil Defence

5. **Lord James Douglas-Hamilton** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether local authorities are directed under his Department's guidelines to use training films for the training of civil defence volunteers and for the education of the general public on protective measures in the event of war.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. Giles Shaw): It is for local authorities to decide how best to undertake local training and education, but we are considering how we can help with standard training material, including a film.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Will my hon. Friend consider the production of an up-to-date film on civil defence similar to that produced on NATO?

Mr. Shaw: I shall consider with some urgency the provision of up-to-date film material on civil defence, and will study the NATO model to see whether it is appropriate.

Rev. Martin Smyth: The Minister may recall that I have previously asked what provisions are being made to train the trainers. In the light of his answer, I wonder whether more urgent consideration could be given to the provision of a film. When one realises how speedily television documentaries can be produced which can undermine the nation's morale, surely we should be producing, with equal speed, films designed to improve the facilities of the nation?

Mr. Shaw: I take the hon. Gentleman's point. We must improve training facilities for the trainers. The hon. Gentleman will know about the Civil Defence college at Easingwold and the many courses run there, but it is necessary for us to improve the equipment.

Mrs. Clwyd: Does the Minister intend to use his powers of direction under the Civil Defence (General Local Authority Functions) Regulations 1983; and, if so, how soon?

Mr. Shaw: As my right hon. and learned Friend has explained, local authorities are being invited to complete the questionnaire, which will be sent to the Home Department by the end of the year. The answers will then be assessed. There is no need to consider using the powers until we have fully analysed the responses to the questionnaire.

Equal Opportunities Commission

6. **Mr. Andrew MacKay** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the future of the Equal Opportunities Commission.

Mr. Waddington: The Equal Opportunities Commission was established in accordance with the Sex Discrimination Act 1975. My right hon. and learned Friend has no present plans to amend that legislation.

Mr. MacKay: Since its inception in 1975 the Equal Opportunities Commission has investigated only eight cases of discrimination, published reports on only four of those cases, and only once issued a non-discrimination notice. Is it not high time that this quango, which costs nearly £3·5 million a year to run, was abolished?

Mr. Waddington: My hon. Friend must bear in mind that formal investigations form only part of the work of the EOC. In fairness, one should take account not only of the number of formal investigations but of the fact that in 1983, for instance, the commission's staff resolved 359 complaints without recourse to litigation or formal investigation.

It is right that the Government should review the operations of non-departmental bodies from time to time. A regular review is taking place, and the conclusions will be announced in the spring.

Mrs. Renée Short: Did the Minister hear the interview with Mr. Norman Willis of the TUC this morning — [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] Then he should have — in which Mr. Willis said that the TUC had collected information about the effect of privatisation of cleaning and other services in hospitals, that cleaning firms were using girls of 15 to clean hospital wards and that they were being paid less than the women who had previously been employed? Does the Minister agree that he should refer that matter to the Equal Opportunities Commission and that it should be strengthened to enable it to do the job that it needs to do?

Mr. Waddington: The answer to the first part of the hon. Lady's question is that I did not hear what Mr. Norman Willis said this morning. However, it does not need a Minister to refer a matter to the Equal Opportunities Commission. If there appears to the hon. Lady to be a matter worthy of consideration by the Equal Opportunities Commission, the matter is in her hands.

Mrs. Jill Knight: Does my hon. and learned Friend agree that many people believe that the Equal Opportunities Commission has now exhausted what opportunities it might have had to do its job? Is he sure that there is no better way in which the Government could spend £3,336,000 a year?

Mr. Waddington: I must remind my hon. Friend that although we have a plain duty to ensure that appropriate management systems are in place and that money is not wasted, we are under an obligation to ensure that discrimination on grounds of sex is abolished. I repeat that we have no plans to amend the Sex Discrimination Act 1975, which was directed towards that end.

Mr. Maclennan: If, as the Minister said, the Government believe that there is a continuing role for the Equal Opportunities Commission in combating discrimination on grounds of sex, why do the Government not accept the commission's proposals, which were published many months ago, for strengthening its powers, which would require legislative change?

Mr. Waddington: As I remember it, the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 puts a duty on the Equal Opportunities Commission to review legislation and make recommendations to the Government if it thinks that amendments are necessary. We have received no proposals from the commission suggesting changes to the legislation.

Shops Act 1950

7. **Mr. Michael Brown** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish the report of the committee of inquiry into proposals to amend the Shops Act 1950.

Mr. Brittan: The report was published yesterday. I am grateful to the committee, under the chairmanship of Mr. Robin Auld, for its valuable study of an area in which there is general agreement that the present law is unsatisfactory. I welcome the report, and we shall give it the most careful consideration.

Mr. Brown: In view of the committee's unanimous view that the Shops Act should be repealed, does my right hon. and learned Friend intend to bring forward legislation in this Session or during the lifetime of the present Parliament to repeal the 1950 Act? If he is not prepared to give that assurance, why was the inquiry deemed necessary?

Mr. Brittan: I cannot give my hon. Friend that assurance. As I said at the time, the inquiry was set up because there was widespread agreement that restrictions on trading laws affecting trading during the week and on Sundays were in need of reform, but there were differing views about how to do that. The committee's task was to establish what recommendations it could make to deal with those unsatisfactory circumstances. We shall consider the report urgently. In the light of the reaction to it, I hope in the not-too-distant future to be able to make a statement to the House about the Government's intentions.

Mr. Beith: Will the Home Secretary take more account of people who live near shopping centres and rely on Sundays for a bit of peace and quiet, those who regard Sunday as having an important role in the traditions of our country, and the families of women shop workers who like mum to be at home on Sunday?

Mr. Brittan: Mr. Auld's committee considered all of those issues and concluded that none of them should stand in the way of a major liberalisation of our commercial life.

Mr. Dickens: Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that many of those who oppose the opening of shops

on Sunday are people who, when on holiday abroad, expect to find the shops open on Sunday? Will he ensure that the Home Office accelerates the passage of legislation in this House so that we can break free from the shackles of Sunday closing?

Mr. Brittan: My hon. Friend makes a fair point about people going abroad. As I have said, the Government do not intend that consideration of this report should be long delayed. Having considered it and the reactions to it, we shall make a statement to the House, I hope in the early part of next year.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Is the Home Secretary aware that for practising Christians throughout the country any decision to change the law will be an affront to their ideals? Why is he so intent on destroying the traditional British Sunday?

Mr. Brittan: I do not believe that the hon. Gentleman's views reflect the entirety of religious opinion in the country.

Mr. John Hunt: In view of the unanimity of these recommendations and the strong support for them on both sides of the House, will my right hon. and learned Friend take this opportunity to indicate to local authorities, including my own in Bromley, that they should not now pursue further prosecutions under the Shops Act, pending a change in the law?

Mr. Brittan: I could not possibly give such an indication. The Conservative party and Government believe in the rule of law; and until it is properly changed by Parliament reaching a conclusion the law remains as it is.

Mr. Ray Powell: Why is it not possible for the Home Secretary to show the same enthusiasm for enforcing the Shops Act 1950 as he has shown in enforcing the sequestration provisions of the Trade Union Act? When will he apply the same standard to both? Has he also noted the report's suggestion that we should retain wages councils?

Mr. Brittan: I certainly noted that recommendation, which will be considered alongside the general review of wages councils undertaken by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment. As the hon. Gentleman knows, enforcement is a matter for the local authorities.

Simulated Nuclear Explosions

8. **Mr. Bill Walker** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will seek to obtain the full results of the research done with simulated nuclear explosions in the United States of America.

Mr. Waddington: The United States has already made its results available. In addition, the United Kingdom has participated in the last two trials at the White Sands range in New Mexico.

Mr. Walker: I thank my hon. and learned Friend for that reply. When the figures are published, will he ensure that they are in a form which allows us to understand the fission fragment elements of the research? Will he also ensure that a copy is placed in the Library of the House?

Mr. Waddington: The results of the research have been used in the review of the casualty and damage effects of nuclear weapons to be published next year. I assure my hon. Friend that a copy will be placed in the Library.

Mr. Rogers: Will the Minister tell us how much it costs to simulate a nuclear attack?

Mr. Waddington: No.

Crime Prevention

9. **Mr. Madel** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how he intends to improve standards of crime prevention.

12. **Dr. Twinn** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what priority his Department gives to crime prevention.

Mr. Giles Shaw: One of my right hon. and learned Friend's first acts on becoming Home Secretary was to set up the crime prevention unit within the Home Office. The joint departmental circular issued last January has prompted a wide range of activities, involving the police, other local agencies and the public. Activities include the growth of neighbourhood watch schemes, the national conference of crime prevention panel representatives in Cardiff last month, which I attended, and the current regional publicity campaign, which my right hon. and learned Friend launched last month.

Mr. Madel: In addition to the measures on crime prevention which the Government are taking, will my hon. Friend encourage the building industry to see what more can be done in the design and construction of windows and doors to make houses much more secure than they are at present?

Mr. Shaw: Yes, I willingly accept my hon. Friend's observations. He may be aware that there is a standing committee in the Home Office, which I chair, which brings together the industries involved in providing crime prevention technology and those involved in policing and local authorities. New British standards have been issued concerning guidance on house furniture. Most important, architects must recognise that crime prevention can begin on the drawing board.

Dr. Twinn: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's answer and the action taken by the Government. Is he aware that there is widespread concern in Enfield about the level of crime there, and that it is being matched by the splendid response of people in the borough through supporting their neighbourhood watch schemes and by beat policemen? Does he accept that a response from the Home Office about policing levels is necessary?

Mr. Shaw: I agree with my hon. Friend that the introduction of neighbourhood watch schemes has played a significant part in the reduction of crime against domestic property. He will know that about 30 such schemes have been established in the borough, including two in Edmonton. I hope that there will be another one in Edmonton shortly. It is through such devices that local communities can help to prevent wanton burglary of houses.

Mr. McGuire: When will the Government do something to prevent the form of crime about which many of my constituents are especially worried? When people

purchase electrical consumer goods they are sometimes flogged absolutely worthless insurance policies to cover breakdowns and the companies issuing them disappear from the face of earth. Should not the Government do something about that form of crime?

Mr. Shaw: The hon. Gentleman will, on reflection, recognise that that matter is for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and the consumer protection council.

Mr. Haynes: Can the Minister remember the present Home Secretary, and previous Home Secretaries, standing at the Dispatch Box and informing the House that the police force had been increased by 5,000? Despite that, we continue to talk about crime prevention and I hardly see a bobby on the beat. When will his Department do something about that, because that is what crime prevention is about?

Mr. Shaw: I remind the hon. Gentleman, whose observations are always original, that the police force is engaged in a number of activities at present in addition to its natural role of community policing to prevent crime. The hon. Gentleman can rest assured that the police force is determined to improve and increase the standard of community policing, upon which he quite rightly lays great stress.

Mr. Conway: Bearing in mind the impact that conventional police patrolling has on crime prevention, will my hon. Friend consider expanding the special constabulary, which is unpaid, and putting the specials on the beat patrols, which are presently vacant because of industrial unrest?

Mr. Shaw: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the increasing importance of the special constabulary. I assure him that this year it has played a particularly important role in dealing with certain issues. My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary will consider the future role of the specials in that regard.

Mr. Soley: The Minister's answers about better doors, windows, locks and porters on vandalised and criminalised estates would be more convincing if he gave the House a guarantee. Will he today give the House a guarantee that he will see the Secretary of State for the Environment about it and confirm that any local authority which introduces such schemes will not be rate-capped?

Mr. Shaw: Not even the hon. Gentleman will expect me to give an assurance in respect of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment. The hon. Gentleman knows full well that the introduction of many of these schemes can lead to direct savings in local authority housing costs and the costs of introducing other forms of technical protection for buildings.

NATO (Civil-Military Exercises)

10. **Mr. Fox** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if local authority emergency planning teams will be involved in North Atlantic Treaty Organisation civil-military exercises.

Mr. Giles Shaw: It would not be appropriate for local authorities to participate in such exercises, which are designed to test central Government's civil and military command and control procedures in a war crisis. But local authorities are normally invited to participate in the annual warning and fallout reporting exercise.

Mr. Fox: My hon. Friend's reply is not unexpected. I understand that next year there is to be a major military home exercise. Will he assure me that local authorities and the civil defence will be involved in it?

Mr. Shaw: I cannot give my hon. Friend that assurance because, as he said, the exercise is fundamentally a military one. However, I assure him that we are encouraging district, county and regional exercises, such as the successful West Wind exercise, which was carried out in the west country in November last year. Local authorities will gain valuable training through such exercises.

Mr. D. E. Thomas: During military exercises involving cruise missiles outside Greenham common, is it normal police practice to incarcerate women and children in mud pits?

Mr. Shaw: The hon. Gentleman had better write to me with a description of what he has in mind. I should make it clear to him, in case he misunderstands, that the role of the police in the protection of that base, and the need for policemen to be there, is entirely due to the fact that some members of the public are carrying on a demonstration there.

Mr. Meadowcroft: Would it not demonstrate the dangerous futility of trying to pretend that there is any protection against nuclear war if the local authority civil defence teams were able to attend those exercises?

Mr. Shaw: The hon. Gentleman is an expert on futility. In the event of conventional or nuclear war, nothing is as important as the protection of local citizens. I hope that he, as a former member of Leeds city council, took every measure possible for the protection of the citizens of Leeds.

Mr. John Wells: Is my hon. Friend aware that the present position of local government advice on civil defence is absurd? If there were a holocaust, it would be ridiculous for the nation to be led by faceless, unknown local bureaucrats. We want people such as Glenn Hoddle in London or Bryan Robson in Manchester, or Mr. Botham —people whose faces are well known—*[Interruption.]* I am being serious. We need people whose faces are well known to the nation to lead us at a time of trouble, not faceless bureaucrats.

Mr. Shaw: My hon. Friend is right to dramatise the importance of true leadership in a crisis. The Government will be reviewing their civil defence preparations after considering the questionnaires which are now being completed by the local authorities.

Departmental Costs

11. **Mr. Thurnham** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what further action he is taking to control the total running costs of his Department.

Mr. Brittan: Keeping running costs to the minimum needed to carry out its functions is a continuous objective of my Department. Plans for tightening control over Home Office running costs were included in the White Paper on financial management in Government Departments, which was published in July 1984.

Mr. Thurnham: Is my right hon. and learned Friend taking every opportunity to privatise services in his Department?

Mr. Brittan: We are taking every opportunity where the benefits outweigh the disadvantages.

Mr. Ashley: What would be the additional cost of setting up an independent inquiry into the case of Dr. Clift so as to allay the disquiet which has arisen about the judicial and Home Office handling of his case? Is it not disgraceful and deplorable that the Home Office has refused to evaluate the new evidence which has emerged, and failed to set up an independent inquiry?

Mr. Brittan: The objection to such an inquiry is related not to its cost but to the fact that, in all the circumstances, I do not believe it to be justified.

Mr. Ryman: How does the right hon. and learned Gentleman reconcile his answers with the plan to set up an independent prosecution service, which on the Government's estimate will cost more than £5 million, which I suggest is a gross underestimate? It will probably cost three times as much.

Mr. Brittan: Whatever the merits or disadvantages of an independent prosecution service — in my view the merits are considerable — it has nothing to do with the running costs of my Department.

Mr. Dubs: Does the Home Secretary recall his Department's White Paper on immigration from the Indian subcontinent, published in November 1982, which contained a commitment to have enough staff to ensure a continuing reduction in queues and waiting times on the subcontinent? Does he stick to that commitment?

Mr. Brittan: Queues are shorter now than they were under the Labour Government.

Drugs

13. **Mr. Eggar** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the increase in drug trafficking and usage.

Mr. Mellor: The Government give high priority to measures to combat drug trafficking and misuse, the increase in which is a matter of grave concern to us all. A ministerial group has been established to co-ordinate and develop strategy, as part of which my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has announced that 160 more customs officers will be provided to counter drugs smuggling. My right hon. and learned Friend the Minister for Health has also announced a major education and prevention campaign and the provision of more resources for prevention, treatment and rehabilitation, and my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has decided to introduce a maximum penalty of life imprisonment for trafficking in class A drugs.

Mr. Eggar: Is my hon. Friend aware that the country will welcome the strong measures that have been taken? Does he know that it is rumoured that over 200 lb of heroin are finding their way into London every week? Can he assure the House that if there is a demand for more police and more assistance to combat this appalling crime he will make them available?

Mr. Mellor: There is no doubt that a large quantity of heroin is being brought into the country. The precise amount is not clear, and some extremely unfortunate statistics are being bandied around, which have no foundation. I can tell my hon. Friend, and I think that this will encourage him, that in the first 10 months of this year the Customs and Excise seized 257 kilos of heroin, as against 212 kilos for the whole of last year, and the Metropolitan police have seized some 28 kilos of heroin in the first 10 months of this year, as against 5·7 kilos for the whole of last year.

Mr. Coleman: Does the Minister recall that during the Conservative party conference the Home Secretary announced that there would be legislation to deal with this? Why did this promise not appear in the Queen's Speech?

Mr. Mellor: Because there is not room in the Queen's Speech for everything. The Government intend to introduce an increase in penalties at the earliest convenient moment. If a private Member successful in the ballot were minded to bring forward such a measure, we would give him every support.

15. **Mr. Favell** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many of those convicted for offences involving the unlawful supply of drugs received prison sentences of five years and more in each of the last six years for which figures are available.

Mr. Mellor: Taking all offences relating to controlled drugs, including the unlawful import or export of drugs, the figures for the years from 1978 to 1983 are as follows: 1978, 71; 1979, 69; 1980, 69; 1981, 116; 1982, 123 and 1983, 238.

Mr. Favell: Is my hon. Friend aware that many courts regard the supply of relatively small amounts of drugs as a relatively minor offence? As the suppliers are an essential link in the chain leading to the misery of drug addiction, does my hon. Friend share that view?

Mr. Mellor: No, I do not. Of more relevance to the courts is the fact that the Lord Chief Justice does not share that view, and following his guidelines on sentencing policy for drug offences in December 1982, in the case of Aramah, the number of drug traffickers sentenced to more than five years' imprisonment increased from the 1982 level of 123 to 238 in 1983.

Mr. Alton: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that there is some relationship between the reduction of 3,500 customs officers in the past five years and the number of unlawful drugs on the streets? Why do we have to wait for two years before drug pushers can be put in gaol for life?

Mr. Mellor: The hon. Gentleman keeps banging on that point, although he has nothing to back it up. In 1980 the customs seized 38 kilos of heroin, and I have just given the figures for the first 10 months of this year, when 257 kilos of heroin were seized. The reason for that increase is that static, predictable checks are not the way to stop drug smuggling. Doubling the number of special investigators into heroin, which is what we have done, is the way, not only to seize more drugs, but to catch more of the Mr. Bigs, rather than needle-in-haystack operations to catch couriers.

Mr. Hayes: Is my hon. Friend aware that the problem of drugs goes well beyond the courts and that there is a serious drug trafficking problem in Her Majesty's prisons?

Will he give an undertaking that his Department will review the training given to prison officers in the detection of drugs, as at the moment it is inadequate?

Mr. Mellor: I do not know whether my hon. Friend is right in saying that. Certainly it is the case that we are looking at the problem of drugs in prison. In so far as my hon. Friend is influenced in asking his question by the report from the Prison Officers' Association, it has been invited to substantiate the assertions contained in that report and has thus far failed to do so.

Mr. Ryman: Does the Minister appreciate that many police officers, in both the CID and uniformed branch, think that a great deal more could be done to apprehend criminals pushing drugs if they did not have to spend so much time bashing pickets in the coal-mining areas?

Mr. Mellor: There is one simple answer to that. The hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends should stop the violence on the picket lines and then the police would go away.

Coal Industry Dispute

16. **Sir John Biggs-Davison** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what financial assistance the Government are providing for police authorities during the miners' dispute.

Mr. Brittan: The Home Office normally meets 50 per cent. of approved policing costs. Because of the exceptional expenditure incurred by some police authorities in policing the dispute, I have announced arrangements which mean that we shall meet 90 per cent. of the approved additional costs of policing the dispute above the product of a penny rate in a police area. Furthermore, once a police authority's own contribution amounts to the product of a three quarter penny rate, all further additional expenditure incurred in policing the dispute will be met in full by the Exchequer, however long the dispute lasts.

Sir John Biggs-Davison: In our local police system police authorities must play their financial part. However, is not the Government's assistance necessary and welcome? Will my right hon. and learned Friend commend the police in the mining areas, who withstand brutal attacks with such courage and patience?

Mr. Brittan: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. Having had the opportunity of meeting the police in one such area — south Yorkshire — only on Saturday, I unhesitatingly commend their magnificent efforts in the face of tremendous provocation.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Montgomery** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for 22 November.

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher): This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Montgomery: Does my right hon. Friend agree that if a union calls its members out on strike, a strike which can often cause great inconvenience and cost to the community at large, the responsibility for looking after those strikers should fall on the union responsible?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I agree. That is what was proposed in our 1979 manifesto, which was overwhelmingly endorsed and passed into law in the Social Security (No.2) Act 1980, under which deductions from benefit payable to strikers' families are made.

Mr. Hattersley: Did the Prime Minister hear the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr. Fowler) on the radio this morning admit that the Specified Sums Order 1984 will further reduce the real value—the purchasing power—of the social security payments that are made to the families of striking miners? What possible justification can there be for that gratuitously vindictive act? Does the Prime Minister still not realise that such callousness confirms our long-held view that she is less concerned with the waste and suffering of the miners' dispute than with the hope of scoring a cheap political victory?

The Prime Minister: If, in accordance with the Act, the NUM meets its obligations to the strikers, they will get the full benefit of the social security uprating because the NUM will provide the £16. The callousness and vindictiveness should be turned upon those in the NUM who are prepared to use the money for mob violence rather than for paying the miners.

Mr. Hattersley: Why does the Prime Minister continually pretend that this is necessary under the Act when the Act gives her powers to change the regulations and the payment? Secondly, if the right hon. Lady is so conscious and certain of the righteousness of her cause, why does she try to sneak the order through at the last moment rather than present it to the House properly? Indeed, to coin a phrase that she will remember from Question Time a week ago, why does she not have the guts to come down and explain it herself?

The Prime Minister: First, the point of the Act is that those who belong to trade unions are entitled to look to them for a part of their benefit while they are on strike. If the NUM carried out its obligations, those strikers would be receiving £16 next week. Secondly, the formula is contained in section 6(2) of the Social Security Act 1980. It is automatically applied every year, and has been every year since 1980. In 1980 the sum was £12. In 1981, by formula, it was £13; in 1982, by formula, £14·50; in 1983, by formula, £15 and in 1984, by automatic formula, £16. The right hon. Gentleman could have calculated that. As for explaining it, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State tried to, but was prevented from doing so by the rowdiest scenes that this House has ever seen, perpetrated by members of the right hon. Gentleman's own party. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Hattersley *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Prime Minister gave a very detailed reply, and I shall call the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley).

Mr. Hattersley: I think that the right hon. Members who were shouting me down were complaining about noise in the House last night. Why does the Prime Minister persist in telling the House that she had no choice other than to implement the order in the way in which she chose to do? There are two sections within the Act which allow

her and the Government to vary the order if they so choose. However, she has not chosen to vary the order and, therefore, she must take direct responsibility for what happens in terms of suffering, hardship and bitterness.

The Prime Minister: A special regulation has to be brought before the House to alter the formula contained in that Act. Every single thing that the right hon. Gentleman says should be turned against the NUM for its callousness in not looking after its members and in calling them out on strike without a ballot and then refusing to give them any help during the strike.

Mr. Onslow: Since there can be no excuse or justification for the disgraceful exhibition that was staged last night by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer) and some of Mr. Scargill's other friends in this House, may I assure my right hon. Friend that you, Mr. Speaker, will have the full support of Conservative Members for whatever action you think necessary to protect the rights of my right hon. Friend's Government and the democratically elected majority that she represents?

The Prime Minister: Yes, Sir. The Government replied to a specific request from the Opposition to make a statement. The Government were then prevented — almost physically, I understand — from making that statement. I hope that the Opposition Front Bench will dissociate itself from the disgraceful scenes last night.

Dr. Owen: Would it not have been wiser if the Prime Minister, instead of rounding up the reduction from 75p to £1, had used section 6(3) of the Act to introduce regulations that would have meant an increase of £15·50? That would also have been in line with the increase introduced for supplementary benefit. *[Interruption.]* That would have been fair to the miners and would have demonstrated——

Mr. Rogers: Here is some money for the right hon. Gentleman. Here is an old threepenny bit—fewer sides than him.

Dr. Owen: There are some of us in this House who are going to be heard—*[Interruption]*—despite——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The right hon. Gentleman is asking a question and has every right to be heard.

Dr. Owen: I have every right, just as the House has rights which were flouted last night, thus damaging reasoned debate. There is a real question here. *[Interruption.]* The Government could have been fairer to miners' families and miners themselves and shown greater sensitivity over this very delicate issue if they had increased—*[Interruption.]* No, Mr. Speaker. I shall not be harried by this mob.

Mr. Speaker: Order. This disorder is not fair to the House or to other hon. Members with questions on the Order Paper.

Dr. Owen: I shall stand until hell freezes over. I put it to the Prime Minister, in answer to a reasoned debate, that regulations to increase the deduction from £15 to £15·50 would have been fairer.

The Prime Minister: No. The formula under the Act was applied precisely. To change that formula would have required new regulations to be brought before the House. The formula was used this year, as it has been used every year since 1980. I should have thought that the right hon. Gentleman would join me in expecting unions which call their members out on strike to have some obligation to pay them strike money — to pay them the amount which would otherwise be deducted.

Q2. **Mr. Stern** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 22 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some minutes ago.

Mr. Stern: Does the Prime Minister agree that the disruption last night was disgraceful? Does she further agree that those concerned should apologise both to Mr. Speaker and to the House as a whole?

The Prime Minister: That would be a very nice way to end a very ugly incident.

Mr. Dormand: Does not the Prime Minister's continued refusal to answer the direct question, repeated by my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley), demonstrate what a guilty conscience she has? Will she now say clearly that the Government have the power under the Act not to increase the needs allowance? May we have a straight answer? Is this not proof of the Government's main purpose, which is simply to break the NUM's power?

The Prime Minister: The figure given by my right hon. Friend arose from the precise application of the formula contained in the 1980 Act. If that formula is to be altered, secondary legislation must be brought before the House. The formula has been applied precisely every year since the Act was passed. The sum started at £12 a week. The same application of the formula has been published in the results every year. If the hon. Gentleman has any conscience, perhaps he will address it to the NUM and ask it to help its own people whom it called out on strike.

Q3. **Mrs. Peacock** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 22 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some minutes ago.

Mrs. Peacock: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the best way to provide a good Christmas for miners' families is for the miners to return tomorrow rather than for them to rely on hand-outs from local authorities such as Kirklees metropolitan authority?

The Prime Minister: Yes. Some local authorities are providing hand-outs and this is causing deep offence to many ratepayers. I agree that a return to normal and a return to work by the striking miners would be best for the industry, best for the families and best for the country. My right hon. and hon. Friends would all welcome that very much indeed.

Mr. Alfred Morris: How does the Prime Minister respond to the Irish Prime Minister's charge that she was "gratuitously offensive"?

The Prime Minister: With total disagreement. I do not understand his comment in any way.

Q4. **Mr. Greg Knight** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for 22 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Knight: Is my right hon. Friend aware that Derbyshire county council has decided to recall all of its stationery, including school notepaper, at an estimated cost of £50,000 so that the slogan

"Derbyshire supports nuclear-free zones"

can be overprinted? Does my right hon. Friend agree that that is a disgraceful waste of public money? Is there not a case, in the interests of ratepayers and taxpayers, for increasing the list of those authorities which should be abolished?

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend that that is a disgraceful waste of money. My hon. Friend made his point effectively in his question.

Mr. Eadie: The right hon. Lady has been hard put today to defend the indefensible — [HON. MEMBERS: "No".]—in relation to starving women and children as a consequence of her action. Since the right hon. Lady is trying to get some mileage out of the matter of conduct in the House, I ask her to read the Adjournment debate that took place on Monday night. *[Interruption.]* Thirty Conservative Members came into the House, after a very good dinner, and during the whole of that debate tried to prevent my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist) from making his speech. *[Interruption.]* Does the right hon. Lady endorse that conduct?

The Prime Minister: I am sorry that I did not hear the whole of the hon. Gentleman's question. Sometimes it is not easy to hear the whole of the questions against the background of noise. With regard to the amount that will be paid to the families of those on strike, even if the NUM does not pay them their £16, the facts are that some 85 per cent. of miners' families who are receiving supplementary benefit will have a net cash increase in their benefit, about 6,000 will have no change and only about 100 people are likely to receive less benefit. I shall read the Adjournment debate to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

Points of Order

3.31 pm

Mr. Eldon Griffiths (Bury St. Edmunds): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. As one who has an interest to declare, and who expects to continue to have an interest to declare, in the policing of—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Even from here I cannot hear what the hon. Member is saying.

Mr. Griffiths: I am doing my best, Mr. Speaker. As one who has an interest to declare, and who expects to continue to have an interest to declare, in the policing of public order, may I raise a point of order about a specific matter last night? It was your judgment, Mr. Speaker, in your absolute discretion, that the House should adjourn, and, of course, all of us accept that. In the event that it had proved necessary for you to instruct the Serjeant at Arms to cause the removal from the Chamber of those who were preventing free speech and obstructing the business of the House, what resources were available to the Serjeant at Arms for him to prevent that affront against free speech in the House?

Mr. Speaker: What the hon. Member said was hypothetical. That situation did not arise. I have given careful consideration to whether I should make a statement about what occurred last night. I just say this: for centuries this House has seen the strongest expressions of conflicting opinion and policy and, over the centuries, the House has jealously guarded its procedures of free debate. I remind the House that if its proceedings are brought to a halt by disorderly conduct — that includes refusal to hear the opinions of others—that long tradition is damaged and violated and the authority of Parliament is undermined.

As long as I am Speaker of this House, I shall continue to uphold its reputation and supremacy. I hope that in this I shall always have the full backing of the House.

Business of the House

3.35 pm

Mr. Roy Hattersley (Birmingham, Sparkbrook): May I ask the Leader of the House whether he will state the business of the House for next week?

The Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Biffen): Yes, Sir — *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. On a day when feelings are running high remarks of that kind from a sedentary position do not help.

Mr. Biffen: The Business for next week will be as follows:

Monday 26 November—Opposition Day (3rd allotted day) (first part). Debate on an Opposition motion entitled Further Reduction in Real Value and Purchasing Power of Social Security Benefits for Families of Miners on Strike. This debate is taking place at the request of the Opposition under the provisions of Standing Order No. 6(2) (B).

Second Reading of the Social Security Bill.

Motions on the Coal (Payments Schemes) (Amendment) Order and on the Coal (Limit of Deficit Grants) Order.

Tuesday 27 November—Opposition day (4th Allotted Day). There will be a debate on an Opposition motion on the failure of Government policies to safeguard the natural environment and the national heritage of Britain.

Motion on the Repairs (Grants for Airey Houses) (Variation) Order.

Motion on the Okehampton Bypass (Compulsory Purchase) Orders.

Wednesday 28 November—Completion of remaining stages of the Elections (Northern Ireland) Bill.

Motions on Northern Ireland orders on road traffic, family law and loans (increase of limit).

Thursday 29 November—There will be a debate on the Royal Navy, on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

Motion on European Community document 8175/84 on the summer time arrangements.

Motion on European Community Documents 7685/84 and 7686/84 on Red Meat and Poultrymeat, and on 7948/84 on Hormone Implants to Cattle.

Friday 30 November—Private Members' motions.

Monday 3 December—Second Reading of the Local Government Bill (first day).

Relevant documents in debates on European documents on 29 November:

(a) 8175/84 Draft directive on summer time arrangements.

(b) 7685/84 Draft directive on the financing of health inspections and controls of fresh meat.

(c) 7686/84 Amendment to draft directive on health problems affecting trade in fresh poultrymeat.

(d) 7948/84 Communication and draft directive on hormones in animal production.

Relevant reports of European Legislation Committee

(a) HC 78-xxxiv (1983-84) para. 4

(b) HC 78 xxxi (1983-84) para. 1
HC 5-i (1984-85) para. 1

(c) HC 78-xxxi (1983-84) para. 1
HC 5-i (1984-85) para. 1

(d) HC 78-xxxv (1983-84) para. 1

Mr. Hattersley: As we are not to have, as the Opposition had hoped, a debate next week on the Chancellor's autumn statement, may we be assured that it will take place during the first week in December? The House is entitled to take a comparatively early view of what even the *Daily Telegraph* called "the Government's fudged figures."

Secondly, may we be given an assurance that, whatever the Government decide about signing or not signing the law of the sea convention, the matter will be debated in the House before 10 December? As I understand it, if the convention is not signed by then, Britain will be absent from those arrangements by default. It will be intolerable for that decision to be made without the House of Commons having the opportunity to pass a judgment and give an opinion about it.

Mr. Biffen: I shall have regard to the points made by the right hon. Gentleman about the law of the sea convention. Surely the matter can be pursued through the usual channels.

I hope to be able to meet the time scale mentioned by the right hon. Gentleman in respect of the autumn statement, and I should also wish to have regard to the work of the Treasury departmental Committee.

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe): Does my right hon. Friend think it somewhat surprising that the Opposition have selected as the subject for debate next Monday the order made yesterday by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services, in view of the fact that in each of the past three years, when precisely similar orders have been made, the uprating has not evoked the slightest protest from the Opposition?

Mr. Biffen: I think there is enough emotion on the topic at the moment for me to say only that it is an argument that can be deployed on Monday.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): In view of the continued requests from the official Opposition for statements to be made next week, will the Leader of the House satisfy himself that they know that their hon. Friends in the Labour party will permit them first to hear and then to ask questions on the statements?

Mr. Biffen: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says.

Mr. Richard Hickmet (Glanford and Scunthorpe): Will my right hon. Friend find time for the House to debate the appalling decline in the standards of policing in Humberside, following the slashing of the budget in that county by the Labour-controlled police authority, its continuing refusal to appoint an assistant chief constable, and the decline in the effectiveness of the police force in that county?

Mr. Biffen: I cannot offer the prospect of Government time, but I am sure that my hon. Friend can use his own initiative to try to secure a debate.

Dr. David Clark (South Shields): I understand that the debate on the Okehampton bypass next Tuesday is to be on early-day motion 122.

[That the Petition of General Objection of the Dartmoor Preservation Association, the Ramblers' Association, the Commons, Open Spaces and Footpaths Preservation Society, the British Archaeological Trust, the Council for the Protection of Rural England (Devon Branch), the Conservation Society Limited (Devon Branch), Transport 2000 (Devon Branch), Friends of the Earth Limited, the Long Distance Walkers' Association and the Devon Alliance of Amenity Societies, against the Exeter-Launceston-Bodmin Trunk Road (Okehampton Bypass) Compulsory Purchase Order (No. CSW1) 1984 and the Exeter-Launceston-Bodmin Trunk Road (Okehampton Bypass Supplementary No. 1) Compulsory Purchase Order (No. CSW2) 1984 be not referred to a Joint Committee.]

If we pass that motion as it stands, it will in essence be a vote of no confidence in the Chairman of Ways and Means and in Lord Aberdare, the Chairman of Committees in the other House. Although I have no objection whatever to a debate on the Okehampton bypass, which I think would be welcome, will the Leader of the House give us an assurance that no vote will be taken after the debate on that motion? Otherwise, tens of thousands of objectors will not be allowed to have their case heard, and we shall be indirectly censuring the Chairman of Ways and Means.

Mr. Biffen: The procedure certainly has precedent, and I am most anxious to make it clear at once that there could be no question of the personal censure that is suggested in the hon. Gentleman's comments. It seems to me that his arguments should be used in the debate. They might influence its outcome.

Mr. Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): With reference to the question put by the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark), will my right hon. Friend accept that there is also a feeling on the Government Benches that, although there might be a parliamentary precedent for the debate, it would be breaking with good parliamentary tradition? Will my right hon. Friend accept that, because of what the other House decided, there is at least a case for putting the matter before a Joint Committee, in which event the matter would still come back to the Floor of this House, but a little later rather than sooner?

Mr. Biffen: I think that that is something to be argued in the debate.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): Will the Leader of the House give a firm assurance that the Government's plans to take a further £1 from strikers and their families in the mining dispute will not be implemented until this House has debated the matter?

Mr. Biffen: I think that Monday's debate should clear up all those matters.

Sir Kenneth Lewis (Stamford and Spalding): Has it occurred to my right hon. Friend that we seem to suffer nowadays from too much government by order—orders from the European Community, orders dealing with Northern Ireland, and all sorts of other orders? We spend hours in this House discussing orders. Will my right hon. Friend put his mind to cutting down the number of orders so that we might have a more sensible parliamentary timetable?

Mr. Biffen: I shall certainly put my mind to it, and I hope that I shall be reinforced by a universal demand for less government.

Mr. Ivor Stanbrook (Orpington): May we have a debate on the White Paper concerning the future of Hong Kong? When we do, will the Minister concerned give an assurance that the pension rights of Government servants in Hong Kong will be as well safeguarded as were those of civil servants of Britain's former colonies?

Mr. Biffen: I hope that the Hong Kong debate can take place shortly. I am sure that my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary will take account of my hon. Friend's point about pensions.

Mr. Ian Wrigglesworth (Stockton, South): Now that the House of Lords has made its decision on the GCHQ case, will the Leader of the House arrange for a Minister to come to the House to make a statement about the position of the people at GCHQ who still hold on to union membership, as I am sure he is aware that many hon. Members still object to the denial of civil rights to those members of GCHQ staff?

Mr. Biffen: I shall refer the hon. Gentleman's anxieties to the relevant Ministers on the Treasury Bench.

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): Will my right hon. Friend ask the Secretary of State for Social Services to give very careful thought over the weekend to the anomaly that is causing real hardship in mining communities, whereby those who accepted voluntary redundancy and who have never been on strike are now being denied their unemployment pay? Will he ensure that a statement on this very serious subject is incorporated in the debate on Monday?

Mr. Biffen: I shall ensure that my right hon. Friend is made aware of the issues that my hon. Friend has put to the House.

Mr. Jack Ashley (Stoke-on-Trent, South): May I draw the attention of the Leader of the House to early-day motion 127 on Dr. Clift?

[That this House condemns the prejudice shown by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State to the Home Office during the Adjournment Debate on 15th November about the need for an independent inquiry into the discrediting of Dr. Clift; believes that every convicted or discredited man is entitled to a fair independent hearing and, if new evidence emerges, has further entitlement to a new hearing; deplores the Minister's refusal to consider or respond to evidence recently emerged which casts serious doubts on the discrediting of Dr. Clift; notes that one of the two forensic scientists on whose evidence Lord Chief Justice Elmslie condemned Dr. Clift has now stated that it is "simply not true" that he condemned Dr. Clift's work, and that the Judge did not understand what it was all about; notes that the expert advising the defence has now admitted that he actually knew of the blood group evidence, yet Dr. Clift was condemned for depriving the defence of this information; further notes that 11 forensic scientists, some of great eminence, have expressed their individual but unanimous views that the Home Office report on which Dr. Clift's enforced early retirement was based was faulty in its approach and wrong in its verdict; and for these reasons believes that Dr. Clift is entitled to an opportunity to clear his name and that the only fair means of ensuring this is by an independent inquiry.]

Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that any convicted or discredited person has a right to a fair hearing if new evidence emerges? Secondly, is he aware that the Home Office has refused any inquiry into new evidence concerning Dr. Clift? As that refusal was made clear during an Adjournment debate that was granted by Mr. Speaker, what help can the right hon. Gentleman give me? Will he consider the matter with a view to finding time to debate an important issue involving a man's reputation?

Mr. Biffen: I shall examine the matters that have been raised by the right hon. Gentleman and I shall discuss the issue with my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary.

Dr. Jeremy Bray (Motherwell, South): Is the Leader of the House aware that the Government's miserable treatment of student grants has done considerable damage to higher education, that the diversion of resources to the science budget will be insufficient to maintain even the basic core of scientific research and that decline will continue after the first year? As their Lordships have found time to debate this issue, is it not time that we did?

Mr. Biffen: As an initial development, I am sure that the hon. Gentleman, with his formidable skills, will be seeking to debate the matter in an Adjournment debate.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. An important debate is to take place after business questions in which many right hon. and hon. Members wish to participate. I reluctantly reduce the time available for Back Benchers to ask questions about the business for next week. I propose to allow questions to run until four o'clock.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Bearing in mind the deep implications for traditional standards in the report on Sunday trading, will my right hon. Friend arrange an early debate on that important report?

Mr. Biffen: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend that it is a most important report. For that very fact, I thought that there might be some advantage in allowing representations to be made upon the report and to be considered by the Government before any such debate took place.

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton (Fife, Central): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware of the growing concern about the escalating amount of fraud in the City? Is he concerned that about 500,000 companies are deliberately defying the law by not filing their accounts with Companies house? Given this unacceptable face of capitalism, will he ensure that an urgent debate takes place on these matters?

Mr. Biffen: I shall draw to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry the problem about filing accounts with Companies house.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): As there is wide interest in the future of the voluntary sector and ways in which it can be promoted, will my right hon. Friend consider giving time for a debate on that issue?

Mr. Biffen: I shall certainly consider that. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for the way in which he has represented the matter to me already. I do not see much prospect of such a debate in the immediate future.

Mr. Gordon Wilson (Dundee, East): When do the Government expect to make a statement on the sabotage of the system of industrial regional aid? If and when such a statement is made, will the right hon. Gentleman give a pledge that there will be an early debate on the matter?

Mr. Biffen: I cannot accept the parody of the premise of the hon. Gentleman's question, but a statement will be made shortly on industrial aid, and we shall have to think about matters thereafter.

Mr. Richard Holt (Lanbaurgh): Will my right hon. Friend accept that we do not want a debate on an increase

in television licence fees to be left until the last moment? Is he aware that the House would like the opportunity, as evidenced by the number of early-day motions on the subject, of debating the principle on which the BBC is funded rather than arguing about pound notes at the end of the day? I do not want the debate to be left until the last moment.

Mr. Biffen: I note what my hon. Friend has said. He has touched on a matter of lively, popular and parliamentary interest. I shall ensure that the matter is drawn to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary.

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): May we have an explanation from a Minister during Monday's debate as to why the wife and children of a convicted criminal in prison rightly qualify for the full rate of supplementary benefit while the wives and children of striking miners have to pay an increased fine of £16 per week as a result of a sneaky Privy Council order which does not even require parliamentary approval? Is not that an utter contempt of Parliament as well as utter contempt for miners' wives and childen?

Mr. Biffen: I cannot anticipate Monday's debate, but I suggest that the hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) had better brush up his arguments and tone down his rhetoric.

Mr. Nicholas Lyell (Mid-Bedfordshire): Given the widespread support in the House for the timetabling of the Committee stages of Bills and the importance of proper debate on the Local Government Bill, will my right hon. Friend consider timetabling the Committee stage of that Bill from the start?

Mr. Biffen: On a day when coolness rather than foolhardiness is required, I think that it would be provocative if I were to answer that question.

Mr. John McWilliam (Blaydon): As we are to have a debate on a defence subject next week, why could it not be on the three-country memorandum of understanding and the quite unnecessary redundancies in the royal ordnance factories that flow from it?

Mr. Biffen: The House is obliged to have a debate on the Royal Navy. That is why it stands.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels (Leicester, East): In view of the road traffic accident last night involving my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, will my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House consider carefully the security of Cabinet Ministers and ensure that police are in attendance, as they were needed last night? Will my right hon. Friend examine this matter carefully and perhaps provide time for a private debate?

Mr. Biffen: The matter does not fall within my responsibility, but I will certainly see that it is considered.

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): In Monday's debate on supplementary benefit uprating, may we have a spokesman other than the Minister of State, Department of Health and Social Security—perhaps the Attorney-General or a spokesman from the Home Office—to explain how a trade union can be deemed to have paid sums of money when its funds have been sequestrated and are in the hands of the court?

Mr. Biffen: I cannot undertake to dispose who will be the ministerial participants in the debate, but I am sure that their arguments will be comprehensively convincing.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Grantham): As my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary said that he hoped to make an early statement on the Government's response to the report on Sunday trading, does my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House agree that it would be helpful for everyone if the House had the opportunity to debate the matter before the Government made their statement?

Mr. Biffen: That is certainly a matter for sympathetic consideration. My hon. Friend will see from the *Official Report* that in my earlier reply I tried to make it clear that proper reflection on the recommendation would be needed before we could proceed to a debate.

Mr. Michael McGuire (Makerfield): When may we expect to hear the Government's plans to protect ordinary citizens from being persuaded to take out bogus policies for the maintenance of television sets and other electrical appliances? Is he aware that about 800,000 people have been persuaded to part with as much as £30 or £40 for worthless insurance policies and that the companies involved, such as Multi-Guarantee and one appropriately named Cavalier Insurance, then simply disappear from the face of the earth? The Government have done nothing about this so far. When may we expect some action?

Mr. Biffen: It sounds as though the hon. Gentleman is referring to alleged commercial fraud. I suggest that he should seek to raise the matter on the Adjournment, addressing his remarks to the Department of Trade and Industry.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): I thank my right hon. Friend for sending me a copy of the European Community financial mechanism. As acceptance of the Fontainebleau agreement depends on an acceptable financial mechanism, is it possible to have a debate on this item alone? I am sure that my right hon. Friend is as concerned as I am about this. Does he agree that it is especially worrying because the document does not even have the status of a regulation but amounts merely to conclusions? Does he further agree that the great and proper desire that agriculture expenditure should be under control is not satisfied because the document states that in exceptional circumstances agricultural expenditure will be allowed to rise and, as we all know, exceptional circumstances occur in the Community every day of the week?

Mr. Biffen: The difficulty is that we are now drenched with Community documents which the Scrutiny Committee recommends, understandably, for our consideration on the Floor of the House. However, I will consider my hon. Friend's point.

Mr. Bill Michie (Sheffield, Heeley): Bearing in mind the answer which he gave a short time ago, will the Leader of the House try to persuade the Government to explain to the House how they can deem that £15 or £16 a week is being paid when the union's funds are subject to sequestration, which means that it is physically and legally impossible for it to pay?

Mr. Biffen: I do not intend to anticipate Monday's debate, except to say that I await it with considerable expectations.

Mr. Tim Yeo (Suffolk, South): Will my right hon. Friend consider using his undoubted influence, through the usual channels or otherwise, to discourage Opposition demands for ministerial statements to be made at 10.15 pm? That appears to be an hour of the evening when Opposition Members find it difficult to take part in reasoned debate, and important items of business can in consequence be lost. On this occasion it was also highly inconvenient for those hon. Members who were lucky enough to have bisques, and who regretted not being present during the dramatic scenes.

Mr. Biffen: Wisely the House is sufficiently flexible that, from time to time, statements are accepted at 10 o'clock. I would not wish in any way to disparage that flexibility. However, I have an overriding consideration, which is that those who request statements to be made should be allowed to hear them.

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil): Is the Leader of the House aware that the new COCOM agreement governing the export of high technology goods from Britain will pass into law by way of an export of goods control order requiring neither the assent nor the scrutiny of the House? Is he also aware that that agreement is causing widespread concern in the high technology industries? Will he undertake to discuss the matter with the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, with a view to allowing the House to debate this important issue before it becomes law?

Mr. Biffen: I acknowledge the hon. Gentleman's long-standing interest in this topic, and I shall draw the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to that point.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): Does the Leader of the House agree that it is unthinkable that the Foreign Secretary should announce this country's withdrawal from UNESCO during a debate supposedly on overseas aid? If the Government have such an idea in mind, may we have a proper debate about it?

Mr. Biffen: As this is an Opposition day arising on a Liberal party motion, I will be very Asquithian and say, "Wait and see".

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Will the Leader of the House bear in mind not only that the funds of the National Union of Mineworkers have been sequestrated but that, in order to ensure that Monday's debate is conducted in a proper manner, it might be advisable to consider the judgment of Mr. Justice Vinelott that the NUM in Derbyshire should not be allowed to spend a penny on the prosecution of the strike? On 6 November the law of the land decreed that the union could not pay £15 or £16 even if it had the money. When someone suggested that the union should search for money abroad, I told them not to go to Oman because Mrs. Thatcher's son had got there first and taken the lot.

Mr. Biffen: I know that the hon. Gentleman is in great difficulties over the miners' strike. His difficulties are compounded week by week as the number of working miners increases and the number of striking miners diminishes. At the heart of the difficulties is the fact that, from the outset, the NUM leadership could never get the fullhearted support of the total membership.

Mrs. Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): Last week the Leader of the House told me that he would discuss with the Secretary of State for Defence the necessity of making a statement in the House about his intentions on the idea of follow-on force attack and the attitude that he will take at the meeting of Defence Ministers in Brussels on 4 and 5 December. Is it not right that the matter should be discussed on the Floor of the House or in the Select Committee on Defence? What progress has the Leader of the House made in his discussions with the Secretary of State?

Mr. Biffen: Discussions are still in progress. The moment that they are concluded, the hon. Lady will be informed.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): Is not the real reason why there is no debate in Government time about the theft of a further £1 from the families and children of striking miners that the decision last night was an act of desperation by the Government as they do not believe their own figures about how many miners are going back to work? The strike remains solid and the Government are worried about their being power cuts in the next six or seven weeks.

Mr. Biffen: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will reflect a little in future before effectively preventing the operation of the official Opposition Front Bench. What he engaged in last night was a destruction of parliamentary procedures. That is offensive to the House and to the Opposition Front Bench. As to the points of substance that the hon. Gentleman raised——

Mr. Nellist: The right hon. Gentleman was not here on Monday.

Mr. Biffen: I was—not all the time but sufficient to get the flavour of it. It was vigorous and that is what one expects on this issue; but one does not expect the intolerance which was shown last night and which was designed to stifle opinions on both sides of the House because the Militant Tendency is in conflict.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): In view of the great public interest in the GLC abolition Bill, will the Leader of the House consider having the television cameras present for the Committee stage of the Bill?

Mr. Biffen: That would require all sorts of procedures and Votes of the House that I cannot deliver, have no wish to have delivered and will not seek to deliver.

Later——

Dr. David Clark: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The Leader of the House referred to a precedent with regard to the Okehampton bypass debate on Tuesday. When a similar precedent was debated in 1976, leave was sought about the availability of petitions because petitions are private. However, on that occasion they were not available. As we have a few days' notice on this occasion, and as we shall debate the motion which refers to petitions, may we have an assurance that those petitions will be available at the Vote Office?

Mr. Biffen: I shall look into that matter.

British Shipbuilders (Redundancies)

4.1 pm

Mr. Don Dixon (Jarrow): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 10, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the decision just announced by British Shipbuilders that another 3,000 men are to be made redundant."

This most recent savage blow dealt by British Shipbuilders falls clearly within the criteria of the Standing Order. The matter is specific because 2,100 of those who are to be sacked live in the Tyne area which has one of the highest rates of unemployment in Great Britain. Most of those who are to be sacked live in the constituencies of my hon. Friends the Members for South Shields (Dr. Clark), for Wallsend (Mr. Garrett) and for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) and in my constituency of Jarrow.

Having been born and bred in Jarrow, I well remember what happened in the 1930s when an organisation called Shipbuilding Security Limited came to Jarrow and closed the shipyard and the shipbuilding industry there. It threw my grandfather and father out of work. My grandfather never worked again and my father only got work again in 1939 when he was taken on to work for his king and country. That is what happened to the men who were thrown on the scrap heap in the 1930s.

The matter is urgent because, as we are an island nation, we need a shipbuilding industry since 90 per cent. of our trade is carried by ships. The Government should provide time for the House to debate the future of the shipping and shipbuilding industries.

The matter is important because the Government's policy is turning areas such as the Northern region into industrial deserts. The sooner the Government change their policy the better.

I hope that you will give this matter urgent consideration, Mr. Speaker. The people in the Northern region have always been law-abiding. They have always believed in democracy. However, the young people of our region are not so deeply steeped in democracy that they will accept the solution of the 1930s for the problems of the 1980s.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member asks leave to move the Adjournment of the House for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter which he thinks should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the decision just announced by British Shipbuilders that another 3,000 men are to be made redundant."

I have listened with care and sympathy to what the hon. Gentleman has said, but I regret that I do not consider the matter which he has raised to be appropriate for discussion under Standing Order No. 10 and I cannot therefore submit his application to the House.

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Although I appreciate that you listened intently to what my hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon) had to say, I should like you to draw the attention of the Prime Minister and the Leader of the House to the fact that they were deliberately ignorant in not listening to what my hon. Friend said.

Mr. Speaker: That is not a matter for me.

Mr. Ted Garrett (Wallsend): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I am afraid that I did not catch your eye in regard to the application under Standing Order No. 10. Would it be possible to make an application under Standing Order No. 10 on the same subject next week?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman knows that, under Standing Order No. 10, a matter must be raised at the first available opportunity, as was the case today.

BILLS PRESENTED

Representation of the People

Mr. Secretary Brittan, supported by Secretary Sir Geoffrey Howe, Mr. Secretary Younger, Mr. Secretary Edwards, Mr. John Biffen, Mr. Secretary Hurd and Mr. David Mellor, presented a Bill to amend the law relating to parliamentary elections in the United Kingdom and local government elections in Great Britain, to provide for combining polls taken on the same date at such elections and elections to the Assembly of the European Communities, to extend the franchise at elections to that Assembly, to amend the law relating to the effect of the demise of the Crown on the summoning and duration of a new Parliament and to repeal section 21(3) of the Representation of the People Act 1918: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 12].

Local Government

Mr. Secretary Jenkin, supported by The Prime Minister, Mr. Secretary Brittan, Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Secretary Sir Keith Joseph, Mr. Secretary Tebbit, Mr. Secretary Ridley and Mr. Kenneth Baker, presented a Bill to abolish the Greater London Council and the metropolitan county councils; to transfer their functions to the local authorities in their areas and, in some cases, to other bodies; and to provide for other matters consequential on, or connected with, the abolition of those councils: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 11].

Opposition Day

[2ND ALLOTTED DAY]

Overseas Aid

Mr. Speaker: Before I call the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Mr. Johnston), I should announce that I have selected the amendment standing in the name of the Prime Minister. I must also inform the House that, because of the number of hon. Members who have indicated their wish to speak, I intend to apply the time limit of 10 minutes, which was agreed to by the House on 31 October, for hon. Members called between 7 pm and 8.50 pm. As this is the first time that the rule has been applied in its present form, perhaps I should remind the House that the occupant of the Chair will have the power to direct any hon. Member who has spoken for 10 minutes to resume his seat forthwith. The rule also applies to an hon. Member who is addressing the House at 7 pm. That hon. Member will have to conclude his speech at 7.10 pm.

4.7 pm

Mr. Russell Johnston (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber): I beg to move,

That this House would firmly oppose any reduction in the real value of the already limited Overseas Aid budget; and would reject proposals to maintain this budget by cutting expenditure on the British Council or the BBC External Services.

I am happy to be able to introduce a full day's debate on behalf of the Liberal party. It is quite unique for us. I am sad that it should be necessary to present the motion, which has been agreed with our partners the Social Democratic party, to the House. There is no doubt that overseas aid is an issue which, for all its clamancy, plays a minor part in British politics. In terms of public expenditure it represents only 1p in the pound. Labour and Conservative Governments have cut the overseas aid budget. Despite the United Kingdom's support of the United Nations resolution of 1970 which called for a contribution of 0·7 per cent. of gross national product, we now contribute 0·35 per cent. of GNP—exactly half of what was sought in 1970.

Our narrowly drawn motion is directed against the proposal for yet another cut. In such a debate the arguments will inevitably range over development as a whole, but our intention in tabling this very specific and narrowly worded motion is to give Members of Parliament in all parties—whose perception, like that of the public, has been heightened and enlarged by the ghastly and harrowing pictures from Ethiopia — an opportunity to vote for calling a halt to any further reduction in British aid. That view is held strongly by many hon. Members on all sides of the House. Indeed, it transcends party views. I vividly recall the right hon. and learned Member for Hexham (Mr. Rippon) intervening recently to say that, considering the amount of money involved, this was a matter on which the Government ought to decide forthwith.

Last night on ITN the results of a public opinion poll commissioned by one of the development agencies showed that 43 per cent. of the population were in favour of an increase in the overseas aid budget, with only 32 per cent. opposed. Parliament can this evening respond to that public feeling, and can do so without any affront to party loyalties, by firmly telling the Government that it is up to Government to solve their interdepartmental disputes but that this British Parliament will not accept a still further diminution in contribution to the alleviation of the plight of the starving.

I do not intend to dwell at length on the Ethiopian tragedy, but after all it was the catalyst that lifted the scales from so many people's eyes. One must, therefore, give it special consideration, not just because of the horror of what is happening there but because of its relevance to what we think we should do, or might be able to do, in other parts of the world, most of all in Africa but also in the subcontinent of India and in parts of Latin America.

Someone much wiser than I once said that the problem of love was the maintenance of intensity. The same is true of tragedy. We must somehow ensure that the way people feel today is sustained. I was told the other day that in a normal year—that is perhaps the wrong use of the word "normal"—up to 1 million people in Ethiopia will die from some kind of malnutrition. Therefore, what is now happening is exceptional only in scale.

The drought has bitten deep. Villages cannot contain it and, therefore, people wander out by the roadside and die in front of Western television cameras. But that is not different or new from much of Third world experience. It was in 1980 that Robert McNamara said:

"Up to a billion of the world's people live lives of poverty which are so limited by malnutrition, illiteracy, disease, high infant mortality and low life expectancy as to be beneath any rational definition of human decency".

I am sorry that in their amendment the Government repeat that they responded so promptly to the famine in Ethiopia. They say that the House should welcome

"its prompt response to the famine in Ethiopia".

The entire aid world has been screaming from the rooftops for the last 18 months that what has happened in Ethiopia was about to occur, yet it was only when we saw it in colour on the screens in our living rooms that the Government acted — [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] I am afraid that that is true. It is perfectly fair to say that within a week, which is good going, of the first graphic pictures at the end of October, aid was sent from this country.

However, it was on 19 October 1983 that Mr. Edward Saouma, the director-general of the FAO, convened a special conference at which he said:

"We foresee that suddenly we may be confronted with the situation that a significant proportion of the population of over 150 million of these 22 countries"—

he meant the sub-Saharan countries—

"face the most serious economic distress and shortage of food, which may reach proportions of hunger and malnourishment on a massive scale".

That is what happened, but it did not do so because there was a shortage of warning. There was a lot of warning, but we did not respond adequately to it.

Mr. Eldon Griffiths (Bury St. Edmunds): In no way do I quarrel with the hon. Gentleman's concern that more food be sent to Ethiopia. However, is not he aware that before the television exposure of the famine in Ethiopia, this country, along with other members of the EEC, was providing substantial amounts of food to Ethiopia, even though it was perhaps not enough? Is not the hon. Gentleman misleading the House by suggesting that our

aid programme began only after the television pictures were shown, when it had been going on consistently for a considerable time?

Mr. Johnston: If, by a considerable time, the hon. Gentleman means a year, that is true. But before 1983 there was no aid programme within Ethiopia, apart from the actions of the British Council.

I do not wish to be excessively party political, but it is fair to say—not only of this country but of the Western countries—that there was a lot of warning about what would happen. Simply to respond, as has been done, when it happened, is not sufficient.

There is no doubt that the effect on the public has been incredible and astonishing. All hon. Members must have experiences within their own constituencies. In a small primary school in Kilmonivaig in my constituency the pupils of primary 7 decided to give up their "playpiece" for a week and to give the equivalent in money of a packet of crisps to the Save The Children Fund. That happened naturally because the children saw the scenes on television, not because they were told by their teachers, and that well of goodwill is something on which we must build.

Mr. John Townend (Bridlington): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Johnston: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will allow me to develop my argument for a moment. Whatever the Foreign Secretary may say, it is quite extraordinary for the Government to consider, as they have been, cutting aid now when public attitudes are much better informed. In public terms the challenge is to channel the specific generosity that we have seen into some sort of contribution to long-term action designed to prevent these things happening again. The challenge to Government is the same.

One problem, which is not unique to Ethiopia, has caused difficulties for successive Governments of all complexions in the Western democratic world. It cannot be said that the Ethiopian Government, according to any definition, is one to which it is easy for us to relate. Equally, people say, perfectly reasonably, "It is all very well talking about the problem but what about the $250 million they spent on the celebration of their independence? What about the whisky?" In addition, the civil war there consumes large sums of money for arms, to kill those who already obtain enough food to live. That is a difficult scenario to face. We believe, as do many others involved and interested in overseas aid, that it is perfectly possible to devise means of providing aid, either through greater involvement with non-governmental agencies or by a direct agreement with a Government—even one like that of the Ethiopian colonel. James Pickett suggested in *The Times* today, in an article entitled

"Feed stomachs and win hearts",

that the direction and effect of aid can be much more narrowly focused.

In that connection it is only right and fair to congratulate the Government on improving the effectiveness of European Community aid. It is open to criticism, for dissipating its efforts and for the incredible slowness in the whole cumbersome process. The Community still acts as if it were the same as it was in 1957, when only France was interested in it. The aid process is slow and the Government and the French Commissioner Pisani have worked to improve it.

Secondly, it is fair to say that aid cannot be separated from the broader issues of Third world indebtedness—that is true of Ethiopia and other countries—and the effect that that has on agricultural economies. An effective cartoon in the *Daily Star*—it is not necessarily my favourite political reading material—showed aeroplanes flying in one direction with aid, in another with whisky and in yet another with melons, and said what a crazy world this was. Ethiopia uses a great deal of energy producing melons to meet its foreign indebtedness. Senegal, which is food-deficient, uses more land to grow groundnuts to sell to Europe for cattle feed, which contributes to the butter mountain, than to grow food for its people.

Mr. David Alton (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): Is my hon. Friend aware that in July, in answer to a question that I tabled, the Government admitted that £3 million in loan charges had to be rescheduled because Ethiopia was still repaying debts to the United Kingdom, and that this year it is estimated that Third world countries will pay more money back to developed countries than we will give them?

Will my hon. Friend reflect on the criticism made of the Government to the effect that money will be taken from existing aid programmes this year to feed the hungry in Ethiopia, which will have a long-term effect on other Third world countries?

Mr. Johnson: I note my hon. Friend's points. It is not for me to lecture the Foreign Secretary about foreign debts. However, there is an increasing belief that the International Monetary Fund must be more flexible, more sensitive to the problems of food subsidies and agricultural spending, and less concerned about conditionality, especially regarding poorer countries, than it has been.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle) *rose*——

Mr. Johnson: With respect, I wish to finish my point. If I give way too often I shall be unable to complete my speech in less than the time usually taken by the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey).

Yesterday I was told by a person who works for Oxfam that at a conference last week an American referred to the IMF as the "International Menace to Food." That shows that many people interested in aid feel that the question of debt rescheduling is not being treated with proper sensitivity.

Although we are arguing for the aid budget to be held at its present level, we should like it to be increased. But we would not necessarily like it to be increased and spent in the same way as it has been recently. The 43 per cent. of people polled yesterday who said that they wanted aid to be increased were thinking of what Oxfam now calls real aid.

In the past there has been too much stress on tied aid and on prestige projects, which bring us export earnings. I can understand the argument for it. During the time of the Labour Government the Victoria dam in Sri Lanka cost an enormous sum, but the return in terms of good to the poorest of Sri Lanka was not so great. At the moment we are spending £131 million from our £1·2 billion annual aid budget on a power station for India to support an aluminium smelter. It may be a good project, but too high a proportion of our aid budget is spent in that way. It might be good for everyone if it were possible to separate trade aid from pure, direct and simple aid.

Dame Judith Hart (Clydesdale): When the hon. Gentleman commented on the remarks of his hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton), was he aware that the Labour Government cancelled all official debt obligations of all the poorest countries? I think that his hon. Friend referred to commercial debt. Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the Victoria dam project in Sri Lanka was part of a rural development programme? It does not merely supply power, but has an irrigation function, which helps to resettle many people in dry areas. It was a matter not of trade but of rural development.

Mr. Johnson: I could argue with the right hon. Lady about that, but I do not propose to. I give full credit to her for the first part of her remarks about the Labour Government cancelling debts. However, it is also true that the dam was an important and significant part of a Sri Lankan politician's programme in his election campaign. I am not seeking to be provocative, but I wish to stress that there is not sufficient concentration on projects that help the poor first time round—directly and immediately—rather than trickling help down to them eventually. Such projects would include rural clinics and communications.

We wish to retain, and hope to increase, the quantity of aid, but there are also many arguments for improving the quality of aid. Only about 20 per cent. of our aid is spent on rural development. Within that, only about 6 per cent. goes directly on agriculture. Yet in most of the countries involved, 80 per cent. of the population live in rural areas. Our programme seems to be topsy-turvy. Britain's gross public expenditure on bilateral aid in Africa in 1983 was £236 million. Of that, only £27 million was spent on project aid to the agricultural sector, some of which was to encourage the export of cash crops, such as rubber, rather than the propagation of food to be consumed locally.

In Mali, for example, the desert is spreading at the rate of about six miles a year. We should give more thought to how we can channel our aid directly and, when we are considering multilateral contributions, to areas where the specific targeting is more precise. I shall give the House three examples of multilateral aid which is more precise.

Mr. Tim Rathbone (Lewes): I suggest that the matter is not so simple. Much of the aid that the hon. Gentleman designated as not going to agriculture is crucial to aid to agriculture — for example, spare parts for trucks and road building. Without it, agricultural aid could not be effective.

Mr. Johnson: I am not trying to argue that the matter is simple. I accept that aid targets are interrelated, but I do not believe that enough money is spent on direct aid that helps people in rural communities. There is proof of that in Ethiopia.

As to Government aid going through agencies, the United Nations Sudano-Sahelian office is a worthwhile organisation. This month Mr. Perez de Cuellar argued that countries should give to that agency and to the United Nations fund for landlocked countries. Presumably the Government are considering that request. Have they yet responded to it? There is no doubt that that agency has been successful and effective, as has the international fund for agricultural development. If a special fund for Africa is set up, money might also be appropriately placed through it.

We have all read a great deal in the newspapers about the European Community's grain stocks and, according to projections, there will be an even greater surplus next year. If we are reconciled to carrying over a stock of about 25 million tonnes of grain, and the requirement for Africa according to the United Nations is about 9·5 million tonnes for next year, we could spare the grain, which would be a direct way of saving lives.

I wish in conclusion to turn to four other matters, two of which are mentioned in our motion.

It has been said that the BBC's external services will be cut. I can do no better than quote an interview of 11 August 1983 on Channel 4 given by Lord Carrington. He said:

"When I was Foreign Secretary I was told I had to save some money on the overseas services of the BBC. I think that was really totally counter-productive and the money saved was trivial compared to the amount of damage done."

I commend that view to the Government, who, I know, respect Lord Carrington. The *New York Times* called the BBC external services the "Oxfam of the mind." It would be difficult in practice to cut the external services without causing disproportionate effects. If the BBC lost 10 per cent. of its external budget, it would lose 40 per cent. of output, which makes no sense.

The British Council has sent a letter to hon. Members, which I shall not read to the House in full but whose conclusion was this:

"The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary has not yet split his frozen cake among FCO, ODA, BBC and ourselves. But if no adjustments were made . . . we could have to reduce activity by a figure between £6 and £7 million next year. This is equivalent to the cost of 25 of our small offices overseas, or our total expenditure on scholarships or two thirds of our library service."

The British Council and many hon. Members believed that the Treasury had accepted that the problem of its overseas rise in costs had been dealt with. The fourth report of the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, which was published only last month, stated that the Supply Estimates would apply to the British Council, yet it seems that that is not the case. I hope that the Government will not consider cuts in the British Council's activities.

I should refer to the United National Relief and Works Agency at length because of the growing number of refugees, not only of political refugees but refugees seeking food. South Sudan will be flooded with refugees from Ethiopia. Between 1980-81 and 1983-84 the direct British contribution to UNRWA decreased by 23 per cent. Surely that is not the sort of response that the Government wish to make.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): Will the hon. Gentleman compare the relatively paltry sums likely to be saved in such key areas with the sums expended on the fortress Falklands policy? Does it not show the Government's priorities when we compare what is spent on Ethiopia with the £1 million per family being spent in the Falklands?

Mr. Johnston: I have consciously avoided making comparisons in my speech, but hon. Members can make their own calculation. The Treasury representative who gave evidence recently to the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs said that there is

"ample scope within the FO/ODA annual programme for dealing with emergency appeals."

There would appear to be some slack in the Foreign Office budget.

It has been said widely that the Foreign Secretary will use this debate to announce that Britain will leave UNESCO, which will save us about £5 million next year. During our debate on foreign affairs about 10 days or a fortnight ago, I said that a bad thing about British foreign policy was successive Governments' determination to act unilaterally. It must have some effect upon the Foreign Secretary that every Commonwealth country and every European Community country says that Britain should not leave UNESCO. I do not argue against the need for reform of UNESCO—few hon. Members would do so—but it would be better to reform from within. If Britain leaves UNESCO and the United States follow—

Mr. Anderson: We are following the United States.

Mr. Johnston: That is probably true.

Mr. Peter Temple-Morris (Leominster): The alliance motion seeks to protect overseas aid, the British Council and the BBC external services. It does not mention overseas representation and the diplomatic service. Is the alliance in favour of cuts in the latter?

Mr. Johnston: If the hon. Gentleman wants a direct answer, I doubt whether we could effectively cut our diplomatic service. However, the alliance's priorities are shown in the motion.

The newspapers of yesterday and today have said that the Foreign Secretary will try to do a conjuring trick today —"Now you see a cut, now you don't." I read the rather dense piece that led the story in *The Guardian* today suggesting that, by using mirrors or some other trick, the cuts that would have to be made will not be made. I did not understand this. The right hon. and learned Gentleman is quite good at explaining things that do not exist. However, I do not think that the public at large, or the great majority of hon. Members, want to see the overseas aid budget cut in any way. This is very important.

The public reaction is clear, and the Government should follow the lead of the people and make sure that there is no reduction in the help that this country gives to the poor and under-privileged of the world.

4.40 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Sir Geoffrey Howe): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

'commends the Government's substantial support for development in the Third World including the encouragement of trade and investment; welcomes its prompt response to the famine in Ethiopia and elsewhere; approves the maintenance of the Government's planned aid programme consistent with its overall economic and foreign policy objectives; and endorses the Government's continued support for the British Council and the BBC external services.'.

I start by welcoming the way in which the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Mr. Johnston) has opened this important debate. He concentrated on a limited number of the programmes for which I am responsible, and, in the light of the Liberal party's motion, understandably concentrated largely on the aid programme. Nobody doubts the importance of the example to which he has drawn attention—the tragedy, of which we have spoken many times in the House, that has been taking place recently in Ethiopia.

However, I should like to correct the hon. Gentleman on his presentation of the case, because our response to the tragedy did not start only yesterday. Since 1982 we have given more emergency relief to Ethiopia than to any other country. In February 1983 the World Food Programme, on our behalf, sent 19,000 tonnes of food at a cost of £3 million. We gave other contributions during 1983 amounting to £800,000, and in the summer months of 1984 — July, August and September — we made allocations from our food aid programme at a cost of just under £3·5 million. Subsequently, we have approved additional donations of £370,000.

Apart from that, during the past two years we have contributed well over £5 million to more general appeals by voluntary agencies and the United Nations organisations, and a substantial part of that has gone to Ethiopia. It was against that background, to the welcome of the House, that on 24 October I announced a further contribution of £5 million. It is important to recognise that the scale of our response and the way in which we have taken a lead within the European Community has been appreciated by the people and the Government in Ethiopia, and my right hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development deserves substantial credit.

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil) *rose*——

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I wish to deal with this point first.

Mr. Ashdown: On that point.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I shall not give way, because my right hon. Friend, who will be replying to the debate, will be dealing with this point at much greater length and foreshadowing his visit to Ethiopia.

It is important at the outset of our discussions to set the question in the wider context of the Government's policy as a whole and of the continuing need to maintain tight control on total public expenditure. That was made clear by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his autumn statement on 12 November, and nobody should be surprised when I say that that I give vigorous assent to the objectives described by my right hon. Friend. It cannot be disregarded that the economic recovery over the past three years could all too easily be placed at risk if the Government were to lose sight of their general principle. *[Interruption.]* Labour Members may groan, but the only consequence of the failure to maintain that central economic policy would be to undermine the country's capacity to sustain finance and defend our interests abroad, to play our full part in the Western Alliance and to make a contribution, which we all want to make, to the needs of the Third world.

That is why it must and will always be unrealistic to consider the aid programme——

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North) *rose*——

Sir Geoffrey Howe: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I wish to move on.

Mr. Hughes: I can understand why.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: A large number of hon. Members wish to take part in the debate, and I wish to make my speech at a reasonable pace.

It would be unrealistic — the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber acknowledged this point —to consider the aid programme in isolation from our other activities. All the programmes for which I am responsible make their contribution to achieving our foreign policy objectives. The balance between all of them must be kept under review.

Mr. Robert Hughes *rose*——

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I must get on with my speech. The House would not wish me to give way too often.

That review has to take account of the fact that Government spending is rightly planned in terms of the cash cost of each programme. It is in cash terms that the money has to be raised.

In the case of my own Department, I have to take account of a variety of factors, including movements of exchange rates in both directions and differential overseas inflation rates. All that has to be done upon the basis of the overall provision for public expenditure for all my programmes. That reflects the simple fact that foreign policy has to be treated as a coherent whole.

I shall now say a few words about each of my main programmes, and begin by confirming that the overall provision for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in 1985-86 remains as previously planned at £1,870 million. That was the figure provided for in the February 1984 public expenditure White Paper, which the House debated and approved on 6 March. I want to emphasise that there has been no cut in that overall figure.

The hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber spoke about conjuring tricks, but the matter has been handled in the customary way. The more specific figures will be published in the customary way in the White Paper published next year. Press speculation about a whole range of figures has been thoroughly misleading and has caused unjustifiable anxiety. We have conducted the public expenditure exercise in accordance with the well-established practice with which the House is familiar.

For the benefit of the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) I shall tell the House something about the outcome of that process.

Mr. Robert Hughes: Does the Foreign Secretary expect the House and the country to believe that the maintenance of our overseas aid programme, even at the current level, is imperilling our economic recovery? Can anybody believe that that has any relevance to the difficulties faced by people in dire poverty who are starving day by day?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The hon. Gentleman misses the central point. Almost every spending programme, with friends in every corner of the House, could advance an argument for its increase for good reasons, but all those arguments must be considered against the importance of maintaining control of public spending as a whole. That objective has been achieved over the past three years, holding public expenditure to £132 billion, and within that objective we have to consider the programme that I am now discussing.

I shall begin with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and our diplomatic missions abroad. As the House knows, the volume of work that has to be handled when meeting our worldwide responsibilities is growing and becoming increasingly complex.

For example, no less than one third of diplomatic service staff are employed on trade promotion activities. Essentially, it is demand-led and that demand has risen. Between 1979 and 1983 the number of British business men visiting our posts abroad, and the number of firms participating in trade missions, rose by one fifth.

The same is true of consular services. Since 1968, the number of British visitors abroad, some of whom are likely to require consular services, has increased fourfold to more than 20 million.

The principle of paying for many of these services has long been established. Passport fees, for example, are set to cover the expense of general consular work. It is right that these costs should be met, where possible, by increasing revenue rather than by an increase in public expenditure.

I have come to the conclusion that this principle should be applied more widely to some of the entry clearance operations carried out by Foreign and Commonwealth Office posts abroad. Two changes will be made.

As from 1 January 1985, the standard fee for entry clearance for foreign nationals coming to the United Kingdom will be increased from £6 to £10. That will raise £2·4 million in a full year. From the same date a fee will be payable to cover part of the administrative costs of issuing entry certificates to Commonwealth citizens. That fee will be set at £10, and will raise about £1·6 million in a full year. The fee will, of course, represent a relatively small addition to the total costs of travel of that kind. There are no changes in relation to commercial work.

The diplomatic service has been able to respond to the rising demand with substantially reduced manpower. It is worth reminding the House that that process has taken place under successive Governments. It is a measure of the improvements in efficiency that have been achieved. Diplomatic service manpower is now less than half that of the London borough of Haringey. *[Laughter.]* That is a formidable fact. The achievement of fewer people carrying a larger burden of work under successive Governments reflects the extent to which the service has over a period of years been giving better and better value for money.

Hon. Members will be familiar with the report of the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs published in July this year. I recall the passage where it is said:

"the squeeze on Diplomatic Service manpower has probably gone far enough and additional significant reductions would only be made at the cost of expecting a reduced level of quality of service."

That judgment was worded with characteristic care. It does not exclude—and I am sure it was not intended to exclude—the search for any further sensible economies. But beyond that there is much force in what the Select Committee had to say. I do not believe a reduction in the quality of service would be in the national interest.

There are, indeed, other factors that we have to take into account. In some places, not only in the middle east, there is regrettably a need to provide increased security protection for our representatives overseas. That change reflects the reality that many of our diplomats are working in difficult, and increasingly dangerous, conditions. Many are isolated. It is a striking fact that more than half our overseas posts now have six or fewer United Kingdom based staff.

Since the cost of providing security for our representatives is rising, it makes sense to consider whether we need to maintain that service in precisely the same geographic pattern. There are, for example, some career consular posts where the work can be done instead by a local or honorary consul. In the light of those considerations, I have decided that it would be right to

close about 10 small posts — I emphasise "small" — almost all of them subordinate posts. I shall give further details after consultations have been completed.

The House will understand that this is not a new process. Under the previous Labour Administration 32 missions were closed. That policy was condoned by the Liberal party during the last days of the Lib-Lab pact. Indeed, it was presided over by the present leader of the SDP, the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen), when he was at the Foreign Office.

I now turn to an area which covers about a tenth of my total provision and which is defined as "Other External Relations". About half is on the Overseas Development Administration side, providing mainly for the payment of pensions to such people as former colonial civil servants.

Most of the balance pays our subscriptions to international organisations. Our participation in those bodies, which range from the United Nations to the Council of Europe, is an important aspect of foreign policy. In all cases, in partnership with like-minded countries, we have been able to keep strict control over their budgets.

But there is one organisation to which the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber referred, where we have not been satisfied, and, from what he said, he has not been satisfied, that value for money was being obtained. That is UNESCO. Nor were we satisfied that the developing world was getting value from that organisation.

We have long been one of the leaders in seeking reform, and earlier this year we put forward a number of practical proposals. We said that we would review our position again at the end of the year and that, if satisfactory progress had not been made, United Kingdom withdrawal would again be considered. We have now completed our review. I can announce our decision today.

We acknowledge that some progress has been made towards reform; we acknowledge the importance of the views of our Commonwealth and European partners; we are grateful for the co-operation we have had in our efforts from many countries in those areas; but much remains to be done. As we have always recognised, the general conference to be held next autumn will have a key part to play. Throughout 1985 we shall continue to work for reform, in co-operation with other countries, as vigorously as we have done this year. But we cannot be confident at this stage that adequate reforms will necessarily have been achieved by the end of 1985, and it would be wrong not to safeguard our position.

I am accordingly writing to the director-general giving him notice of withdrawal. Unless rescinded, this notice would become effective on 31 December 1985. We shall reconsider our position towards the end of next year in the light of the result of the general conference.

It is only right to point out that that decision will not have any effect on expenditure for 1985-86. But, by giving notice now, we retain the option for 1986, which we should otherwise forfeit, of being able to devote to better purposes in that year the amount which we would be due to pay to UNESCO in 1986.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East) *rose*——

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North) *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Mr. Winnick.

Mr. Faulds: I was up before he was.

Mr. Winnick: Is the Foreign Secretary aware that that is a shameful decision which simply follows the line of the United States? Why are we acting in a way completely unlike other countries in the EEC? Is the Foreign Secretary aware that the manner in which he has brought the subject to the notice of the House today is wholly inappropriate? We require a statement on the issue and certainly a debate.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I could have wished that the intervention would have had more point. I can think of no more appropriate occasion to tell the House about our decision on this matter than the earliest opportunity.

Mr. Faulds *rose*——

Sir Geoffrey Howe: Our decision has been taken in the light of our continuing concern — which is, I think, regarded in all parts of the House as well justified — about what has and has not been achieved in reforming that organisation. We shall continue with our partners in the Commonwealth and in Europe, working as hard as my right hon. Friend has been working in the past year, to secure the changes that are necessary. But it would be foolish to discard now the option that I have described in favour of leaving the organisation next year. If the money can be better spent elsewhere, we have that option as a result of our decision.

Mr. Faulds *rose*——

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I want to say something now about our——

Mr. Faulds: I was on the UNESCO commission.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I want to say a word now about our military aid programme.

Mr. Faulds: Let me get my point in first.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The Secretary of State clearly is not giving way. Mr. Secretary Howe.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I leave the hon. Gentleman to make his own judgment about his own merits in this matter, but I want to move now to our military aid programme.

Our military aid programme of about £12 million is a useful arm of our foreign policy. That sum is divided almost equally between sending British military personnel overseas to train certain countries' armed forces and receiving trainees from those forces here.

Here, too, it has been necessary to identify economies of about £500,000 a year. That will give us less scope to respond to requests at short notice, but existing commitments will be fulfilled as planned.

The last main item in this group is the FCO's own information activity. The sum involved — about £22 million — mostly provides for payments to the Central Office of Information for a wide variety of services. Some economies can be made here without significant loss of effectiveness. I am therefore scaling down what the FCO commissions from the Central Office of Information by about £1 million.

I now turn to the British Council, which is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year — 50 years of solid achievement. I am sure that I speak on behalf of the whole House in commending its work in promoting understanding and appreciation of Britain overseas.

[Sir Geoffrey Howe]

Given the importance which people worldwide attach to the English language, and their view that it is a worthwhile investment, the benefits of the work done by the council are considerable.

Of course, the council has to live in a world of changing costs and, in doing so, it is like everything else. It faces particular difficulties from inflation in some countries. It has also had to pay a rent increase at its London headquarters. Here, as elsewhere, I have judged it right for the council to absorb part of its risen costs as a contribution towards the overall need to keep the Government's spending within the resources available. I am looking to the council for £1·2 million of savings, which is about half of its total rise in costs during the current year. That represents only a little more than 1 per cent.——

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): The Foreign Secretary is cutting Britain's voice abroad. It is mad.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I wish that I could cut the hon. Gentleman's voice.

That represents only a little more than 1 per cent. of the council's gross revenue from grants-in-aid and from its own receipts combined. But I should emphasise that the council will be receiving nearly £6 million more in 1985-86 than the original provision established for that year.

Mr. Mark Hughes (City of Durham) *rose*——

Sir Geoffrey Howe: In many parts of the House strong support has been expressed for the BBC's external services. They have more than 100 million regular listeners around the world.

Mr. Mark Hughes *rose*——

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am sorry, but I shall not give way. I have already done so several times.

The fact that so many—often denied honest news by their own national media—should turn to the BBC for an unbiased account of international developments, works strongly in our national interest. But the BBC, too, has had to face some increase in costs. I do not believe that it would be right to meet that increase in full. As in the case of the British Council. I shall be looking for savings of about 1 per cent. in its total expenditure.

Mr. Mark Hughes *rose*——

Sir Geoffrey Howe: Nevertheless, there will still be an increased provision for the external services under this head of about £750,000. It is already apparent that many hon. Members, rightly in my view, attach particular importance to the programme to improve the audibility of those services. A capital programme costing more than £100 million was approved in 1981. I am glad to say that additional funds of over £2 million are being provided for that important programme. The programme is now well advanced, and will be maintained.

Mr. Mark Hughes: Is the right hon. and learned Gentleman aware that, given his announcement, I shall, as vice-chairman of the British Council very solemnly consider whether we can continue having a bi-partisan vice-chairmanship on that authority?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The hon. Gentleman has given his provisional assessment. But in a year in which all programmes face rising costs and have had to be looked at very closely, and in which it has been important to maintain the overall size of public spending alongside an increase in the provision for the British Council, is it entirely unreasonable to ask that efforts be made to absorb about 1 per cent. of the total expenditure for the year?

I want to make it plain to the House that the provision for overseas aid remains unchanged at the previously planned and published figure of £1,130 million. That is the figure for 1985-86 that was published in the public expenditure White Paper in February 1984. That is also the very figure that was published in the 1983 public expenditure White Paper, on which my right hon. and hon. Friends fought, and won, the election. It is that figure of £1,130 million that is being maintained.

I hope that it is clear from what I have said that within that figure our capacity to provide emergency assistance to Ethiopia and other countries suffering from drought and famine will be fully maintained. I know from what has been said that that is a matter of great importance to many hon. Members on both sides of the House, and I can assure them that it is a matter of great importance for the Government as well.

Some aid programme commitments are affected, as they always have been, by changes in international prices and exchange rates. The effects of such changes, whether positive or negative, have always been absorbed within the total aid allocation. Perhaps the crucial fact is that over the three years to 1985-86 expenditure on the aid programme is expected to increase faster than British inflation in those three years. Our aid programme remains the fifth largest targest among industrialised countries, and the Government remains committed to maintaining a substantial aid programme. Moreover, the aid programme is only part of the story.

Private capital flows can, and do, play a vital and increasing role for many developing countries. Direct investment can make a particularly important contribution to their long-term economic progress. I remind the House that one of the first things that the present Government did on coming to office was to abolish exchange controls, with the precise purpose of encouraging investment overseas, not least in developing countries. Despite the disbelief and fury of Opposition Members, that is exactly what has happened.

Mr. John Evans (St. Helens, North)*rose*——

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am about to conclude my speech.

Direct private investment in developing countries rose from £300 million in 1979 to an average of more than £800 million a year in the subsequent four years. It must be observed that the declared intention of the Labour party to reimpose exchange controls threatens that major contribution by private finance to development in the Third world. Not satisfied with that, it also threatens to force British companies to withdraw from developing countries the finance that they have put in since the abolition of exchange controls. That is, indeed, a strange way of showing concern for the Third world.

That is the successful background against which we have maintained the planned aid programme, and that is the basis from which I invite the House to conclude that the Government are implementing a carefully considered, effective and wide-ranging aid policy.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I shall not give way, as I am about to finish my speech.

"Our ability to honour our international obligations . . . depends in the last resort on our economic strength."

Those words were taken directly from the White Paper on overseas representation which was presented to Parliament in 1978 by the right hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Callaghan).

Sir Peter Blaker (Blackpool, South): I have risen on an important point of clarification. My right hon. and learned Friend said that there would be increased provision of £750,000 in 1985-86 for the external services of the BBC. Will he explain on what base that increased provision rests? Is it the originally proposed provision in the White Paper, or something different? Is it an increased provision to take account of risen costs overseas?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I have explained that we are anxious to maintain the capital programme for the BBC, to which I know my right hon. Friend attaches importance. An additional £2 million has been provided for that programme. Not all of the BBC's risen costs are being met. About 1 per cent. of the total expenditure will have to be found by the BBC. But an increase of £750,000 is being made in addition to the £2 million for the capital programme, which is being maintained.

Mr. Terence Higgins (Worthing): Will my right hon. and learned Friend give way?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am sorry, but I cannot give way any more. I am coming to the end of my speech. *[Interruption.]* My right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins) must understand that many hon. Members wish to speak, and I should like to finish my point.

"The public debt must be contained. The best way in which to reduce the overall debt burden and sustain the downward trend of interest rates is to ensure that the long-term growth of revenue exceeds that of expenditure."

Again, those are not my words. They are taken from the European Liberal manifesto on which the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber, who opened for the Liberal party, stood and lost in the European elections. They are wise words to which we must pay attention. It is because of our success in upholding those principles that we have been able to pursue the important objective of promoting and protecting British interests around the world. It is because of that success that we are able to maintain the aid programme which we laid before the House in February 1983——

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Berkshire, East): Will my right hon. and learned Friend give way?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: —and on which we fought, and won, the election.

On that basis, I commend the amendment to the House.

5.9 pm

Mr. Stuart Holland (Vauxhall): To cut or not to cut has been the question in the minds of the Government and the Foreign Secretary recently. They have had to decide whether it is better to close an embassy, amputate the British Council cut transmissions by the BBC world service or to reduce the aid programme. Both sides of the House have expressed their anxiety. Neither the level of Foreign Office expenditure nor the overseas development programme should be in question. The reasons are in part complex, but in essence simple.

The Foreign Secretary referred to the increased work that the Foreign Office has had to undertake in recent years, especially in terms of consular services, against a background of falling resources. The House should be clear about the issue. We need to examine more closely the Government's claim today that there is to be no cut in the aid programme. The Government have already scythed the aid programme. The programme fell by 17 per cent. in real terms between 1978-79 and 1982-83. It now stands at the derisory level of 0·35 per cent. of gross national product. That makes Britain tenth among the OECD development aid committee donors—way below Norway and the Netherlands which are smaller countries and which face the same international economic climate. Norway gives just over 1 per cent. of GNP and the Netherlands just under 1 per cent. to the Third world countries.

United Kingdom current expenditure on aid is £1,013 million against £1,214 million at 1983-84 prices in the last year of the Labour Government under the stewardship of my right hon. Friend the Member for Clydesdale (Dame J. Hart), who I am glad to see in the Chamber. Under her stewardship real aid spending rose consistently until the last full year of the Labour Government, whereas it has fallen consistently under this Government. What is true of the aid share of GNP is also true of its share of total public spending. From 1974 to 1979 under Labour the share went up, while under this Government it has consistently gone down.

What of today's statement? We expected that the Foreign Secretary would use the 1985-86 aid figure expressed in cash terms—the £1,130 million. He claims that the increase will be higher than the rate of inflation. How can it be, granted that it is only a 3 per cent. increase? If inflation is over 3 per cent.—and it is forecast at 5 per cent.—the figure will represent a cut in real terms. The House should be clear about this. It is misleading to claim that the increase is greater than the rate of inflation, and I hope that the Minister will deal with that. Where might the money come from? Can we be assured that the programme is secure for the rest of the year? What will happen to the Contingency Fund and to the unallocated reserves? Are they definitely secure?

Under the Government's monetarist policies their response has been, "If at first you don't succeed, cut, cut and cut again." Today we were entertained when the Foreign Secretary's response was, "If at first you don't succeed, but, but and but again."

After all the concessions to the good work done by the diplomatic service, the Central Office of Information, the British Council and the BBC external service, what do we have? We have cuts. There are to be cuts in diplomatic missions. We are interested in which 10 small consular missions will be cut. Will Durban be one of them?

There is to be a £2 million increase in the BBC external services' capital programme, but a 1 per cent. cut overall. We deplore the Foreign Secretary's declaration about UNESCO.

The Government are engaging in a masking exercise. They are defending the aid programme in principle, while camouflaging cuts—and this is when the Government have one of the lowest aid levels for any comparable country in the world.

[Mr. Stuart Holland]

I am surprised that the Foreign Secretary did not tell us, as he has in the past, that humanitarian aid will be given. A Select Committee examined the matter earlier this week. It is not clear what the Government mean by humanitarian aid. The Minister later will probably claim, as he did during the foreign affairs debate recently, that the aid programme is high in quality, not only because of its humanitarianism, but because it provides aid to the poorest people in the poorest countries. I shall be interested to hear what the Minister says, because 63 per cent. of United Kingdom bilateral aid goes to the poorest countries which now represent 75 per cent. of the Third world's total population. How is bilateral aid biased towards the least developed nations and the poorest people in them? We should welcome such a bias, but it must involve more than 75 per cent. of aid. It must be 80 per cent. or 85 per cent. Why cannot the Government make a commitment now that they intend to achieve that target?

Mr. Robert Jackson (Wantage): With regard to the precise arithmetic of aid expenditure, I recall that the EC aid budget, the major vehicle for British multilateral aid, is frequently underspent at the end of each year. Does the hon. Gentleman recognise that one of the problems is the capacity of countries to absorb aid and that the aid budget in any given year is frequently underspent?

Mr. Holland: I agree that there is a problem in less developed countries. However, are such countries in a position effectively to deploy and disburse that aid? I agree about disbursement under the EC, the pattern of which is slow, slower, stop. That is discouraging to less developed countries. We must bring pressure to bear.

How can some of the least developed countries, faced with crippling drought problems, plan long-term development expenditure in, for example, natural water resource projects when faced with the piecemeal and parsimonious response from the British Government in the past year? The Foreign Secretary claims that we have not responded slowly or inadequately. He says that we gave a little bit here and a little bit there—£3·5 million here and £5 million there. The scale of the problem is enormous. The poorer countries are swamped by the crisis. We need a more imaginative response from the Government.

The Minister told us during the debate on the Queen's Speech that the Government accented quality in aid. He said they give it to the poorest people in the poorest countries. But let us examine the breakdown in the ODA annual report on project aid for 1983. Of a total £308 million, which is nearly one third of the total ODA programme, only £56 million is aid for renewable natural resources and only £3 million is for rural development programmes. That figure is derisory. It is equivalent to a mere accounting error. With such a derisory sum no Government can seriously claim that they are concerned about the long-term drought problem and with promoting agriculture in rural areas so that there is no drift from the land.

I should like to ask the Minister about the United Nations least developed category and the October 1981 conference on that subject. I refer the right hon. Gentleman to the definition of the 36 countries with low income, low literacy and low manufacturing levels. The United Kingdom was asked at the conference whether it would aim at a minimum target of 0·15 per cent. of GNP by the end of the decade. Thanks substantially to the work done by my right hon. Friend the Member for Clydesdale and others during the Labour Administration, in 1980 the United Kingdom gave 0·14 per cent. of GNP in aid to countries in the least developed category. But the Minister would not commit himself to 0·15 per cent. When we talk of Government parsimony, we really mean it. Why can the Minister not commit himself to an increase of 0·01 per cent. in that programme? Unless we can get such a commitment from the Minister, neither side of the House can take seriously the claim that Britain is concerned with meeting the needs of the least developed and the poorest in the poorest countries.

Mrs. Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): It is regrettable that only £3 million is spent on rural development programmes. Does not the hon. Gentleman accept that it is difficult for the United Kingdom Government or any other Government to compel countries to spend their money in a particular way? Not only in Ethiopia but in Mali and other countries the money is spent on prestige projects in the towns. Those countries are not interested in putting the money into rural areas.

Mr. Holland: I am positively delighted that the hon. Lady has put that point to me, because I was going to refer to the basic need programmes in countries that do not have grand prestige projects. Those countries are concerned about housing, health, education and social welfare. One of those countries is Nicaragua, which has an unparalleled record in this respect. What are the British Government doing? The Minister for Overseas Development has still not answered the question why the Government are not pressuring the World Bank to restore the type of development projects in Nicaragua — including agro-fishing, agro-industrial, processing, canning, bottling and dehydration projects—which raise export value as well as improve diet in such countries. The Government have blocked that move. On this, as in other matters, the Government are simply coat-tailing United States policy. Why are the Government doing that? Are the elections in Nicaragua the reason? We have had a debate about those elections, which were free and fair. The United States is shifting the goal posts on article 21 of the Contadora proposals. As soon as it was clear that Nicaragua would agree to the proposals, the United States said, "No, we are not happy." The United States is unilaterally revising the treaty.

Are human rights the reason why the Government are acting in this way? Amnesty International and international observers from both Houses of Parliament are agreed that there are no human right derelictions in Nicaragua. There are, of course, derelictions of human rights in other countries to which similar criteria have not been applied. I cite just one case. A prominent member of the judiciary in Pakistan, Mr. Raza Kazim, has been denied his right to a review of his case under martial law procedures. That matter was raised in general in *The Guardian* yesterday and in practice has been raised by many hon. Members. The dereliction of human rights in that case should be set right by the Government concerned. In that case, unlike Nicaragua, the British Government are not allowing the issue to influence their aid programme.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary made various points about the timing of the Government's

response. Despite all he said, there was an 18-month warning but the Government moved only in October. The Government have talked of the £5 million in disaster cash and the 6·5 thousand tons of food aid. Where was that food aid going? Was it going to Ethiopia or — this is a straight and genuine question — was it allocated to another country? Was the food aid allocated to Bangladesh? Was that aid unearmarked and unallocated? If the food aid is removed from Bangladesh to Ethiopia, the Government will be giving with one hand while taking away with the other. That is not what is needed in response to the Ethiopian crisis.

During the reply to the Queen's Speech we did not have much time to go into the development aspects. I grant that neither I nor the Minister for Overseas Development had much time to go into the development aspects beyond the issue of the food aid shortage. But questions of food aid shortage are questions of income distribution as much as questions of food distribution. The issue is whether people can buy food as well as whether Governments and non-governmental agencies can transport food aid to drought areas involved. Recently, that point was forcefully made by professor Amartya Sen, professor of political economy at All Souls college, in a letter to *The Times* on 7 November.

Drought is not entirely an act of God. It is also man-made. There is drought in South Africa, but the only people who are starving are those in the black homelands. There are deserts in Africa, but there is also desertification. The cutting of foliage for food is also done by man. It is a vicious circle of response to earlier droughts where there has not been a sufficient development response. We know the cycle. Crops fail; people leave the land and do not plant; the next harvest never comes; and little hope turns to no hope.

What are the Government doing? This spring in Eritrea, I was struck by the fact that although the area was suffering from drought, rain was falling intermittently and heavily. There appears to be no adequate expenditure on upstream water resource projects — the simple, not the prestige, projects. I refer to the coffer dams that trap and retain water, and therefore syphon water into underground reservoirs for agriculture and for human consumption. What is the Minister doing? Can he do anything, apart from assisting the non-governmental agencies?

We need faster action on the overall EC food programme, rather than the slow, slower, stop response from the Community. If the Community budgets are used up this year, how will the Government budget for food aid from next year? What action is the Foreign Secretary taking in the EC Council of Ministers? The Council must act now, if we are to avoid further disaster. The Common Market Council of Ministers is famous for its stopped clocks when it reaches its deadline. The tragedy here is that the stopped clock today is the timing of tomorrow's disaster in sub-Saharan Africa. Those who pay will be in Ethiopia and Bangladesh rather than Brussels.

The Foreign Secretary did not touch on the International Development Agency replenishment, although I hope that the Minister for Overseas Development will do so. Some of the basic issues are well known and have been well aired in the House. The Government showed their initial willingness to provide an extra $200 million for IDA replenishment if the United States did the same. When the United States withdrew, and despite the fact that Japan and Germany said that they would be willing to supplement the £3 billion shortfall, the Government backed down.

The Minister for Overseas Development (Mr. Timothy Raison): The hon. Gentleman made that point exactly the wrong way round. It was Germany and Japan that were reluctant to supplement the shortfall and we who said that we would supplement the shortfall.

Mr. Holland: I am glad that the Minister made that clarification. Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman will now say what he will do with the money. Will he support the new fund for Africa proposals? Will he make that $200 million available for that project? If so, that allocation, although not through IDA, could be extremely useful.

The tragedy in Africa is a special case. It involves more than Ethiopia alone. We have seen several indications of that, and they are very distressing. The drought affects not only Ethiopia but Mauretania. It is reckoned that 3·5 million people in Mozambique are suffering from the drought out of a total population of more than 20 million. I also visited Mali and Chad during the last drought cycle, and the position there is now desperate. What funds will be allocated? It is unlikely that they can be allocated bilaterally by the Government. Will the Government support the new fund for Africa proposal?

Mr. Robert Banks (Harrogate): The hon. Member mentioned a number of countries. It is worth reminding him that the Sudan is one of our old and trusted friends in Africa. It has suffered greatly from the drought and the refugee problem.

Mr. Holland: I agree that there is a special problem in the Sudan. I saw it earlier this year. It involves refugees from both war and drought. The Sudan has a serious problem and it needs special attention. I reiterate the points that I made in the debate on the Queen's Speech about getting food into Tigré and Wollo. We cannot focus solely on the core drought areas themselves. Sudan will be unable to cope with its refugee problem unless it receives further assistance.

We have heard a depressing and unwarranted decision from the Foreign Secretary on UNESCO. We note that it is, allegedly, a decision in principle, but nonetheless it will not be welcomed anywhere in the Commonwealth. There is outstanding opposition to our withdrawal. We appreciate that the decision was taken by the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister and that the Minister for Overseas Development might have been overruled. But no Third world country is considering withdrawal from UNESCO.

The Commonwealth, the United Kingdom and the West have a total of 22 out of 51 seats on the UNESCO executive board. If the Foreign Secretary would pay attention for a moment to the argument he might be able to respond. Does he believe that reforms can be achieved better by staying in — as the senior Commonwealth country — and working for reforms rather than complaining from without that reforms have not been achieved? We agree that certain internal reforms are needed in UNESCO. By and large, those reforms are in progress, but how can the Government supervise reforms when they are planning to withdraw from membership?

Viscount Granborne (Dorset, South): What evidence does the hon. Gentleman have to show that reforms are

[Viscount Cranborne]

under way with regard to the undermanning of head office, putting more agents in the field and the extraordinary way in which people are hired on a supplementary basis?

Mr. Holland: We are familiar with the criticisms. Many of them are warranted. I have not only the Foreign Secretary's assurance that he believes the reforms are in progress I have consulted several of the authorities involved and several of those who are responsible on the UNESCO executive board about the progress. Today I spoke to several of the high commissioners in London on this matter. They saw the Foreign Secretary yesterday, and they deplored the fact that Britain might withdraw. He did not tell them what would be in his statement today, only that he would take their argument into account, which he has not.

Viscount Cranborne: What evidence?

Mr. Holland: There was no evidence in the Foreign Secretary's statement that the overwhelming arguments put forward by the high commissioners have been taken into account.

Sir Anthony Kershaw (Stroud): *rose——*

Mr. Holland: I have accepted many interventions; I had hoped to take less than 30 minutes but I shall have to take more time.

What other agencies are there in the pipeline? What other agencies are targeted by the Government? What about UNCTAD? We know that the Government have reservations about UNCTAD. They claim that it is inappropriate for it to be involved with issues such as the international debt crisis. We do not share that criticism. Debt is a matter both of finance and of the structure of trade and payments.

Development aid—allocated by individual countries, or multilaterally—has little or no hope of success if the IMF follows a policy of cut, cut and cut again towards less developed countries. The IMF, with its monetarist tunnel vision and its cut packages for so many countries, has now contributed substantially to the global slump in trade between developed and less developed countries. We need powerful, wide-ranging agencies such as UNCTAD to analyse the development implications of debt crisis and act as a counterweight to the fund's policies.

It would be interesting if we could have a reply from the Minister as to what will happen about UNRWA, because it appears that there could be cuts in the UNRWA programme. What will its programme be next year? What will the expenditure be next year? Will it be dollar-denominated? If not, the cut in real terms will be appalling. It is crucial for the Arab countries that it should be in dollar terms, and also for Africa and the Sudan, to whose refugee problems other hon. Members have referred.

In the last year of the Labour Government we gave $10 million to UNRWA. It appears that next year the Government will give only $6 million. Those figures are current rather than constant prices. In the overall context of the aid programme, that is parsimonious. It is a pathetic response to the short-term food aid needs and the long-term development needs. The Government's response also is contradicted by everything they have done — and failed to do—in a series of international initiatives.

The Foreign Secretary said that he was seriously interested in co-operating with the Commonwealth. Why was that co-operation not forthcoming at the New Delhi summit, where the Prime Minister was the only Head of Government to block the recovery proposals made by the Commonwealth? She was the only Head of Government to block proposals for reform of the international monetary system. The Government's record is an indictment of their claim to care for the least developed countries and the poorest people in them. We know that while drought and death are stalking the Third world the Government are looking for some way to cover the nakedness of a cut of nearly 20 per cent. in real aid in the past six years. Talk of avoiding further cuts is eyewash against the background of such a lamentable record and such an outstanding response to the food aid appeals from the British public.

The Government should spill some of the cornucopia of the Falklands in the direction of the drought areas of Africa and Asia. At £1 million per family in the Falklands surely the Government can spare a few more pence for the starving of the Sahel.

Instead of minor reactions, the Government should take a major initiative, not just to stave off the cuts but to reverse them. If they cannot commit themselves to 0·7 per cent. as an aid target, whey can they not commit themselves to increasing the aid target to over 0·35 per cent? Instead of snubbing the Commonwealth high commissioners, the Government should be working with them to realise the longer-term development potentials of the New Delhi summit.

Hon. Members will be aware that the Prime Minister came to office quoting St. Francis of Assisi. She has often been quoted in turn since then. I know that some Conservative Members believe more in the parable in which Christ said:

"Take up thy bed and walk."

The starving of Eritrea, Tigré and Wollo and other areas in the Horn are already walking. In Mauretania, Chad, Mozambique and Mali others in their thousands and tens of thousands are following. Can the British Government be so far behind—responding with so little, so late? If so, they should on no account expect the support of Members from either side of the House in the Lobby tonight.

5.39 pm

Mr. Edward Heath (Old Bexley and Sidcup): It is gratifying to find the interest which has been displayed in the debate and the large number of hon. Members who are listening and wishing to take part. Remembering the sparsely covered Benches during the first debate on the Brandt report in the spring of 1980, one is perhaps justified in feeling that four and a half years' work is at last beginning to bear fruit.

At first sight, the debate appears to be about the future welfare of the billions of people in the developing countries. That is right. Many of us believe that we have a moral obligation to help those who are less fortunate than ourselves. However, from the Foreign Secretary's speech it has also become apparent that it is about our widespread national interests in regard to the developing countries and the resources that we make available to help them in their development. It involves information being given about Britain through our overseas services and the British

Council. It is about influencing people and persuading them that our way of life and our culture are worth while so that they will want to be associated with them.

Britain is now fighting a desperate battle in Europe, in North America and in the world generally to maintain an economic position—not to gain an economic position but just to maintain one. Today the growth area is in the Pacific basin. That is where employment and confidence are to be found. In September a Foreign Minister said to me, "Why don't the British realise that they are losing out everywhere?" That is what the debate is really about.

The Foreign Secretary rested his case firmly on the fact that the amount to be spent overall on the Foreign Office is the same as was foreseen in the White Paper. He deserves our congratulations on that, because we know the pressures that he has been under to accept a cut in that basic overall figure. But if the basis of that calculation proves to be wrong in any way, and if currency movements prove to be more damaging than is imagined at present, we want to know that he will ensure that in real terms the sum remains the same. If the Foreign Secretary can give that simple assurance it will remove many doubts from the minds of hon. Members on both sides of the House. That is what we want to hear him say.

The Foreign Secretary said that expenditure on overseas aid has, of course, to be related to overall expenditure and the future of the economy. That is true, but I hoped that he would say that he had found his successor in the Treasury far more flexible than he was himself, and that as Foreign Secretary he had been able to achieve what he wanted to do as Foreign Secretary and not as a former Chancellor of the Exchequer. It is a matter of proportion, and it is that aspect that worries me in considering the approach of the Foreign Secretary and his colleagues.

If I may coin a dreadful word, akin to "privatisation", what worries me is the automaticity of the Government's approach. They insist that inflation must be at 3 per cent., that it must be kept at an even figure, and that we must not expect anything more in the way of expenditure. But it is in the national interest that we should extend our influence in the world, and that does not require automaticity. In the present critical situation it is necessary to spend more on overseas aid, and I hope to show why.

I do not wish to go into detail concerning the development of overseas countries, because my views are well known and are set out clearly in the first and second Brandt reports. But the disaster in Ethiopia has brought home vividly to the people of Britain, of Europe and of North America, through television, radio and press, what is happening in developing countries.

Whenever there is a crisis—a drought, a flood or a volcanic eruption—the British people respond and the British Government respond. That has happened in regard to Ethiopia. But in the past we have never said on the occasion of a disaster, that our contribution to aid must come out of our normal contributions for ordinary purposes. I hope that such a view will never be accepted by my colleagues on the Government Front Bench. If there is a disaster, additional money must be made available. We must have a proper perspective. I am asking for an assurance that there will not be a change of policy, because it has been said that if we contribute aid when there is a disaster such as that in Ethiopia it has to come out of normal expenditure.

Mr. Raison: Surely the important point is that we have a contingency fund in our aid budget, and that contingency fund is available to meet emergencies and disasters. If we did not have a contingency fund for that purpose, it would be a very bad way to construct a budget.

Mr. Heath: I am glad to have that assurance and to know that anything we do to Ethiopia will come out of the contingency fund, and that our normal programmes will not be affected. It will take a long time to deal with the crisis in Ethiopia. There will have to be a sustained effort of at least a year until the next harvest. It will probably take 18 months to deal properly with the crisis.

How are we to help the development of agriculture in the developing countries? There is a lack of confidence between much of the developing world and the developed countries. The developing countries believe that we want to keep them in a primitive state of agriculture, instead of helping them to achieve industrial development. It is in that area that confidence has to be re-established.

We should be giving the developing countries practical help in elementary ways. They need better seeds and better stock. From our funds we should pay for the fairly simple instruments that they need. We can also help in teaching them. They do not require a great central organisation such as there was with the lamented groundnuts scheme. Individual farmers with small plots need to be taught how to achieve greater production. They can then pass the knowledge on to their neighbours. That is infinitely more valuable than setting up a huge central control organisation and telling it to get on with the job.

Mr. Ashdown: The right hon. Gentleman made the very important point that the solution of the problem in Ethiopia will require a sustained effort, extending well over a year. It is said that the immediate crisis will not be over until at least a year from now, when the next harvest is in. Therefore, does the right hon. Gentleman agree that it is odd that the Government, who claim to take a long-term view of the problem, are prepared to permit the aircraft to assist Ethiopia only until just after Christmas? Would it not have been better if the Government had said that the aircraft could stay in Ethiopia for a year, or for as long as they were needed?

Mr. Heath: I am delighted that——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the House that intervention are made only at the expense of other hon. Members' time.

Mr. Heath: I am delighted that the Government responded in the way that they did and that they have guaranteed the help until after Christmas. I hope that when they see that the emergency still exists they will extend the effort that is being made with the aircraft. I am sure that the Government will do that.

I should like to see an extension of the development programme in the interests of Britain and of our trade. That aspect is sometimes overlooked. The entire Foreign Office Vote is 0·6 per cent. of total public expenditure. That expenditure has to cover the whole of our diplomacy overseas and the protection of this country's interests as well as those of its citizens. When the whole of the development budget is added, it is still only 1·5 per cent. of total expenditure.

I realise that expenditure has to be kept under control. The Chancellor of the Exchequer, in his announcement,

[Mr. Heath]

said that this year his public expenditure borrowing requirement will be £1·5 billion more than he anticipated. Yet, in matters affecting major national interests, the Government are seeking to save £1 million here or £750,000 there. Our expenditure on those important matters is entirely out of proportion. I want to help the Foreign Secretary as much as possible, but these things are very dear to my heart.

It is well known in this House that I do a good deal of travelling. Wherever I am, I listen to the overseas services of the BBC. In doing so, I am aware of the intense competition from European countries, our neighbours in the Community, and of the outpourings of the United States in every part of the world, to say nothing of the broadcasts from the Eastern bloc countries every hour of the day. It is disappointing to see how little the BBC is able to do, especially when one finds how desperate people are everywhere to hear the BBC. They want to hear the British view. It is one of our greatest assets, yet we are told that it is necessary to spend £1 million a year less on the BBC. That policy is not serving the national interest.

In Khartoum the British Council has a magnificent library. Every hour of the day it is packed with people who are trying to read about Britain, British literature and British culture. They are eager to read British newspapers. The British Council should be enabled to do more. Criticisms about people being asked to play a guitar in another part of the world are out of date. The work of the British Council is of immense value for our national interests. It helps to spread our influence and to win trade for Britain in the desperate battle that we are fighting. I had hoped that the Foreign Secretary would say, "I have now been able to convince my colleagues that in the national interest we must give more to the BBC overseas service and to the British Council."

The Government have taken a lamentable and illogical decision on UNESCO. Increased influence in diplomacy is never achieved by opting out. One example is that of the United States and the International Labour Organisation. President Ford, a Republican President, gave notice that he would withdraw from the ILO. The ILO was not affected. It took no notice even of the United States once it said that it would withdraw. President Carter withdrew from the ILO in 1977. Two and a half years later, President Reagan went back to the ILO. The Americans realised that they had lost all influence in the organisation. They realised that the only way in which they could deal with industrial relations affecting any part of the world was by going back to the ILO. They followed the simple advice that was given by Mr. Attlee and which has been recounted in the House before. He attended a Labour party meeting and he was told by others, "We are organising a walkout and you will lead us." He refused to do so and he was asked why. He replied, "If you walk out, you have always got to go back." That is true. It happened with the United States and the ILO.

Why do we not use the Community and the Commonwealth to achieve the objectives that we want in UNESCO? No one would say that there is nothing wrong with UNESCO; it is clear that some things are wrong. Some developing countries want to have press control and they are wrong, but we must understand why they adopt that approach. They do so because they believe that they are not getting fair treatment in the Western press. An impartial observer will probably accept that there is a good deal to be said for that view. The way to deal with the problem is not to have censorship of the press, and it is up to us to show them why that is so. It is illogical to say that by withdrawing from UNESCO we shall be able to make greater progress with the reforms that we want to see take place within the organisation. We shall not do so by that means.

Let us get the Community and the Commonwealth together and reach an agreement on what we require. If we do that, no one will be able to resist us. After all, the Commonwealth contains 43 developing countries. Those countries know what the position is and they feel strongly for the Commonwealth. That is the right form of diplomatic activity. I lament the decision that has been taken on UNESCO, which I consider to be wrong. It will achieve nothing and I hope that the Government will change it. It will certainly fail to extend our national influence. Indeed, we shall lose influence if we opt out of a major organisation that has done great things.

When John Foster Dulles reneged on the Aswan dam and Anthony Eden was forced to follow suit, the Egyptians went to Moscow and the Russians went into Egypt and went on to occupy a large part of the middle east. Only when we said that we would support UNESCO to an extraordinary degree over moving Abu-Simbel, one of the great treasures of the middle east, above the Aswan dam, and ensure its presence for eternity for all to see did we begin to regain some of our prestige in Egypt and the middle east generally. That was a tremendous job.

UNESCO has done an excellent job in China in Sian with the four armies, especially with the one which is on view and protected. It has also been carrying out investigations in the Ming tombs. This is invaluable work and it should not be spoilt because of our concern about some of the central expenditure and with some of the actions which some developing countries want to take. I urge my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary not to go ahead with the UNESCO decision. Let us use our influence with the Commonwealth and the Community.

It is clear that we are debating British influence throughout the world. That is paramount and I know that my right hon. and learned Friend has it at heart. I hope that he will benefit from the debate in the decisions that he makes. I hope also that he will be able to give us some of the assurances that my right hon. and hon. Friends want.

5.55 pm

Mr. Roy Jenkins (Glasgow, Hillhead): It is not for the first time that I find myself in substantial agreement with the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath). I note that the Foreign Secretary is leaving the Chamber. Surely this is a debate that should command his presence for most of its duration. The right hon. and learned Gentleman is probably the most resonant speaker in the House—he is generally lucid and anxious to put his arguments clearly before the House—but I have never heard him less resonant than he was this afternoon. He gave the impression that he wished to move as quickly as he could from one topic to another without allowing too much time for the House to take hold of what he was saying.

Things are not very good but I suppose that they might be worse. The right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup placed emphasis on the Foreign Secretary having

made much of the fact that the combined Foreign Office budget will not be less than the figure which was originally contemplated in February. But where is sterling in relation to its level during February? How much of a cut does the weakening of sterling involve in our ability to perform tasks overseas, whether in providing aid or diplomacy? The Government do not deserve congratulations on making no cut in money terms in the aid budget. It is disgraceful that such a cut was ever contemplated seriously, and there is no doubt that it was.

There is a growing food shortage, an increasing population, an overhanging burden of debt and the real possibility of a financial collapse if we are not careful. To contemplate a cut in the aid budget against that background, when it is 0·35 per cent. of national income and lower in real terms than it was 15 years ago when the target was laid down — there is no question of any advance and there has been a retreat over the past 15 years — is in itself disgraceful. Why is it that the Government, having seriously contemplated a disastrous cut in aid, should now draw back?

Some credit for the Government's decision lies with the timeliness of the motion. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Mr. Johnston) on having used the first day of Liberal Supply time for the debate. I do not wish to be divisive among the pro-aid forces, but the first day of Liberal Supply time has been used with a good deal more relevance than the vast number of Labour Supply days are mostly used. Some of the threatening noises that have come from Conservative Members on overseas aid have helped substantially.

The Ethiopian famine has been vividly portrayed on television screens over the past few weeks. There was a dispute this afternoon between the hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Griffiths) and my hon. Friend the Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber about whether enough had been done earlier by the Government and the European Community. Not enough was done, but something in advance was certainly done. But that is not the precise point of the impact of the Ethiopian famine upon our affairs. That which has happened in Ethiopia is only an eruption, even though it is a horrible and harrowing one.

The underlying issue is the advance of the desert and the retreat of agriculture across six or seven countries in northern Africa and sub-Saharan Africa, with the same thing happening in southern Africa. That is a long-term development which, when accompanied by a high rate of growth in the population, spells an almost certain increase in starvation in the medium term. That spells the Ethiopian crisis 10 or more times over. Medium-term water is as necessary as short-term grain in these circumstances. For the Government seriously to have contemplated a cut in aid is a consideration of extraordinary irrelevance.

Had the Ethiopian famine not occurred and had it not suddenly attracted the attention of the world, including millions in their sitting rooms in Britain, I believe that we would have had from the Government an announcement of a cut in overseas aid. That is the underlying shame. I do not believe that any member of the Government could deny with conviction the underlying truth that it took the Ethiopian famine to prevent overseas aid from coming under the Chancellor's insensitive chopper.

Mr. Norman St. John-Stevas (Chelmsford): As the right hon. Gentleman knows, I am not unsympathetic to that view, but is he not being somewhat unfair to the Foreign Secretary? Could one not equally conclude that in certain respects the parliamentary system actually works and that the expressions of opinion in all parts of the House have evoked a positive and welcome response from the Government?

The right hon. Gentleman has rightly set the issue in the much wider context of the problems of Africa. That must surely mean, however, that the problems cannot be solved by any one country but only by co-operative international effort. Does he agree, therefore, that this should be one of the most important questions on the agenda for the forthcoming EEC summit?

Mr. Jenkins: I agree with the right hon. Gentleman on both points. I said that the Government had resiled from their disgraceful intention to cut aid, first, because of the mobilisation of parliamentary opinion and, secondly, because of the shock effect of the Ethiopian famine on public opinion. Those two factors together were necessary to make the Government withdraw from a position that they should never have contemplated taking up.

I agree entirely that we cannot do everything on our own, but if we are to give a lead to a co-operative effort in Europe we must rapidly move from having one of the lower percentages to having one of the higher percentages of aid provided by Community countries.

Cuts in real terms in any other aspect of the Foreign Office budget are equally regrettable. One of the favourite thoughts of Lord Stockton — rightly in fashion at this time — over many years was the perhaps somewhat romantic view that, although the Americans may be the Romans of the modern world, we can be the Greeks. The Americans may have the power, but we can have the influence, the wisdom, and the rayonnement, as the French, who pay great attention to these matters, would describe it. But if we are to achieve that, we cannot rely on the refulgence of the Foreign Secretary's personality unsupported by the BBC external services, the British Council and, indeed, the sometimes maligned Foreign Office itself and our diplomatic representation abroad.

The Foreign Office is the only one of the three great traditional Departments of State of which I have never been the ministerial head, but I have had quite a lot of dealings with it — sometimes in a semi-adversarial capacity when I have been attempting to represent a wider interest than the British interest. In the great majority of cases, I have been impressed by the quality of the Foreign Office. If I have any doubt, it is not that the Foreign Office is weak, ineffective or unsupportive of British interests, but that within the public service as a whole rather too much talent is concentrated there at the expense of some of the other Departments. Equally, I have no doubt that the British system of government works better when morale at the Foreign Office is high than when it is thought that everything has to be decided at No. 10, which produces a very unsatisfactory balance of power.

At a time when British influence in the world is not great, I do not favour selling off or getting rid of every good bit of real estate that we have in the capitals of the world. It is a great mistake to think that retreating into a villa, as we have done in Copenhagen, increases British influence. In general, I do not believe that there is extravagance in our diplomatic representation abroad. It is vital to keep a sense of proportion when considering these matters. On fortress Falklands we spend between

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£500 million and £1 billion per year. On our defence budget, of which on the whole I am in favour, we spend £17 billion per year. Over a period of five years or so we propose to spend £10 billion, perhaps even £11 billion or £12 billion, on Trident. I hope that the primary purpose of that defence expenditure is not to blow up the world but to increase our influence in world affairs. To spend such vast sums and then to niggle about a few million pounds to make Britain's voice heard in the world shows a total lack of proportion. The trouble is that the Government, the Prime Minister and especially the Chancellor have little sense of history, proportion or compassion, and the absence of all three qualities in confluence is a devastating weakness.

6.6 pm

Mr. Edward du Cann (Taunton): My right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) caught the mood of the House exactly when he said that this debate was about British interests, and those interests and the desperate needs of the developing countries are certainly linked. The right hon. Member for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Jenkins), too, was right when he said in effect that in prosecuting those interests through the satisfaction of the needs of the developing countries there must be no faltering and no parsimony. I agree entirely with that.

I wish to speak about aid in a practical sense. First, I declare an interest. Since 1972, I have been a director and am now deputy chairman of a British trading company which employs many thousands of people in the developing countries, especially in Africa. The hon. Member for Vauxhall (Mr. Holland) was right to stress the urgency of the need for action to help people in that enormous continent. Those whom we employ work in manufacturing, agriculture, mining, and so on. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup said, few people in the past have been alive to the needs of the Third world, and we are glad that more are now taking an interest. I am therefore proud to have been associated for several years with a dedicated and competent team doing what it can in a practical way to help, to produce food, and to create employment and wealth, often in partnership with Governments. The company with which I am associated has put more acres under the plough than any other company in Africa, and I am proud indeed to be associated with that work.

On aid in general, not so many years ago Mr. Disraeli defined the purpose of political endeavour in our own country as

"the upholding of the constitution and the elevation of the condition of the people."

We can all agree that there is much yet to accomplish in our own nation. In the first respect, we did a good deal in the defence of democracy in the last Parliament by improving the machinery for the surveillance of the Executive. On the second aspect, the elimination of social, economic and political injustice, wherever it exists in the world, is an equally important objective. Famine, poverty, disease and hopelessness, I swear, are none of them inevitable anywhere in the world. All can be overcome if we have the will, the wit and the imagination to do what is needed. I hope that I have said enough to make it clear that I speak of what I know.

I am not alone on these Benches in welcoming the Government's commitment to aid on the substantial scale outlined in the Queen's Speech, and in welcoming the growth in money aid—over £1 billion to over 130 countries. I rejoice in the devotion of so many who are engaged in its administration. I am glad that our country, as my right hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development pointed out, took the lead in bringing aid to Ethiopia.

In the 28 years that I have represented Taunton, I have never before received so many letters on a humanitarian subject as I have lately received on overseas aid. A few of the letters are couched in roughly identical terms. No doubt they come from members of pressure groups. But most of them are from individual citizens appalled by the suffering that they have seen on television or read about and genuinely want to help.

It is easy, analysing that correspondence, to list a whole series of measures that the Government might pursue or persuade other Governments or international agencies to adopt. For instance, more liberal trade policies are suggested. The United Kingdom has set a good example in that area. Some letters suggest giving the greatest help to the poorest nations. That is the direction of our policy. Other writers suggest longer-term credits and lower interest rates. That is something else that we are working towards. Some people suggest that there should be a greater voice for poorer countries in world forums. I agree.

Many of the letters end with a plea for greater expenditure of British taxpayers' money. Some people think that money is the cure for every ill throughout the world. I do not agree. Some argue that it cannot be right to give aid to countries where the rulers are corrupt, as too many are, or incompetent, as unfortunately many more are, or antagonistic to the interests of this country. I believe that it is right to give the maximum aid to those countries which are bravely attempting to put their economic houses in order—Ghana is a splendid example —but I do not share that general view. I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup that there is no moral dilemma. There is only a moral imperative. We do too little for our fellow men, and it is our duty to do all that we can. I hope that we will say clearly to my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Government during the debate that we are doing less than we might, and that we must do more.

According to a letter in *The Times* on 5 November:

"a larger proportion of Western aid should be devoted to helping food production in poor countries".

However, it is not aid alone that will make the difference. If one examines, for example, any recent disaster in central Africa, one finds that the reasons are usually the same. The climate is perhaps to blame for a large proportion of the disaster. But equally important, more often than not, are two man-made factors. First, the politicisation of the Civil Service of many Third world Governments has made them no longer competent to provide essential services for their people. Second, there is the destruction of the will to cultivate on more than subsistance level, caused by the reorganisation of agriculture on political lines. In too many countries in Africa that reorganisation has, in effect, been a criminal act.

The peasant farmer—or, indeed, any farmer—will not produce food unless it is worth his while and unless he is encouraged to take pride in his land. No amount of

aid can alter those realities. If the United Kingdom and the free world were to ostracise those with whom we disagree politically, or send them to an economic Coventry, that would be folly indeed. Attitudes will not change unless we use our influence and help people to put their houses in good economic order.

The Indian example is most encouraging. Two decades ago universal opinion was that India would always require food aid. India's greatest achievement since independence is that she is now self-sufficient in basic foods.

Cash aid is not enough. Success — consistent improvement in a desperate scene — will come only from persistent and painstaking effort in a variety of fields. However, cash aid—finance in all its forms—is crucial, and it would have been wicked if Britain's cash contribution to mankind's problems had been reduced in any degree.

Statistically, aid comparisons are notoriously difficult. Flows are made of many elements and can be defined in various ways. My own view of the figures which are often quoted and have been quoted today—not least by the hon. Member for Vauxhall — is different from the conventional. The Government have always encouraged British industry and entrepreneurs to invest abroad. That is what the amendment states, and my right hon. and learned Friend made it clear that it is Government policy. If one counts official aid and private flows together, they now amount to 1·25 per cent. of the gross national product, which is well ahead of the accepted United Nations target of 0·7 per cent.

We should remember how effective private flows can be. I could give a long category of examples of private sector work from my own experience, but I shall give only four. The Sudan is one third the size of the United States and twice the size of the enlarged EEC. In 1971 my colleagues initiated the world's largest sugar project there. Mozambique lost most of its maize crop this year. We flew 14 sorties carrying 500 tonnes of seed maize. That action may have rescued many thousands of people from future starvation. In Ethiopia we are having discussions about bringing into cultivation many tens of thousands of hectares of land which at the moment produce no food. Perhaps the best example of co-operation between our friends in the developing world and the expertise that is so readily available in the developed countries can be found in Zambia, where high technology expertise has been brought to bear on agricultural production. The secret, of course, is water. Utilising overhead irrigation systems sourced from boreholes, we are now producing very large quantities of produce from previously infertile land—10 million eggs and 1 million litres of milk per year. We also farm over 8,000 pigs, there is a significant dairy herd, and we produce 2 million kilos of vegetables every year.

That is what one British company has done. Much more could be done, and much more should be done by private industry.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup rightly said, there is great good will towards us in Africa and in every part of the developing world. We enjoy the warmest respect, and it is essential that we should capitalise on that respect not only in our own selfish interest, because there is so much that we can offer and teach, but because so many countries are in a desperate state and it is our Christian duty to assist them out of it. The quickest and most effective way to help is not only to bring pressure on the Government to increase the size of the taxpayers' subvention, but to make greater use of the private sector. I believe that to do so will not only help the United Kingdom economically in terms of direct exports, influence and in a hundred other ways, but, most important of all, enable us to keep faith with those who trust us.

6.19 pm

Dame Judith Hart (Clydesdale): It is a pleasure for me to follow the right hon. Member for Taunton (Mr. du Cann). I welcome his participation in this debate. I also very much welcomed, as always, the speech of the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath), who has been making speeches on these matters for a very long time. The right hon. Gentleman was very polite about his Front Bench colleagues. I shall be less polite. As an Opposition Member, it may be my privilege to spare no blushes on the Conservative Benches.

I am sorry that the Foreign Secretary is not present to hear me say that his speech was one of the most disgraceful speeches that I have heard in the House for a long time. As the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup said, the debate is about Britain's interests and how far we care for the world in which we live and those who inhabit it. I find it inconceivable that a Foreign Secretary can tell us that he has had to give way to the Prime Minister and the Chancellor and impose cuts.

The BBC's external services have already been pared to the bone. The British Council has suffered grievous cuts. Heaven knows what else the Government can find to cut. Perhaps it is all right to close 12 small consulates, but is that really the way in which to approach the major issue of Britain's having a voice in 1984? It is ludicrous that a monetarist policy, which is so dear to the heart of the Prime Minister and her favourite colleagues, should extend to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the British Council, the BBC, information services and overseas aid when the issues at stake are fundamental to Britain's role in the world.

Of course the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary can say, "Stop the world, we want to get off," but it is despicable for them then to announce the United Kingdom's withdrawal from UNESCO. Of course there are criticisms of UNESCO, but they have tended to be exaggerated. I heard West Germany's permanent representative at UNESCO speak on the subject last week. He had criticisms of UNESCO, as do other EC countries, but he observed that only 13 per cent. of UNESCO's programmes are controversial.

I should like to underline what the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup said about UNESCO's excellent work. I have had my tussles with it. In 1978, when the new information order was first proposed, I spent a whole week in Paris negotiating and drafting in an attempt to postpone what looked likely to be a pretty hard UNESCO declaration limiting press freedom. We did not solve the problem, but at least we averted the worst.

UNESCO does some excellent work and it is not possible to reform from outside. Just as the United States no longer has the slightest influence in UNESCO, so we, henceforth, will cease to have any influence there. We will no longer be able, with our Commonwealth and EC colleagues, to promote the type of reforms on which we are set. The Government's decision is utter folly and it is disgraceful because we were one of the founder members of UNESCO. It was registered here in London. I maintain that UNESCO is one of the three major international

[Dame Judith Hart]

organisations — the others being the World Health Organisation and the Food and Agriculture Organisation. If we begin by leaving one, where do we end?

There is a principle attached to participation in United Nations agencies. There is a principle attached to international commitment. But, by today's disgraceful announcement, we have destroyed that commitment with the concept of internationalism. I deplore that. I am sure that a few Conservative Members would like to indulge in similar vituperation, but their ways are more polite.

As we know, and as my hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall (Mr. Holland) said, the aid programme has suffered since the Government came to power in 1979. There has been a cut in real terms of up to 20 per cent. There are two estimates—one of 17 per cent. and the other of 20 per cent. When the Labour Government left office in 1979 we had achieved expenditure of 0·53 per cent. of gross national product on overseas aid—the United Nations target is 0·7 per cent. We were committed in the next four years, as our White Paper on public expenditure showed, to the highest increase in any public expenditure programme on overseas aid. We were committed to a 6 per cent. per year increase.

Under that programme we should have reached the 0·7 per cent. target this year. Instead of that, we are back to half of the target. Perhaps the Minister for Overseas Development could give us a rather more meticulous elucidation of that, as we were clouded in confusion by what the Foreign Secretary said. Our impression is that, taking inflation into account, there has been a cut in real terms of the cash figure. We should like to have the matter spelt out precisely so that the constituents of the right hon. Member for Taunton, who have been writing to him in their hundreds, may be under no false impression as to what has been announced today.

Mr. Spearing: Perhaps it would be convenient for me to give an answer to my right hon. Friend's question and that asked by the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath). In Cmnd. 9367, in reply to the Select Committee report on Estimates, the Government made it clear that if cuts were not to be made in the existing programme by virtue of differential inflation or exchange rate movements, and if Ministers refused to make such cuts, there would be additional Supplementary Estimates in the spring. The Foreign Secretary did not make that clear, but it is clear from the White Paper. The choice as to whether the Supplementary Estimate is submitted or whether cuts are made rests with Ministers.

Dame Judith Hart: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I do not see any sign of the Minister leaping to his feet to reply. No doubt he will couple his answer to me with one to my hon. Friend later.

Another little matter has been undone by the Government. When I left the Ministry of Overseas Development in 1979, the disaster unit, which we had set up to respond quickly to emergencies such as Ethiopia, had 59 vehicles such as trucks, Land Rovers and Land Rover ambulances. That stock meant that there was no delay in getting equipment on to a Hercules or a ship. I recently asked a couple of questions on the subject and discovered that the stock is now down to two vehicles. That is yet another tiny reduction in capacity.

The Government have also reduced the status of the Ministry of Overseas Development. The Minister will correct me if I am wrong, but I am pretty sure that he did not have the opportunity to attend Cabinet discussions about whether there should be a cut in the aid programme. The Government have also destroyed the development education programme and reduced the proportion of the aid programme that goes on rural development.

The Government's record has been disastrous. I hope that public anxiety will continue and be translated—there are signs that it will—into action whereby Britain and other industrialised countries provide the basis for development to prevent famine such as we have witnessed in Ethiopia this year and will continue to witness in other parts of Africa and possibly Asia within the next couple of years.

The special committee of the United Nations development programme, on which Bob McNamara and Sunny Ramphal, among others, served, has just reported. I listened to the result of that report on last night's BBC world service, although if these cuts go ahead I shall no longer be able to do so. It says that to promote the kind of development necessary to prevent famines in Africa and Ethiopia, about $18 billion should be ploughed into development there during the next two years.

That sounds formidable, if not impossible, but it is not. We are effectively talking about £6 billion a year, which should be compared with planned expenditure on Trident and defence generally. If that sum were divided among the major industrialised nations, it would not amount to much. It is certainly within the capacity of the developed world to raise such a sum.

About three nights ago, also on the BBC world service, I listened to an Indian talking about the politics of India. He came from a very poor rural area. Although I agree that much has been done in India, and that India has now reached more than self-sufficiency in food production, that has largely been achieved in areas with the capacity to undertake tropical agriculture. Such areas as the Punjab, and Tamil Nadu do not suffer from the drought which afflicts other areas. The dry areas still suffer from poverty, and that Indian politician said quite frankly, "If it rains, you eat." The right hon. Member for Taunton (Mr. du Cann) is right to suggest that the key is water, but the key to water is either small-scale tube wells or the larger-scale projects, both of which cost money.

The right hon. Gentleman referred to Zambia, where his own company has been able to increase food production but, as I am sure he will agree, such production tends to concentrate on cash crops and does not touch the 70 to 80 per cent. of poor peasants who suffer famine because there is no rainfall or water. The infrastructure of water supplies and irrigation is needed for them. That costs money and, unfortunately, there is no profit in it for private companies. That can arise only through someone's public expenditure.

If the developing countries fall into debt because the price they receive for their primary commodities has declined and they cannot meet the cost of imported fuel following the successive increases in oil prices, they will not have the expenditure to invest in these necessary irrigation projects. Therefore, it is obvious that the money must come from somewhere else.

This is where aid programmes, be they multilateral or bilateral, come into the picture and matter so much. If we are to begin to see any hope of ending the starvation,

malnutrition and high death rates among the millions who try to scrape a living from the land in the poorest countries, there must be an understanding and realisation that the rich countries — in their terms we are wealthy beyond belief — must be responsible enough to accept that what we do will make all the difference.

I deplore what thr Foreign Secretary said. We ought to have the same commitment that we had from the Government in which I was privileged to serve. There should be a commitment to reach the 0·7 per cent. target within three or four years. Steady increases in overseas aid should follow. There should also be a commitment to participation in the international community in which we live. We should hear no more nonsenses about cuts in the BBC and the British Council or the international institutions of which we should be proud and privileged to be members.

6.35 pm

Sir Anthony Kershaw (Stroud): One fully understands that the right hon. Member for Clydesdale (Dame J. Hart) should think that the sun set when she left Overseas Development, but she should not exaggerate. A certain amount of work, albeit under great difficulty, has been carried out since her departure.

It is tempting to say that the United Kingdom does not give enough overseas aid. In a way there could never be enough, though it must be properly applied. It is, however, nonsense to suggest that the United Kingdom is doing so much less than others. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary said, we are among the top seven or eight aid donors. In real terms our official expenditure is a steady percentage of GNP. That remains the projection to ensure that in the immediate future our spending is not less than that of the immediate past.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Mr. Du Cann) made a valid point. One is entitled to add to official aid the private enterprise aid from this country, unlike many others, to developing countries. Together, those two types of aid far exceed the United Nations target of 0·7 per cent.

Because of the training which it automatically gives to local people, not to mention the employment that it provides, private enterprise aid can in some way be even superior to official aid. It should not be despised.

In considering this matter we should divide the short term and the long term. In effect, the short term means Ethiopia. I understand that over the last two years the United Kingdom has made special payments to Ethiopia totalling £13 million. To that we have now added £6·5 million, and we have joined the EEC in spending £16 million in that country. We have promises from the EEC and the United States of £35 million each, which means that at present there is plenty of money for the next ensuing months. We have plenty of money now, we have promises of money for the future, but lack the grain which people can eat. My information is that only 9,000 tonnes of grain is quickly available in Ethiopia because transportation has not been sufficiently energetically used. That may be the result of bureaucratic delays, particularly in Brussels. Aid to Ethiopia could be put on its feet if such delays were avoided, and we must now concentrate on supplying the food which people can eat.

It is alleged that the ODA was not alert soon enough to the tragedy that is about to take place. I do not know whether that can be established. After all, the ODA has a special disaster unit whose duties include giving warning of such things. I have no doubt that it did, and the amount of money we spent last year shows that some people were aware of what would happen.

One can only operate in a country where the Government of that country are co-operative. They must let us know what they want as well as how it can be done. Unfortunately, until recently, Ethiopia, either through a certain shame, which one can understand—the civil war or other reasons—did not ask and did not co-operate. Therefore, the local agencies operating in such countries have been shooting at the wrong target by blaming the British and other Western Governments for getting aid to Ethiopia so late.

I do not accept the moral blame for that disaster, which many people appear to think we should shoulder. We did not cause the drought, cut down the trees, overcrop the land or start the civil war. Why should we be blamed? The holier-than-thou attitude which many people seem to adopt is attributable more to a political sense than to a love of mankind.

Nevertheless, I recognise, as will all hon. Members who have received letters from constituents about this, that there is genuine anguish among those who have the welfare of their fellow men at heart. Because the necessary and possible steps have been taken and are now funded, a reduction in aid would not in the short term have an adverse effect on staving off starvation in Ethiopia. If aid is sharply reduced at the end of 12 months, it may make a difference, but for the moment one can be confident that all practicable aid is being given. Therefore, I do not condemn the Government, and I shall support them tonight.

We have paid a lot of attention to the development of the Sahel area in the long term. We have concentrated, correctly, on rural work and raising food. I disagree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) that we should try to organise industrial expansion and activity in the poorest countries. They want to be able to grow their own food to eat, not in plantations, and they should not produce rubber or grow corn for export. We already provide aid for that sort of food growing as we should do increasingly, and we are aware of the problem.

The effects of the no doubt necessary and to some extent desirable public economies in other parts of the Vote cause me anxiety. I must declare an interest as a vice-president of the British Council. It thought that it had an agreement with the Foreign Office about risen costs and domestic inflation. The sum involved tonight is about £3 million. The British Council needs £7 million to carry on work which it is already doing, and has been given £5·8 million.

That is divided into £1·2 million risen costs caused by foreign inflation, and the remainder, a little less than £2 million, which is due to domestic rises in costs. That presents not a 1 per cent. but a 3 per cent. cut in the British Council's activities. Hon. Members may say that 3 per cent. is not much, but it is important to remember that there has been a percentage cut every year for the past five years. No private or public business can sustain a diminution of resources year after year without losing efficiency and morale. That is an important point, and it should be considered.

I am gratified to know that capital expenditure on the BBC overseas services based in Hong Kong, the

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Seychelles and the United Kingdom is going ahead. However, the long-term damage of changing programmes, which will be necessary, should not be underestimated. One cannot keep an audience if one chops and changes programmes. If one abandons 30 minutes of air time to a country, the Russians or the Chinese will leap in at once and take up that wavelength and half-hour. After years of trying we shall not be able to get it back, even after audibility has been increased. Radio programmes are extremely sensitive and cannot be changed year in, year out, because of the withdrawal or addition of a few hundred thousand pounds.

As my right hon. and learned Friend said, the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs advised that the diplomatic service should not be further cut without expecting a drop in efficiency. That is true. If it must be cut again, which I deplore, it is right to cut posts. I do not understand whether the Foreign Secretary proposes to cut only consular posts. I understand that that will not be possible and that some diplomatic posts will have to be cut. Furthermore, some of the those diplomatic posts are almost bound to be in the Commonwealth. Hon. Members should reflect what a bad impression would be caused if the United Kingdom withdrew a diplomatic post from a Commonwealth country.

Expert and efficient work is necessary abroad. The diplomatic service is already cut to the bone. Our diplomats cannot work harder, and they could not work with such purpose with fewer staff. They could not cover the country or provide the service which is required.

The Foreign Office and the Ministry of Defence are the easiest targets for cuts because the Government know exactly now many are employed and how much will be spent, except for risen costs. When one tries to attack social services, which have a monstrous expenditure, it is like cutting a blancmange. One does not know what is happening or whether genuine savings can be made. Because the Foreign Office and the Ministry of Defence are easy to knock about, they have been made targets. I deplore that. It should not continue.

6.45 pm

Mr. Eric Deakins (Walthamstow): I welcome the debate and congratulate Liberal Members on devoting a day to this important subject. I, like the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath), welcome the many new faces in debates about aid. I congratulate hon. Members from all parties on turning up to debate this subject which, until now, has been an unpopular one in terms of parliamentary attendance.

We have not yet had an assurance that the aid budget for 1985-86 will not be cut. I invite the Minister, when he replies, to say whether the total, which will be unchanged in cash terms, will represent a cut in real terms of between £40 million and £50 million. Will the Minister re-examine some of our aid project priorities? In the past we have, rightly, given large sums for projects in developing countries for cash crops. With the growing onset of famine in parts of Africa—we shall have to face many more famines in future—we should place greater emphasis on the selection of aid projects for growing food for local consumption, even if that is not always the priority of the Government of the country in question. We do have some choice in these matters.

Will the Minister tell the House whether he has considered, and, if so, has reached a decision on, support for the World Bank project for sub-Sahelan Africa for the future. It seems that Africa is one area where disasters will loom almost every year from now on. We must do something about it.

I congratulate the Minister for Overseas Development on the speech, of which he must have approved, of his noble Friend Lord Glenarthur at the Mexico City conference on population during the second week of August. As he knows, I am joint honorary secretary of the parliamentary group on population and development, and I had the privilege to attend as a non-governmental organisation observer. It was an excellent speech. I hope that whatever else happens in the aid budget the Minister will continue to give increasing priority to a population component in development projects.

For hon. Members who worry what all the fuss on population is about, I shall give some figures. The current world population is about 4·6 billion, of whom 1·2 billion are in rich countries and 3·4 billion in poor countries. On World Bank projections, which were mentioned at the Mexico City conference and in this year's world development report, by the year 2050, which is within the lifetimes of children alive today, the world's population will have increased to 9·8 billion, of whom 1·4 billion will live in rich countries and 8·4 billion will live in poorer countries. The proportion of the rich countries will have shrunk from 26 per cent. to about 13 or 14 per cent. That must be a sobering thought for those who consider the economic future of Britain and the other rich countries.

A fact that is not widely appreciated by many aid agencies and voluntary organisations is that people consume resources and that the more people there are, the more resources they will need, including food. The current population of Africa is about 480 million. By the end of this century, which is only 16 years from now, its population will have increased to almost 800 million and it will increase by leaps and bounds well into the 21st century.

In the Sahel, an area which worries us all—Ethiopia is only part of that area—the population of several countries is increasing by 3 per cent. a year, with little prospect of a reduction. I invite the House to consider some simple arithmetic. If a population grows at 1 per cent. a year, it will double within 70 years. If it grows at 3 per cent. a year, in the same period it will increase eightfold. That is the prospect for sub-Sahelan Africa and other parts of Africa, which at present are more fortunate in terms of food supplies.

Aid alone is not enough. The debate, although primarily about aid, has been about other factors. The House should invite the Minister to say that the Government will sign the United Nations convention on the law of the sea by the closing date of 10 December. This debate is about sharing resources, and that convention will enable the resources of the deep sea, which at present belong to no one, to be shared equitably among rich and poor countries. That would be a vital step for the Government to take and would be a sign that their heart is in the right place.

Poor countries must trade more if they are to improve their living standards and make the best use of their natural resources. A mood has grown in the House during the past few years—it has also grown in the United States and in other rich countries—which could be characterised as

protectionist. Many Conservative and Labour Members believe that we must protect our industries and jobs above all else. But Britain is a rich country and we should be able to restructure our industries, given time and financial assistance, so that they can meet the challenge that is being posed increasingly by the developing countries.

My hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall (Mr. Holland), who is an expert in such matters, made several useful suggestions to the Government about the debt burdens of poor countries. I hope that the Government will follow those suggestions.

More aid to and trade with developing countries will involve social and economic costs to the United Kingdom. I should be interested to hear whether the constituents of Conservative Members, who have written to them about the Ethiopian famine and the need to help poorer countries, recognise that in the long term we must make material sacrifices to help the poor and to narrow the widening gap between our living standards and those of the people in poor countries. I am not sure whether those who have written to the Members of Parliament on moral and Christian grounds—or whatever grounds are appropriate — appreciate the full implications of what they are asking the Government, the House and the nation to do. We have a duty to tell them that the growing gap cannot be narrowed without our making some sacrifices. That is a problem for politicians on both sides of the House. It is not a popular thesis, but it will become increasingly inevitable that if we give more in aid and do more about trade with the poor countries we shall have to examine our material resources to see how best they can be shared with the poor.

The only way in which politicians can make life easier for themselves as we approach the 21st century, when the problems of famine will become much greater and will impinge much more on everything that we do in the House, is to give more resources to development education. I appeal to the Minister, who has so far maintained the development education budget to the Centre for World Development Education, of whose council I am a member, not to allow it to disappear in two or three years. I have worked for many voluntary organisations, but it is by far the most efficient Third world voluntary body in the country. It gives tremendous value for money, and I hope that the Minister will recognise the value, not only to development education but to politicians in general, of the tasks on which it is engaged.

6.56 pm

Sir Peter Blaker (Blackpool, South): Although my later remarks may be somewhat critical of the Government, I should say at the outset that their decision on UNESCO is correct. They have not, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) implied, opted out of UNESCO; they have given notice, thus keeping open the decision at the end of next year. I have seen something of UNESCO, and I believe that that is one of the few methods available to us to exert pressure during the next 12 months to change that organisation. I hope that it will be changed.

The reply of my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary to my intervention in his speech confused rather than illuminated, and I hope that my right hon. Friend who replies will clarify the position. The simple question was this: do the Government propose any measures to compensate the entire Foreign and Commonwealth budget for risen costs outside the United Kingdom as a result of the reduction in the value of sterling or inflation in overseas countries?

We should ask ourselves why Britain's influence in the world is so strong. Britain is not a super-power, nor is it as rich as Germany and France, but from many travels I believe that our influence is greater than that of those two countries, and in some parts of the world it matches that of the United States. We are in that position partly because of our record of empire and decolonisation, of both of which we should be proud. It has given us long experience of overseas affairs and resulting skills, and we have developed instruments to use those skills to good advantage. The instruments are those which we are discussing today: the diplomatic service, which has been criticised in recent years, but I do not know of a better one; the BBC external services; the British Council; the military assistance programme, which is an important part of the Foreign Office armoury; and the aid budget. They give us an influence out of all proportion to our real strength.

I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup that our influence in the world is important not only in helping to protect the interests of the free world as a whole but in protecting our national interests, which can be summed up as peace, trade and jobs. However, every few years for some time past—I am speaking not only of this Government but of previous Governments, because the Labour party did it, too—the Government of the day have taken steps to make more blunt the instruments for protecting our interests. I would describe it as a recurrence of "Operation Ha'porth of Tar". The savings about which we are talking are tiny. They are small change in the pocket of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, let alone my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence, as they are for any other Department. Wherever these cuts are made in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, they will have potentially devastating effect.

Do Ministers realise how the Government are viewed by other countries? Our enemies are delighted when they see us blunt these instruments of foreign policy. Our friends are incredulous, but they are consoled by the fact that British weakness in trade helps them to compete in the markets that we share. They are incredulous simply because the sums involved are so small. I do not know for sure, because I have not been told, but the cuts probably represent about the cost of three Tornado aircraft. Is it sensible to damage so seriously our instruments of foreign policy for such a saving?

The British Council's total receipts from the Goverment are about £79 million. The diplomatic service receives £374 million, but that includes many other activities aside from the diplomatic service proper. The military assistance programme, which is of enormous value, has £12 million. the diplomatic service has been cut by 20 per cent. in numbers over the past 20 years, but my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary explained in a rather powerful passage, how much more work it is having to do. How true that is. Having seen their work in many parts of the world, I know that our diplomatic offices are overstretched.

My right hon. and learned Friend went on to say that the Government were proposing to cut out 10 career consulates. But that conclusion did not seem to me to follow from the point he was making about the burden on

[Sir Peter Blaker]

our diplomatic service, not least from greater travel by British subjects abroad. He said nothing about what will happen to the budget of the diplomatic service, and that is an ominous omission. We have already heard about the British Council, which has had a cut of 20 per cent. in its grant over five years. The external service have been cut in scope and the capital spending programme is running behind schedule. We have fewer hours of broadcasting than Albania. In all this, the time has come to say that we have had enough.

I used to know a maxim which was relevant in many circumstances—"reinforce success". We appear to be destroying success, so we appear to have the thing upside down. Have Ministers, in distant continents, ever fiddled with the dials of their short-wave radio receivers, in a desperate attempt to get the BBC external services, in competition with the louder signals from Germany, Yugoslavia, Australia, the Soviet Union, the United States, France and others? It is an enlightening experience.

Have Ministers asked their opposite numbers in other countries what they, the Prime Ministers, the Foreign Ministers and so on, think of the external services, because many of them listen to them? All over Asia and Africa, that has been my experience. Have Ministers seen the numbers of people who attend the British Council libraries, in many parts of the world, not least in the Communist countries? Have they talked to scientists and politicians about the benefit to them in their careers of having had British Council scholarships? The other day my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, East (Mr. Moynihan) told me that he has come in touch with a Nobel prizewinner who, when asked to what he attributed his success, included his experience as a British Council scholar.

I shall say little about the aid programme because many hon. Members have spoken about it, and I am pressed for time. We have done well for the relief of famine in Ethiopia, but why do we spoil the effect that we have created by saying, in effect, that the aid programme will suffer a cut in real terms? I hope that the Government will take note of the strength of feeling that I sense on Conservative Benches. If they do not, and if there are more real cuts in the budget of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Conservative Members may begin to question other parts of Government spendings.

For example, I have in mind the Falklands. We know how much the Falklands are costing. Some £552 million of spending is forecast for next year. So far, I have been a firm supporter of the Government's policy on the Falklands. It is not conceivable that we should be debating sovereignty at the moment, but if the central organs of our foreign policy are to be cut and damaged as seriously as I fear they may be if the Government are not more generous, many Conservative Members may begin to question the Falklands policy. I am not taking any position on it now, but simply pointing to what I regard as a danger.

Some of my hon. Friends might regard it as ridiculous to spend about £550 million a year to sustain a small territory, 8,000 miles away, with only 1,800 inhabitants while at the same time we cause irreparable damage to the central organs of our foreign policy, which are of benefit in relation to the whole world, and affect much bigger issues than the Falkland Islands, important though they are.

Unless assurances are given by the Government that the overseas risen costs faced by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office as a whole are provided for, the Government have not got their priorities right.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Paul Dean): Order. Before I call the next hon. Member, I remind the House that the 10-minute limit on speeches is now in operation. I appeal for the co-operation of right hon. and hon. Members in observing the limit.

7.7 pm

Mr. Geraint Howells (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am delighted to be the first hon. Member to be called under the 10-minute rule. History is being made, and I am sure that my family and constituents will notice that I am the first hon. Member to have made a speech under the new rule.

We have listened to leading politicians from both sides of the House making major contributions to the debate. I am convinced that they have been inspired by the public, who believe that more time should be given to debate the needs of the young, the elderly and the needy in the Third world. I hope that, by a concerted effort by hon. Members on both sides of the House, we shall be able to persuade the Government to give of their best to help those in need in the Third world from now on.

What has inspired this debate today is not particularly a wish to score party points over the Government, although they have laid themselves open to criticism from all sides, but a genuine desire to put forward a view that reflects the strong feelings of ordinary people throughout the country about our responsibilities as a nation to our fellow human beings in other parts of the world. I do not think that any hon. Member, of whatever political persuasion, can now be unaware of these feelings or can remain unconvinced that a majority of people want the Government to take positive action to improve overseas aid.

Following the harrowing pictures of starving children in Ethiopia and the appalling statistics that have come to light as a result, the conscience of the nation has been stirred as never before. I am sure that we are all aware of the influence of television on the family, and I am convinced that what has been seen on television of what is happening in Ethiopia has stirred the consciences of many in Britain.

All over the country, groups of people have come together to organise appeals. I know of several in my constituency—many other hon. Members have said that their constituents are doing similar work—including farmers' unions, chapels, churches, women's organisations and many others which hold the view that help should be given to the needy and to those in the Third world. They are all meeting with a generous response, and I am delighted that people are taking up the challenge to help others who are less fortunate than we are.

Letters have been pouring in to hon. Members—many have said so during the debate—and we all agree that they are sincere in their deliberations. They ask for pressure to be put on the Government not only to take urgent action to help Ethiopia and Eritrea, but to resist any cuts in overseas aid. I am sure that the Minister is well aware of the letters that pour in to his office as well as to those of hon. Members.

The constituents who write to me—I am sure that they reflect a substantial opinion throughout Britain—do not understand why, of all times, the Chancellor has chosen now to cut back those resources, which will inevitably mean a cut in aid, when we should increase it. My constituents ask: does Britain no longer care? Should we not still aspire to a moral leadership when it comes to humanitarian causes? Should we not be ashamed of a reduction in the amount of aid in real terms since 1979 of between 17 and 20 per cent.?

Another aspect highlighted by the public response is the stark contrast between the surpluses that have accumulated as a result of the unsatisfactory common agricultural policy and the starvation in parts of Africa. To the ordinary person—I include myself in that description—there seems to be no rhyme or reason for the continuation of that discrepancy: the total imbalance between need and provision. People cannot believe that we have not yet devised a way of transforming a glut in one part of the world to provide for the needs in another.

When we consider the money—millions of pounds—that is wasted in keeping so-called unwanted food in intervention stores and how it could be better used in transporting that food to other parts of the world where it is needed, most of us are horrified and disgusted.

I am well aware of the arguments against direct food aid. I accept that food aid at the wrong time can bring about disastrous consequences in social and economic terms. It seems that I shall have to deliver the remaining part of my speech on another day, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): My hon. Friend has another four minutes by my reckoning. Before he continues, does he agree that what has come across to both of us is that, no matter whether we represent poor constituents in rural Wales or equally poor constituents in Britain's urban centres, the view is the same? People cannot understand the economic policies of cutting back when money in Britain is spent to stockpile resources that we do not need while millions away from home, whom the British people want to help, are not being helped through the Government's agency. That is a shared feeling across Britain.

Mr. Howells: I agree with the sentiments expressed by my hon. Friend, although he took two or three minutes of my time to express them.

Here we are in 1984 with a surplus within Europe. We produce enough food for ourselves and we have a surplus. If there is a will to help our friends in the Third world, I am sure that there is a way. If we believe in Christianity, as some of us do, we should urge members of the Government and others in authority to take action. I hope that they in turn will be able to influence their friends and counterparts in Europe to release the surpluses that we have in Europe so that in the short term—the public are interested in the short-term issue—we may save many of those who are dying in Ethiopia.

When I was at school I learnt a little verse. I am sure that many hon. Members have learnt the same verse:

"Let us sow the seeds of friendship
As our way we wend,
And we will reap a blessing
At the journey's end."

I am convinced that this is the opportune time to sow a few seeds of friendship to help others in need in the Third world.

7.15 pm

Mr. Francis Pym (Cambridgeshire, South-East): I find it painful to have to say to the House that I am afraid that I found the speech of my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary not commensurate with the realities and needs of the international situation and inadequate to the maintenance, and where possible the extension, of British interests and influence.

I think that he was saying in his speech that, no doubt as a result of pressure, the aid programme will be maintained at its existing level in real terms—I am thankful about that—but that that is to be done at the expense of the diplomatic service, the overseas service of the BBC and the British Council. That means that in the public expenditure round he has, unhappily, been defeated. I criticise all his colleagues, as well as himself, for that, because it is to misjudge priorities. They have got their priorities wrong. As many of my hon Friends have said, the amount of money that we are talking about is trivial.

I also want to criticise the Government's amendment which, among other things, asks us to endorse the Government's continued support for the British Council and the BBC external services, when they then say that they will cut that support. The kindest thing that I can say about that is that it is lacking in integrity.

There are two separate issues—overseas aid, and the diplomatic services and the overseas services. They are related in various ways which I shall deal with if there is time. It is an extraordinary moment even to contemplate reducing aid. Happily, that has now been stopped. It is a moment when aid should be increased, even if that could only be a modest increase. For decades our aid programme has been a part of our strategy to invest in the under-developed countries to help them help themselves. Of course the programme is never enough. It never could be, but it has been effective. In the past four years we have maintained it through the extremely difficult period of a world recession, which has hit every country and the Third world hardest of all. Its deprivation has been increased. It has also hit us and the other developed countries and constrained the amount of aid that we can give.

Therefore, from every point of view it has been a central object of international policy to lead the world out of the recession which has brought that hardship and bedevilled relationships. The economic recovery has been a major objective and various attempts have been made to bring that about. One of the most significant has been the summit of industrialised nations, the latest of which was held in London. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister used the occasion with her characteristic vigour and enthusiasm as chairman to take the most positive line to lead the world out of recession.

Paragraph nine of the London economic declaration of 9 June said:

"It has therefore been agreed"

and sub-paragraph (4) said:

"to maintain and wherever possible increased flows of resources, including official development assistance and assistance through the international financial and development institutions, to the developing countries and particularly to the poorest countries."

I do not quite know how today's decision fits in with that. At least the resources are not now falling, but there is nothing about an increase. Three months later, the Commonwealth Finance Ministers' meeting took place in Toronto. The communiqué was quite positive.

[Mr. Francis Pym]

Paragraph 12 states:

"Ministers endorsed the general objective of maintaining and enlarging, wherever possible, the net transfer of resources to developing countries."

Paragraph 15 states:

"Ministers expressed serious disappointment at the continuing sluggishness of aid flows . . . Ministers urged all donors to make determined efforts to increase aid flows in line with agreed targets".

I do not know how all that fits in with what we have heard today. In addition to that and since then we have heard of the famine, and Mrs. Gandhi's murder. I referred to her murder last week, and consider it a very significant and important international event that may have all sorts of repercussions that we cannot, of course, assess. Thus, it is clear that the next year or two will be particularly risky and difficult. We must be very positive and constructive in our response, and willing to give extra support. But the Government's decisions do not reflect that need.

Given the restrictions of time, I turn to UNESCO. My view is that the Government's decision is unwise. It is totally right to bring the maximum pressure to bear, and my right hon. and learned Friend is doing that. I just question whether giving notice now will not be counter-productive. We know that virtually all the high commissioners took a strong line yesterday with my right hon. and learned Friend, and that our European partners take a strong view. As there has been progress, I would have inclined to the view that we should continue in membership and let it be known that, if there is no satisfactory progress next year, we shall contemplate giving notice then. The empty chair policy, or the threat of it, is not a very effective way to proceed. The contemplation of somehow using a subscription to an international organisation to balance the United Kingdom Budget is a grotesque solution to the problem of priorities.

However, I should like to give the Government one bouquet—I come to a matter raised by the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Mr. Holland) — over the IDA, as determined efforts have been made to obtain a replenishment that is better than the one proposed.

The second part of the equation concerns the diplomatic service, overseas representation and the overseas services. The problem stems from the drop in the value of the pound and overseas inflation rates. I do not know what the cash cost of that is, but I think that it is somewhere between £5 million and £10 million. We have the same problem this coming year, but as the pound has dropped and will probably be at low levels throughout the year, the cost may well be considerably more. Therefore, to maintain our overseas services at a constant level will require more cash, which has clearly not been allowed for. It has not been said that the Treasury will top that up. Therefore, it is not accurate to say that there is no change. The same factors are bound to affect the BBC, the British Council, VSO, UNCTAD and so on, which all face cuts.

Whether or not the Government like a $1·25 pound, they have no intention of interfering, so the costs are unknown and speculative. To go on from there and to argue that the level of our service overseas and our overseas representation, the workings of the British Council and the BBC should become the accidental consequence or the fortuitous function of the exchange rate is an abdication of responsibility and absolute nonsense. There is a right size and structure for our diplomatic service, the British Council and the BBC, and that must be maintained.

The Treasury must compensate for the fall in the value of the pound and for overseas inflation. In 1982 I felt that the cuts in the Foreign Office had gone too far. Indeed, as soon as I had settled into that office I came to that conclusion. No further cuts were made in my time and in the spring of 1983 I started a process that was going to lead to a recommendation to colleagues to make increases which I would have fought for strenuously. However, I was not there to carry that through and since then further manpower cuts have been announced. I think that I am right to say that a further cut of more than 5 per cent. is required by 1988. That is worse than just short-sighted — it is positively damaging to British interests. The diplomatic service is now being starved to the point of foolhardiness.

There are facts and figures that I could give about the extra work load on the political and commercial side, but I shall skate over them for now. However, if one adds to all that the present state of the world, this is no time to reduce the effort. Rather it is the time to increase it, and that includes the British Council and the BBC.

There are, therefore, two distinct facets to our vital international work. Each stands in its own right and each contributes to British interests. Each should be judged on its merits and then given the resources needed to fulfil its role and carry out the level of activity decided upon.

7.25 pm

Miss Betty Boothroyd (West Bromwich, West): Given the consistent stand that the right hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, South-East (Mr. Pym) takes, I would be tempted to vote for him at the next election if he was still my Member of Parliament.

However, I wish to draw attention to two areas of aid, and to do so in detail. One area is the United Kingdom's funding of the United Nations development programme. But I want first to underline some of the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Deakins), who referred to aid for population activities. If World Bank projections are anything to go by, those nations that are classified by the World Bank as developing countries will find that in the next 60 years or so their populations will rise from the present 3·5 billion to 8·5 billion. That is a devastating increase of 133 per cent. in little more than half a century.

In trying to meet such a situation, I see little use in tackling economic problems in development unless the population problem is tackled with equal vigour, because the two are inextricably intertwined. To achieve a slow-down in population growth a number of social inputs are needed. For example, access to health care for the rural and urban poor is necessary if we are to reduce the incentive of parents who desire more children in order to ensure that a few survive. Again, we need to advance the status of women and to provide access for them to education. That is crucial. We already have evidence to show that women in developing countries who have completed primary education have fewer children than those with no education at all. As the education of the mother advances and her awareness increases, the number of children she gives birth to declines.

Therefore, to slow down the pace of population growth is not to take one area of concern in isolation from others.

A variety of factors in social development are needed, as well as the provision of the means to limit the number of births. It is the many ingredients working together that provide a powerful combination with which to put a brake on population growth. But the Government have lost ground, because they have failed to build on the momentum generated in the late 1970s. Multilateral funding has been reduced and has not yet been restored to the levels that we achieved in 1979. Much ground has been lost as a result. Even bilateral funding does not look too healthy. Look at the bilateral side of donor aid. Even bilateral funding does not look healthy.

Judging by the long list of countries in the ODA report, many earlier recipients now get no contribution at all to assist with population activities. Four or five countries in that long list have had their allocations increased but the overwhelming number of countries in that list have had this form of investment sharply reduced.

Kenya has the largest population growth rate in the world. A survey by the World Bank shows that the need for population programmes goes unmet in that country. Yet British funding to Kenya for population problems has been reduced from an average of £150 million in the late 1970s to £3 million in recent years.

Although Ethiopia is much in our minds, the emergency in the Sudan is looming large. Last week I received a letter from a friend who is filming there. Soon our television screens will show us the millions of people who exist in abject poverty and are dying of starvation. The population of Sudan is more than 20 million. Nearly half of that 20 million are under the age of 15 years. Its projected growth rate will take its population to the 50 million mark. Yet that country's funding has been reduced to zero.

No serious-minded person believes that policies to stem population growth are a panacea. They cannot replace action to provide advantageous trade terms, stabilise commodity prices or increase food production and so on. But equally, it has to be recognised that the loss of momentum on the population front cannot fail to slow down other forms of development, and the poor in those countries are the major victims of that slow-down.

The Minister has been asked numerous questions tonight. Perhaps he can tell the House his proposals for increasing the percentage of bilateral support for population activities.

Another issue relates to the United Nations and, in particular, to the United Nations development programme. A few weeks ago, an all party group of Members of Parliament met Mr. Brad Morse, the director of the development programme. He happens to be an old friend of mine, but anyone who meets him will agree that his dynamic and dedicated personality is suited to the post. He left us in no doubt that at one time the United Kingdom was high on the list of donors. I am sad to say that that no longer applies. Our contribution has been reduced in recent years. It is now back to the level of 10 years ago. I have news for the director and hon. Members—it is much worse than any of us realised.

In constant price terms the United Kingdom will be contributing £15 million to the United Nations development programme this year. Ten years ago, in 1974, our contribution was £23·5 million. The cut in our contribution is about £10 million and it is a loss to the programme. In 1978, which was the peak year, our contribution to technical co-operation was close to £35 million. A cut of £20 million has been made in that single programme since this Government came to office.

If the Government are serious about their commitment to halt the movement of people from the countryside to overcrowded cities, we must put the story of Dick Whittington into reverse. We must encourage ambitious young people in developing countries to remain in the rural areas. To do that we must provide facilities and improve living conditions. We must improve the infrastucture and help to improve the standard of life. We must invest in rural electrification and irrigation plant and help with new techniques in agriculture and mining. We must expand technical co-operation so that developing countries can become wealth creating and achieve some self-reliance. That cannot be done by denying the means to bring about that reversal.

I understand that the pledge for the UNDP for next year has not yet been made. The question is whether the Government intend to remain feeble in their approach to these urgencies or whether they have the will to restore the British contribution to levels which a former Government were able to maintain.

7.34 pm

Mr. Jim Lester (Broxtowe): I shall not follow the arguments of the hon. Member for West Bromwich, West (Miss Boothroyd) because in 10 minutes I wish to make a constructive speech. My hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, South (Sir P. Blaker), in his elegant way, and my right hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-east (Mr. Pym), made the case for many of us on this side of the House. I do not intend to repeat their arguments, but I have a shared sense of disappointment at what has been said from the Government Front Bench.

I am a member of the Select Committee which carefully scrutinises the Foreign Office budger in a dispassionate way. The Committee came to a conclusion that would have avoided the need for this debate and the agony and saved us from a petty cash policy by PESC, which many of us find so devastatingly irritating. I shall find it impossible to support the Government tonight.

I do not want to minimise what has been done for the Ethiopian crisis by the ODA special committee, which has done remarkably well, nor by the rapid use of the £5 million to stem some of the initial problems. However, I want to suggest constructive ways in which so much more can be done to mobilise the genuine feelings of the British people.

The Minister knows already of the value of the non-governmental organisations, such as the Save the Children Fund, War on Want and Oxfam, which have been doing much good work in Ethiopia for some time. The Government believe in increasing support for such organisations, as does the public. From the money raised in constituencies and advertising efforts, we know there is tremendous support and a genuine heartfelt response that goes wider than famine relief.

Under the joint funding scheme, the Government give thousands of pounds for specific projects suggested by those organisations. In 1983, 290 specific projects were funded, 33 per cent. of which were for agriculture, 15 per cent. for health and 18 per cent. for non-formal education schemes. The budget is comparatively small, but it has been expanded this year.

[Mr. Jim Lester]

That is only the tip of the iceberg which the Government should encourage and develop. Just over a year ago, with the help of the local BBC station and the local newspaper, over £42,000 was raised in the four east midlands counties to provide 1 million sachets of oral rehydration salts. That was before the starving children were seen on television. Oral rehydration techniques save children's lives. People were told that if they gave 5p, that would buy a sachet and save a life. I am delighted that the 1 million sachets were in place in February this year. According to UNICEF, which distributed them throughout west Sudan, the lives of about 18,000 children were saved.

I use that as an example because I am convinced that there are many similar possibilities for people-to-people assistance. One thinks of blankets made in Ethiopian refugee camps which are of value to the people and can be distributed immediately to those in need. One thinks of water in the wells. Young farmers and people who understand the value of water can contribute to schemes to raise money for wells. One thinks of trees in the Sudan. Those who understand the value of trees could undertake to raise money to plant trees. I think of blackboards. In the Sudan, one can see children writing in the sand. Surely we can provide blackboards so that children can work and learn. Those are examples of what people realise in general terms can be done through a heart-to-heart gift.

I should like the Government to match, pound for pound, all the money raised by the non-governmental organisations and, wherever possible, to encourage specific projects. People will give when they know that the money they are providing will buy something tangible. They are giving at the moment because they feel so desperately upset and sad about starving people, including children, but they will give even more if they know that the money will provide something tangible. I am sure that if we provided the objects for people to buy and the Government matched, pound for pound, the cost of transportation and dispersal in the countries to which they choose to give money, we would have a major impact in the world in terms of our wider constituency. People at every level in our society understand that.

Those of us who have travelled in the Third world are conscious of the humbling scale of the problems. It is difficult for ordinary people to understand the complexities of multilateral agencies, bilateral aid, and all the rest. The problems are immense. Instead of debating petty cash alterations, we should be debating how, with our experience in Europe and the Commonwealth, we can be the catalyst to mobilise the efforts of the world to deal with some of these dreadful problems. Our role is to lead, not to diffuse, public opinion, to develop an awakened conscience in this country and to help those who recognise that we live in one world, that we are all one with another.

7.41 pm

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): I shall follow the catalytic point made by the hon. Member for Broxtowe (Mr. Lester) later, but first I shall thank the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary for the compliment he paid me after my intervention, albeit from a seated position, earlier in the debate. I wish that I could be equally complimentary about the Foreign Secretary, but I have to tell him that the content, delivery and logic of his speech went back to the bad old days 10 years ago when he was the Solicitor-General. The cause about which he spoke today was just as mistaken as his cause was then.

Two main themes, which I wish to bring together, have run through the debate so far — Britain's role in the world and the need to sustain rural subsistence societies. Britain, as the leading and founder member of the British Commonwealth, has inherited an unmatched system of international linkages and scientific institutions that relate to the Commonwealth and are now brought together under the unlikely umbrella of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. I refer to the scientific units of the former Ministry for Overseas Development. The Foreign Affairs Committee in the 1982-83 Session looked at those units in report HC 25-I. Unfortunately, they were dealt with in a most unscientific way by our Prime Minister. I make no apology for making a strong attack on that right hon. Lady. She, as a scientific person, should have known better. Those units were "Raynered." Sir Derek Rayner and his assistants looked at those important scientific institutions whose expenditure would have been about £14 million a year out of an aid budget of £1 billion.

Those institutions comprised the Tropical Products Institute, the Centre for Overseas Pest Research—both of which have been combined into the Tropical Research Institute—the Land Resources Development Centre, and the Directorate of Overseas Surveys. As it happens, all of those institutions were working in Ethiopia or had had projects there in the recent past. One distinctive feature was the fact that they were called in as consultant bodies and assisted institutions in different parts of the world, both inside and outside the Commonwealth.

The Directorate of Overseas Surveys was concerned with mapping, particularly geological and soil mapping, which is fundamental to most developments of any sort. The Tropical Products Institute is and was concerned with the preservation of food, its efficient and effective storage, its protection from pests and its marketing and distribution. What could be more basic than that when considering rural development and food supply?

The Land Resources Development Centre, situated in Tolworth, was a multi-disciplinary group concerned with surveys of a geological, petrological and hydrological character, which provided the basis for rural development schemes all over the world. The centre had developed an enviable expertise, including the interpretation of satellite pictures which help in this sort of work. Finally, and not least, there is the Centre for Overseas Pest Research about which the Prime Minister should have known but did not. If the Prime Minister had made some observations of that centre and found that there were entomologists, biochemists and biologists on the payroll of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, I can imagine the tantrums that may have ensued on that discovery, particularly if it were found that the centre occupied what were thought to be the relatively expensive premises behind what was Pontings in an old warehouse in Kensington. That might be extravagant, but in fact Kensington is one of the entomological centres of the world. Entymology is the study of beetles, bugs and other pests that eat food and get into human beings' bloodstream. Why is Kensington one of the entomological capitals of the world? That is due to the Victorian virtues of the Prince Consort—virtues that the right hon. Lady does not recognise. She only perpetrates Victorian vice. That is why Kensington was important; yet the Government wanted to move the centre.

The Centre for Overseas Pest Research gave great aid to the International Rice Institute in Manila in dealing with the brown plant hopper. Only that place, due to its combination of meteorological and climatological skills, was able to deal with that pest. The centre is now working on the East African soldier insect, which bores into the roots of plants. If the centre is successful, the success will not be due to the right hon. Lady.

The Government wanted to cut those institutions down and were successful in doing so. The number of people involved in those important scientific institutions has been cut from 561 to 410½. The Directorate of Overseas Surveys has been cut to a greater degree from 328 to 180. The manpower of those vital institutions has been cut by about a third by this Government—all for the sake of between £4 million and £5 million. That is all. I am angry because that action shows an awful lack of common sense. It shows also the way in which the Government have gone about their normal tasks. The institutions were involved in the prevention of famine.

What the Government have done is unbusinesslike, uneconomic, unprofessional, unscientific and uncharitable. That was the theme of the concluding remarks made by the Earl of Stockton last week in another place. He talked of

"the dreadful, wicked systems which have crept into our lives". —[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 13 November 1984; Vol. 457, c. 241.]

Can one of those dreadful wicked systems be a system that says, "Cut public expenditure if you can and if it is easy to do so, irrespective of the effects"? That is the dreadful, wicked system that our Prime Minister and those who continue to support her—I suspect that is a declining number—are putting in place. The noble Earl spoke also of charity and St. Paul. We know that charity begins at home, but of course it does not end there. This Government do not even practise charity at home. It is, therefore, not surprising that they are incapable of practising it abroad.

7.49 pm

Mr. Julian Amery (Brighton, Pavilion): The leader of the Liberal party and his colleagues should be congratulated on giving us the opportunity for this debate; it comes none too soon. Black Africa is dying. Some 1,000—it may be more—Africans will have died of hunger while we have been talking here. What could be even more serious is the fact that the land is dying—the land upon which the survivors and their dependants must depend if they are to have any kind of life. They may be acts of God—if it is not blasphemous to say that—that cause the drought, erosion and over-population, but we also carry our share of the blame. We abandoned our responsibilities in black Africa far too soon; and although we spent a great deal of money on aid—the totals are large—we were ineffective in controlling how it was spent. A great deal of it was wasted through inefficiency and in other ways.

Our debate has focused to a considerable extent on Ethiopia, where the position is apocalyptic. The famine prevails in the Government administered parts of the country and those controlled by the dissidents. We are right to give all the help we can. I hope that we shall give it to both sides through the voluntary organisations operating from the Sudan and through the airlift in Ethiopia; but the civil war hampers distribution of essential food.

I understand that the Eritrean and Tigrean movements have offered a ceasefire, but that that has not yet received any response from Colonel Mengistu's Government. I urge my right hon. and learned Friend to apply all the pressure that he can to try to get the Ethiopian Government to agree to the ceasefire, even if only for a limited time. It is obscene that the Ethiopians should be devoting so much effort to adding to the death roll which the famine has already produced.

The spotlight is on Ethiopia but, as many right hon. and hon. Members have siad, many other countries are awaiting the charge of the Four Horsemen of te Apocalypse, in particular, the Sudan and Somalia—two countries with which we have long had historical associations. I do not know whether, even now, we shall be in time to avoid the same kind of tragedy taking place in the Sudan and Somalia as is occurring in Ethiopia. i am not sure that we can. The disasters taking place in Ethiopia at least help us to focus on the disasters that could lie ahead.

One of the difficulties of the debate is that we tend to measure aid in terms of the money supplied—the input—but that is only one standard of the value. What is the money producing? That is the only way in which we can form a judgment as to whether the Government are doing right or wrong with what they are supplying. We should monitor what the money is producing in welfare for the people.

I confess to having grave doubts about the amount of our aid contribution that goes towards multinational organisations. UNESCO is a caricature. They are not all like that. I entirely support my right hon. and learned Friend in pulling out of UNESCO, although I should like an assurance from him that when 1986 comes the £5 million saved will not be pocketed by the Treasury but will be used for other foreign service purposes—for aid or in other ways.

It is interesting to see—if I have my figures right—that about half our aid goes to multilateral organisations, whereas France gives about one sixth to multilateral organisations and the remainder is on bilateral aid. Our French allies give much more than we do. They spend twice as much on aid as we do. It seems to me, without expert knowledge, that the former French territories, which receive the bulk of the aid, are among the most stable and prosperous countries in the Third world. I wonder whether we should not look more carefully at their example.

We are still obsessed with the fear of being called neo-colonialists, but, when people are dying, there is something to be said for concentrating on humanitarian causes and being a bit tough with Governments to ensure that they spend the money that we are supplying in the right way.

It is a paradox, but I believe that the best way to help the Third world is to help ourselves. If we promote Britain's recovery and the recovery of the European Community, we shall provide a market for the goods that the countries of the Third world make and supply. If we became richer, we shall have more money available to spend on suitable and sensible aid projects. Our prosperity is essential to their recovery.

There are many ways of fostering that. We went through them in the days of the colonial empire—

[Mr. Julian Amery]

preferences, the old sterling area, bulk buying, commodity agreements, and so on. There is not the time tonight to deal with all those matters.

I should like to see some recognition that the European Community, and Britain in particular, has a major part to play in nursing Africa back from the death throes into which it is now sinking.

7.56 pm

Mr. D. E. Thomas (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): At the very time when the deflationary policies which are part of monetarism and its effects are ravaging the southern countries, we see the same monetarist policies in terms of controlling public expenditure at home reducing the aid budget.

It is important that we should have the figure right. It is clear, if I understood what the Foreign Secretary said, that we are talking about a cut in real terms. If we are talking about a level of aid which increases at 3 per cent. while the inflation rate is 5 per cent., that is a reduction of 2 per cent. That is my simple economics. I am sure that if the Foreign Secretary were listening, he would confirm that.

Our level of aid, in terms of proportion of GNP, is the lowest that we have ever seen. We can compare it with the high peak of 0·52 per cent. achieved in 1979. We can also compare the 1982 figure for raw materials from the southern countries, which was the lowest for 50 years. That is the equation with which we must work. We have seen not just a reduction in the amount of aid but a shift in its nature.

In the 1970s there was a growth in multilateral aid through international institutions such as the World Bank and, to a lesser extent, UNESCO. This Government and the American Government are now reversing the trend —underfunding aid, withdrawing from the multinational agencies and redirecting ODA resources into bilateral aid.

That is a shift away from the opportunity for southern countries as a group to have a greater say in the way in which aid is spent. That is part of the issue that we should be considering tonight. We are talking not just about aid, but about the way in which those countries that receive resources control them and can influence the world macro-economic trends which affect them.

In the reply that I received from the Minister on 15 November about the criteria for aid allocation, it was clear that he was, in reality, talking about an aid programme to assist the export of British goods and services and to improve the procurement of British goods. Therefore, the bilateral aid programmes are not aid programmes; they are investment programmes. When Conservative Members try to include the commercial input as part of the aid programme in GNP terms by throwing in the commercial investment of companies, clearly they fail to understand the reality of economic aid.

If we consider the position since 1979, there has been a move from aid to aid-trade provisions. That is an example of how a bilateral programme is not being used to enhance the position of the poorest countries. That is why we see a shift of aid from rural programmes into aid-trade provisions which are, in reality, commercial transactions with the poorest countries.

It is important, when looking at the pattern of our bilateral aid programmes, to identify our targets precisely. I was appalled to find that our bilateral aid to Turkey is £62 million. Turkey is, of course, one of our great NATO allies—with about 6,000 political prisoners. Our aid to Ethiopia is about one sixth of that amount.

There have been continual allegations about the withholding of aid from Ethiopia on ideological grounds. The Government have not responded to the criticisms made, both outside and inside this House, by those who are very concerned about the issues. From a letter that I received from the Prime Minister, and from Ministers' responses—they do not, however, appear to be listening —it is clear that the Government have been trying to cover up the figures.

The Prime Minister told me that in 1982 the United Kingdom provided £5·2 million of food aid to Ethiopia. She told me that in 1983 our bilateral food aid to Ethiopia consisted of 19,000 tonnes of cereals. She omitted to mention that the aid had dropped, in monetary value, to £3·4 million in that year. Not only was the Prime Minister giving misleading figures to me and to the House; but earlier she had claimed credit for achievements of the previous Labour Adminstration as though they were her own. She said that after the change of Government in 1979, aid to Ethiopia averaged over £2 million a year, and that in 1982 it rose to £5·6 million, of which £5·2 million was in the form of food aid. She omitted to mention that, according to the Government's own figures, aid to Ethiopia fell in 1980 to £1·5 million, and in 1981 to £166,000. When I saw the figure in *Official Report* I thought that it was an error.

It is essential to repeat in this House that it is quite clear to those of us who have been concerned about the political drift of the Government's aid programme and its political intentions that there has indeed been a deliberate attempt not to provide for Ethiopia the level of aid that should have been provided by the Government from the late 1970s onward. The fact that the Government are now arranging a ministerial visit and trying to have a higher profile in response to public concern must not cover up the political intent of the Government in not maintaining their aid programme at a consistent level. The Minister may want to respond to that point at the end of the debate.

The Government's political attitude is again reflected in our relationship with international organisations, and in particular in our threatened withdrawal from UNESCO. The Government are not concerned about the inefficiency of UNESCO. They want to follow the United States line. UNESCO is a multilateral agency in which southern countries have some power. The free flow of information internationally is an issue that this House should take seriously, and it has not done so. It should take seriously the critique that has been mounted over the years of the press agencies of the West and their coverage of activities in the southern countries.

Those who have been looking at the media coverage in Britain of our home affairs in recent weeks can surely understand what it means to Third world countries to be continually stereotyped in the international media. There are serious arguments within UNESCO about the role of the media in the international flow of information. We should be dealing with those arguments within UNESCO, not threatening to withdraw because the United States wants to do so.

We have to link the present economic crisis and deflationary policies with what the Government are doing in regard to their own aid programme. We must support

international agencies, we must direct specific aid to areas of crisis, but we must never fail to realise the structural nature of international poverty. We need to tackle the debt crisis and we need to spend far more time in this House considering ways of genuine international collaboration. We should be talking about genuine internationalism rather than the kind of narrow parochialism that this House often displays in international affairs.

8.5 pm

Mr. Colin Moynihan (Lewisham, East): It is much to be regretted that we face a day when once again we are moving away from the United Kingdom goal — the declared intent of both major parties—to move towards the United Nations target of 0·7 per cent. of GDP for aid to the Third world. Our contribution was at 0·35 per cent., it slipped to 0·34 per cent. and is now at 0·33 per cent. of today's figures. That is a safe fact of life and is to be regretted on both sides of the House.

It is also a sad day when the cash figure for the net aid programme for the next financial year is, as stated in the public expenditure White Paper, unchanged, without reflecting the substantial public and political developments and reactions. That figure is £1,130 million. Hon. Members should bear in mind that that represents a 3 per cent. cash increase on the present figure of £1,099 million but—that seems to be the in word of the day—after allowing for inflation it is effectively a 2 per cent. cut in real terms, before taking into account the relative decline of sterling against foreign currencies, particularly as the dollar is a key currency for many of our multilateral programmes.

With regard to Ethiopia, hon. Members should note that food aid can make a temporary disaster permanent. It is vital to provide food aid but it is equally important to provide a longer term developmental package to develop the indigenous industries, and to use multilateral schemes to make sure that that aid is effective in the long run. That means encouraging Governments to face up to price structures which are reasonable to farmers in the countries concerned, and to look at infrastructure projects such as road building and regional development. It is essential that the emergency aid should be seen by those concerned as part of a longer term development strategy to assist broad areas of sub-Saharan Africa.

I welcome the Government's decision concerning UNESCO. The key criterion of our aid policy must be effectiveness—to ensure that as much aid as possible goes to those in need. I think that it was wise of the Government to put before UNESCO conditions, suggestions and recommendations for improvement as long ago as the spring of this year, giving UNESCO 20 months in which to study and implement the proposals. But those proposals should be tied to a decision to leave UNESCO by the end of next year if the proposals are not put into practice. I hope that the Government will not stop there, because we have an important opportunity to investigate all multilateral agencies to which we subscribe. we must make certain that those to which we donate—the Government have added to the list the African development fund — are working effectively through their multilateral aid programmes.

I should like to take this opportunity to try to break down a distinction which has been created by several right hon. and hon. Members between humanitarian and concessionary aid. It is a false distinction. If in talking of humanitarian aid the word "emergency" is implied, why not say so? There are many concessionary aid projects where a factory may be built, a nucleus estate developed and infrastructural and outgoer schemes implemented, followed by significant humanitarian inputs such as hospital schemes, facilities for housing and general projects with a humanitarian bias which are attached to what otherwise we would term concessionary schemes. It is wrong to make a distinction between humanitarian aid and concessionary aid such as aid and trade provision, implicitly claiming they do provide humanitarian benefits. There are substantial humanitarian benefits on that side of the aid programme.

The House will recall that in May £4 million was agreed to be added to the British Council's budget for 1984-85. That sum represented the rising costs that had been added to the expenditure survey figures for the current year together with the rent increase for the Spring garden premises for a further 10 years at a fixed sum following 10 years of a fixed and low rent.

The council, in common with many other bodies involved in our aid budget, has experienced overseas inflation costs. These costs have amounted to £2·3 million for the council in the current year net of exchange adjustments but that sum has not been added to the council's public expenditure survey figures for 1985-86 in the autumn statement of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

It must be recognised that increased costs overseas for a body such as the British Council that are granted in one year must be carried forward into the next year. That is vital. If that does not happen, there will be another real cut to the programme. I am a keen supporter of the council's work and the fact that increased costs have not been added to its budget may mean reduced expenditure on scholarships, academic links and visits by specialists to and from Britain. That is to be deeply regretted, especially after a period when the council has suffered substantial cuts and has become a lean and efficient organisation.

I share the view of a number of hon. Members that we are talking no longer of cutting into the fat of an overweight operation. Many parts of the budget are already lean and efficient. The additional cuts—some of them are paltry but some are more substantial—will be painful to all the recipients of the FCO Vote at the end of the day.

Stop-go policies for diplomatic representation overseas do nothing to promote British interests abroad, be they commercial or diplomatic. The announcement that 10 further posts are to be closed must be viewed with great regret by hon. Members on both sides of the House. The closure of Stuttgart was a bad move. It is important to have commercial representation in that city. Which other commercial cities will be among the 10 closures that are to take place? British influence abroad requires a long-term presence, the nurturing of contacts, experience and the presence on the spot of our representatives. I am concerned about the effect of another cut to our diplomatic Vote, which is so important in developing British interests overseas.

Politics is about priorities. A strong diplomatic representation overseas to promote Britain's role in the world is an important priority. A strong aid programme to alleviate hunger and encourage development is an important priority. A trusted and respected BBC external service which reaches the hearts and minds of many who

[Mr. Colin Moynihan]

regard it as a lifeline of political credibility and external reality coming over the airwaves, is an important priority. A flourishing British Council that promotes Britain's educational, technical and cultural interests is a priority. I regret that today we are unable to sustain the real value of all these budgets.

8.14 pm

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): The hon. Member for Lewisham, East (Mr. Moynihan) was at his best when he drew to the attention of the Minister for Overseas Development the plain and undeniable fact that the figures that have been presented to us do not represent an increase in real terms in our overseas aid. I was pleased that the hon. Gentleman advanced that argument. I do not agree with everything else that he said, especially on UNESCO.

Hon. Members will recall that during business questions this afternoon I asked the Leader of the House whether a statement would be made on UNESCO by the Foreign Secretary during this debate. The Leader of the House replied by quoting Mr. Asquith and said, "Wait and see." I have waited and I have seen, and in common with most hon. Members I do not like what I have seen. We are still waiting for a reasonable explanation of the decision on UNESCO.

The Foreign Secretary failed to give this House a clear exposition of the Government's thinking. If we are giving UNESCO 12 months' notice, and if we are doing so on the flimsy evidence available to us, we are failing to stand up to American pressure. Against that background it is not likely that we shall say in 12 months' time that we shall remain a member of UNESCO. It is more likely that we shall respond to American pressures and pull out, despite the overwhelming weight of opinion, which has been echoed by a former Prime Minister and a former Foreign Secretary. Their opinions are shared by Commonwealth countries, by western European countries and by almost every country apart from the United States. Other countries share our view that UNESCO has a contribution to make in a democratic setting, which we cherish and which we are encouraging other countries to endorse. It is profoundly wrong to pull out of an organisation because there are members of it who do not agree with us.

The Minister for Overseas Development might be interested in informing his right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and his right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary that they will be disappointed if they think that the Reagan Administration will warmly welcome their compliance. They will be making a great mistake if they take that view. During the summer recess I was at a meeting that took place at the Pentagon. I was in the company of some Conservative Members and some of my hon. Friends. We were told bluntly that the Pentagon was highly critical of the comments of the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary following the invasion of Grenada. The sentiments that we heard expressed were not those that we expected from an ally to which we are responding by giving notice that we are withdrawing from UNESCO. The United States Administration should see us as an ally but as a nation that is capable of expressing its own opinion and not necessarily responding to its every whim, which in fact we are doing with our decision on UNESCO. There should be a full debate on the UNESCO decision and I hope that it will take place.

The debate was to be about overseas development. Given the views of the British people, it seems reasonable that the House should consider the problems of overseas aid. It is a subject on which all hon. Members have received many letters. The hon. Member for Stroud (Sir A. Kershaw) struck a note that was somewhat different from that of his right hon. and hon. Friends. He said that there was no real reduction in overseas aid and that we must consider the issue in terms of foreign policy. He argued that Britain cannot be blamed for the deforestation in Ethiopia and the mismanagement which, I concede, takes place in that country.

The British people are not interested in that sort of argument. We realise that people are suffering, starving and dying. I received a letter from Turnbull high school, Bishopbriggs, which was typical of many others that I received. The young people who wrote to me made a comment which I thought was appropriate. They argued that we should not be penalising hungry people because of the regime that happens to be in control of Ethiopia. They added that some Ethiopian people would be unable to tell the difference between Karl Marx and Groucho Marx. That was fair comment. The problem of world poverty is far too serious to allow us to assume that every decision that we take should be based on how the member states will vote in the United Nations.

The imagination of the British people has rightly been captured and they expect a better response from the Government than today's statement. *The Guardian* today carried the headline:

"Overseas aid saved by Howe dodge".

That is an absolutely correct description of a profoundly cynical exercise. It is not sufficient merely to maintain the present inadequate overseas aid commitment at the expense of other important functions of the Foreign Office —from the British Council to the BBC foreign service and the diplomatic service. I am sorry that the Foreign Secretary is not present. It would have been far better if he had simply told the Chancellor that the Foreign Office could not meet the figures demanded. The Minister said in response to the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) that the money for Ethiopia was to be found from the contingency fund. He was less polite when I put the same point in the debate on the Queen's Speech. If that is so, it is time that we re-examined the contingency fund because it cannot be big enough. No one was surprised about Ethiopia. The crisis was predicted by Members on both sides. It is nonsense for Ministers to say that they were taken by surprise. The British public simply do not believe that.

The former Prime Minister referred to the Brandt report. It is a poor reflection on our Government and others that the Brandt commission had to produce a second report, "Common Crisis", because its original recommendations had not been taken seriously, by our Government and others. I end by quoting the words of Willy Brandt in his introduction to that report. He said:

"We too often forget that even today the depth of human suffering is immense. Every two seconds of this year a child will die of hunger or disease. And no statistic can express what it is to see even one child die . . . 'to see the uncomprehending panic in eyes which are still the clear and lucid eyes of a child' . . . A new century nears, and with it the prospect of a new civilisation. Could we not begin to lay the basis for that new

community with reasonable relations among all people and nations, and to build a world in which sharing, justice, freedom, and peace might prevail?"

I regret to say that on the basis of the Government's statement today we are still a million miles from that objective.

8.23 pm

Mr. Reg Prentice (Daventry): Many of us entered the Chamber today in the hope of hearing from the Government a statement representing a real shift from the position taken by the Chancellor in his public expenditure statement last week. We have been profoundly disappointed. In assessing what has happened, I rely upon the analysis made by many of my right hon. and hon. Friends, especially my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, South (Sir P. Blaker). If we have got it wrong, perhaps the Minister will tell us how we have got it wrong. I shall simply state the position as it appears to me at this moment.

The figures for Foreign and Commonwealth Office expenditure next year, including the aid programme, will be higher in cash terms than this year and will represent an increase in terms of the expected rate of domestic inflation. They will not, however, contain an element for the higher rate of inflation overseas and they will not contain an adjustment for differential exchange rates. The real value of the aid programme and of the other FCO programmes will thus be cut.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary spoke earlier of two developments. The first was a series of specific, niggling cuts affecting the BBC overseas service, the British Council and other important services. The other was a more generalised cut in the real value of the aid programme. This was not specified. Perhaps it could not be specified at this stage. Certainly it need not be specified. It means, however, that the already inadequate programme will be even more inadequate in a year's time. I shall be delighted to hear from the Minister if I have made a mistake, but that seems to be the picture given by the Secretary of State.

It may be argued that allowances have never been made for overseas inflation. There are two replies to that. First, the need to do so has never been more urgent. Secondly, the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs has done a great deal of work on this and provided a technique for Ministers to use. It would be of some comfort if my right hon. Friend could at least say that those proposals will be carefully considered and might lead to some adjustment. I should certainly be very glad to hear that. At the moment, however, we face an effective cut.

That reflects very badly on the way in which the Government carry out the public expenditure exercise. That applies not just to this Government but to any Government. As a Labour Minister, I faced the same situation. At least once a year—perhaps more often—there is a scramble, with all the paraphernalia of the star chamber, special Cabinet meetings, and so forth. The spotlight, perhaps necessarily because of lack of time, is on those programmes about which the spending Minister is making the most fuss. There is neither the time nor, perhaps, the inclination for a real analysis of the value of the various programmes or for a proper assessment of priorities. The Government and the House must tackle that general problem urgently and seriously.

I do not quarrel with the Chancellor's overall strategy or with the Foreign Secretary's comments about the need for discipline in public expenditure, but I believe that the aid programme is a very special case. I have been saying that in the House for well over 20 years, but the same arguments have to be made time and again. Basically, there are four arguments, and they are largely the same as they have been for years. Indeed, we may still be making them in 10 years time. Those arguments must be constantly recycled and re-examined.

The first argument—this argument, indeed, would stand alone—is that there is a moral compulsion on people living in the most affluent one third of the world to assist those living in the poorest one third of the world. It is important to try to assess what that duty is. We cannot feed these people all the time, although we can provide aid in special emergencies, such as the crisis in Ethiopia. We cannot do the development for them—basically, that is up to them—but we can help them to help themselves. We can put a small part of our capital and technical skills alongside theirs to enable their development plans to work more effectively.

As for how much we should do, I believe that the target of 0·7 per cent. of GNP, which was fixed by the United Nations General Assembly 15 years ago, is the bare minimum. It was fixed at that modest level so as not to have too much impact on the selfishness of taxpayers in the affluent countries, and I find it deeply embarrassing that this country is now achieving less than half that figure.

There are many other ways of helping. Trade may be more important. Private investment may be just as important. The quality of the aid programme may be more important than its quantity. Nevertheless, quantity is the clearest single test of our commitment to helping those people to help themselves. We are not meeting that test and we shall slip even further from it next year. In my view, that is a disgrace.

The second main set of reasons is connected with economic self-interest and can be expressed in the word "interdependence". I echo what was said by my right hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-East (Mr. Pym), when he reminded us of the communiqué of the London economic summit a few months ago. The seven leading industrial countries of the West, together with the European Community, said in that communiqué that the programmes of development assistance should be at least maintained and, if possible, increased in the period ahead. If ours drops in value, we will be letting down our partners in the affluent Western world as well as people in the developing world.

The third set of reasons is connected with our political stance. This is part of the battle for ideas between the free countries and the Communist countries. We provide aid on a bigger and better scale than the Communists. Inadequate as our efforts may be, theirs are abysmal. The gap must not be allowed to narrow. There is no reason why we should not derive the maximum advantage from the fact that we are helping people to help themselves and at the same time helping to win the battle of ideas—freedom and free enterprise against totalitarianism. That message should be better understood in President Reagan's White House.

Finally, this is the worst possible time for a reduction in the aid programme. It is a question of trust and understanding between Her Majesty's Government and the British people. Thousands of people in this country are

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deeply shocked by what is happening in Ethiopia. They have been sending donations and organising sponsored events. In villages in my constituency, special action groups have been formed by people who have never done such things before. This is not the moment to cancel out the totality of their efforts several times over by a stroke of a Treasury pen.

People understand that relief must carry on into development. I have spoken to three village Conservative branches on this matter in the past 10 days and found that people understand that development is the real answer. They urge me to resist—as I am resisting—any cut in our aid programme.

I hope that the discussion that is emerging in our country will continue. Two countries in western Europe — Sweden and the Netherlands — have engaged in continuing constructive internal debates on these matters for many years. Their aid programmes are bigger than the average. I hope that there will be such a debate in this country leading to a similar result.

8.33 pm

Mr. Mark Fisher (Stoke on Trent, Central): As a former Minister of Overseas Development, the right hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Prentice) speaks with authority when he adds his voice to the almost unanimous criticism by hon. Members of the Foreign Secretary's speech.

This debate is overshadowed by the thought of the people starving and dying in Ethiopia. I doubt whether the debate would have taken place but for the crisis there and the television coverage of it. I pay tribute to the Liberal party for choosing this subject for debate on an Opposition day.

The Government have responded to the crisis, as the Foreign Secretary said. I welcome the £5 million in aid that has been announced, the 6,500 tonnes of grain, and the Minister's decision — recently announced — to visit Ethiopia next week. However, many people who have written to me and to other hon. Members fear that the Government are doing too little and too late. The Foreign Secretary addressed that criticism in his speech, but he failed to convince me and I suspect that he failed to convince many other hon. Members.

Is it not a fact that the Ethiopian Government first approached Her Majesty's Government formally for aid in 1983? I believe that it is, because the Minister for Overseas Development himself gave me a written answer to that effect a few weeks ago. Is it not also a fact that our aid to Ethiopia this year, apart from the allocation of EEC aid, has amounted to the princely sum of £300,000 of food and medical supplies and £70,000 of transport aid? I believe that that is true too, because the Minister told me so in another parliamentary answer. I believe that the House and the country were looking for a far more urgent and positive lead from the Foreign Secretary and the Government.

As hon. Members on both sides have said, the Foreign Secretary's speech was wholly inadequate. The debate gave him an opportunity — in fact required him — to survey the whole globe and to evaluate Britain's interests, responsibilities and contribution. Instead, we listened to the Foreign Secretary myopically stumbling around in an undergrowth of irrelevant detail, quite unable to see the farther horizon of famine and deprivation in the world. In one especially demeaning and irrelevant passage, the right hon. and learned Gentleman fidgeted around with information about an increase in the price of entry certificates. What on earth was he doing? He should have been addressing the real problems.

The other details were even more depressing because they were far more substantial. There was the news about UNESCO, the cut in the British Council, and the cut in the world service of the BBC. Those announcements may have sounded the death knell of British influence in the world. Surely that is not the Government's intention. It is certainly not what the House or the country wants.

There was another and even more crucial announcement. If I understood the figures correctly—my mental arithmetic may not be as good as that of some other hon. Members—there is to be, in effect, a 2 per cent. cut in our aid budget in real terms. The speech will have to be read very carefully. It will certainly be read carefully in the underdeveloped countries, as an indication of the British contribution and of Britain's priorities. I hope that people will read the report of the whole debate as well, because I believe that it will forcefully represent the views of the House and the people of this country. In their letters to hon. Members, the British people are showing a far more energetic and generous response to the problems of Ethiopia than the Government are.

The debate has also, rightly, embraced the longer-term problems. As the right hon. Member for Daventry said, there is a question of political will in connection with the United Nations' 0·7 per cent. target. It is a disgrace that we have never reached that target. No hon. Member can be proud of the fact that we now contribute only half that amount. Of course we could do more. Nine other OECD countries contribute a higher percentage than we do. Smaller countries and poorer countries, such as the Netherlands and Norway, do more. We cannot be proud of our record.

There is also the question of the effectiveness of our aid. I believe that the debate has severely blurred the distinction in terms of effectiveness and in financial terms between bilateral project aid and food and humanitarian aid. We could publish our aid figures in net rather than gross financial terms. We could show the receipts which are connected with project aid agreements — receipts from firms for equipment, staffing, salaries, materials and technical expertise. Those receipts could be netted off against our gross aid and then the real net financial effect of our country's aid programme would be seen to be very different. That might help to concentrate the minds of hon. Members and of the British people on the net financial benefit or loss to this country of our aid programme. That was the altruistic aim behind the 1974 United Nations resolution.

What are the immediate steps that we could take to improve our approach to aid? We could support the World Bank's initiative in September this year for an emergency programme in Africa. I hope that the Minister will reassure us that the $200 million will be devoted to that purpose now that it cannot be allocated for its original purpose under the International Development Association's programme. The Foreign Secretary could encourage greater co-ordination of aid programmes and therefore greater efficiency. Most crucially, he could be encouraging the Government to negotiate immediately and effectively within the EEC to enable food surpluses to be released more swiftly and to be directed more accurately

and flexibly. Our correspondents have pressed for that. Much aid goes to countries where it undercuts the price of locally produced food. It distorts local markets and acts as a disincentive to local production and investment. We could scrutinise our aid. Although 63 per cent. of our aid goes to the 50 poorest countries — we have a good record in that respect — is the Minister convinced that the aid gets to the poorest people in those poorest countries? I doubt whether any hon. Member could say that it does. Such scrutiny would be supported by most hon. Members and it would ensure much better use of available resources.

As the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) and others have said, the debate is about our national interest, complex choices, political issues and priorities. Far more than that, however, it is about the fact that in spite of our producing vast surpluses, human beings in other continents are starving. The debate is about life and death. That cannot be said of many of our debates. It is a chilling responsibility for the Government which we cannot ignore. From his actions and sincerity I am sure that the Minister understands that. It is also obvious that those who have spoken today understand it. However, from their actions and priorities and from the Foreign Secretary's speech today, there is grave doubt about whether he and the Prime Minister understand it.

The British people have warmer hearts than the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary. They have responded, especially to Ethiopia, with characteristic and magnificent generosity. They expect the Government to match their generosity and to translate it into political action. They expect the Government to rise to the challenge of Ethiopia and other countries where people are dying. In spite of its fine though rather complacent words, the Government amendment fails dismally to meet that challenge. I hope that the House will support the Liberal motion, stand against the Government and, with constituents who have written to us, reject the Government amendment. If the House does that, it will have made a gesture and have put down a marker on behalf of people who desperately need our assistance.

8.42 pm

Mr. Bowen Wells (Hertford and Stortford): I rise in anger and sorrow. What we have heard from my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary is short-sighted, politically inept, unnecessary, meaningless in total public expenditure terms and mindless in its pursuit of a budgetary target. It undermines the work that my right hon. and learned Friend and my right hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development have done since they came to office. It undermines the Government's good record in overseas matters. Even if our overseas development programme is not as large as many of us would like, it is effective and has helped and continues to help many people throughout the world. The Government have undermined their good name and let down the British people by the manner in which they have conducted the debate.

I must balance that statement unless I am to be treated as some kind of nut case who favours aid and ever more aid. Much of the work that has been and is being done is excellent. I wholeheartedly disagree with what the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher) said about the Government's record on Ethiopia. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development immediately sought ways in which to assist Ethiopia to prepare for the famine as soon as it was clear, two years ago, that famine would come. Bearing in mind the nature of the Government in Ethiopia, the only means by which he could use the overseas development budget was through non-governmental organisations such as Oxfam, Save the Children Fund and the Red Cross. The Government doubled the amount of money available to such organisations and relied on them to get aid to the very people the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central, talked about—the poorest people in the poorest areas.

We have to work in the context of the country concerned and the Government that rule it. We are not a colonial power and we cannot simply say, "You must do development work in this way." The Ethiopian Government's policy involves large state farms producing crops for export. That Government have carried on a vicious civil war against many of their people, especially in the drought-affected areas of Tigré and Eritrea. The Government wanted to stop secessionist movements in those areas and have used despicable tactics to that end.

The drought has not been rainless. As the Foreign Affairs Select Committee heard last night, there are flash floods. What must be done and what local farmers know how to do is to conserve such water as there is by using small earth dams. Such dams increase agricultural production dramatically. If there is a war, the dams are broken by the passage of troops and vehicles and by the fighting. That has happened and the Ethiopian Government bear a heavy responsibility for that. We can only try to do something about it, even though the Ethiopian Government might oppose our efforts.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Mr. Amery) said, the Ethiopian Government have not yet declared an amnesty to get food which British people, the EC, America and latterly the Soviet Union have sent. The Soviet Union has sent only small amounts of aid and it has supported the Ethiopian Government's iniquitous policies. We have a good record. As I understand it, the Government propose to maintain the aid budget in line with the autumn statement and the White Paper. As has been said, that means a cut if the budget does not compensate for exchange rate variations and rising costs because of overseas inflation. In their reply to the Foreign Affairs Select Committee, in which it was suggested that we establish an equalisation fund, the Government said that instead of establishing such a fund they would bring forward in the spring Supplementary Estimates, sums to compensate the Foreign Affairs budget and the ODA budget for risen costs.

Neither my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary nor my right hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development has said whether that remains the case. If it does, the cuts are a matter on which my right hon. and learned Friend should be congratulated. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor has said that some of the risen costs in the diplomatic budget must be met but that he will leave the ODA budget alone and let it increase by the amount of its overseas risen costs. If that is so, far from condemning, we should be congratulating my right hon. and learned Friend as this would be the first time that any Government had compensated any Vote for overseas risen costs. I hope that we shall have a reply so that the House can know what we are talking about. My right hon. and

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learned Friend the Foreign Secretary has left the House in complete bewilderment about what he is talking about, and that cannot be the proper way in which to present a case.

We live in an interdependent world. We need our Foreign Office posts overseas principally to present our position on major political items such as peace and defence. They should also be concerned with commerce and its promotion. Our economy will not expand unless we export more. That is the nature of Britain. We must export, not only to expand the economy but to enable us to provide overseas development in greater quantities. It is counter-productive and short-sighted to cut posts overseas in the context of expanding our economy in real terms.

It is also counter-productive to silence our voice through the BBC external service. It is equally counter-productive to silence the promotion of our cultural heritage and the English language through the British Council. That will have a damaging effect on the provision of overseas student places in this country, which the British Council principally administers.

Interdependence means that overseas countries must have the means by which they can afford to buy goods and services from this country. To do that we must provide the infrastructure of a proper diplomatic service with commercial offices in every area. We must also provide the pump-priming finance to ensure the development that will produce an expansion of world trade as well as the abolition of poverty of the kind in Ethiopia which so disgraces our world.

8.51 pm

Mr. Alan Howarth (Stratford-on-Avon): I should like to make a limited but practical suggestion which I believe will find favour on both sides of the House. We all want to see the maximum possible proportion of money available from the Foreign Office budget channelled towards providing help for people who are starving and in desperate need. At the same time, we do not want cuts which are detrimental to other valuable activities funded from the Foreign Office budget.

A possibility is available of making a worthwhile switch of funding of up to £20 million—a significant sum—within the overall Foreign Office budget in a manner which should be acceptable to us all. I heard what my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary said about the BBC's external services capital programme, I believe that he has missed a windfall opportunity that was under his nose.

My suggestion is that my right hon. and learned Friend should abandon the current proposals by the BBC and Foreign Office to build a BBC external services transmitter at Bearley on the edge of Stratford-on-Avon. They would thereby release £19,850,000, a considerable proportion of which could over the next 18 months be added to the sums otherwise available for famine relief and aid. I hope that the House will accept that I am not in an opportunistic way seeking to make a point on behalf of my constituents. The issues raised by Bearley are not just of local significance; they present an important and practical opportunity in the context of the aid budget.

If the Government follow my suggestion, there will be no detriment to the existing external service broadcasting schedule. I am a strong supporter of the concept of external service broadcasting and very much admire the integrity and quality of the broadcasts made. I also want the audibility improvement programme to go ahead, but only on a properly considered and sensible basis. I shall not take up the time of the House by elaborating the reasons why the proposal to use the Bearley site so ill-judged, because I explained them in an adjournment debate on 18 July.

I shall only say that there has been a catalogue of confusion, incompetence and misrepresentation by some BBC staff who have been responsible for finding a site and advising the director general on Bearley. The formidable weight of technical evidence is that radio frequency interference from this transmitter would have a devastating effect on homes and business. The Royal Shakespeare theatre has stated in plain terms that if the transmitter is built at Bearley it will have to close. A total of 163 Members from all parties have supported an early-day motion urging the Secretary of State not to permit the transmitter to be built.

I ask the House to agree that, rather than spend £20 million in the next year or 18 months on wreaking havoc in Warwickshire, it would be better to spend it in a special reallocation to help starving people in Ethiopia and sub-Saharan Africa in their current crisis. I hope that the BBC and the Foreign Office will now reconsider their position. They should abandon the Bearley application and either look for another site or develop plans to use satellite technology.

Meanwhile, in the fiscal year 1985-86, a substantial part of that £20 million earmarked for Bearley should instead go to aid. That would be a decent and prudent course. I very much hope that it will commend itself to all parties and to my right hon. and learned Friend.

8.56 pm

Mr. Richard Page (Hertford, South-West): In the short time at my disposal I wish to say that we should look at development aid not through the rose-tinted spectacles of those who can only recognise volumes of money but in the context of value for money. But—and this is a but in another direction—we would do well to regard parts of our overseas aid budget as the valuable seedcorn that benefits the donor and recipient countries.

Before developing that point, I wish to address myself to the question of our embassies and consulates throughout the world, because I believe in helping individuals who export from the United Kingdom. We must reappraise the role of our embassies and consulates and encourage trade organisations, chambers of commerce and trade and exporting countries to develop closer links. In this regard, the Department of Trade and Industry and the Foreign Office can play an important role.

I am pleased to hear that only yesterday a further step was taken in that direction, when a trade association and some business men held a meeting at the Department of Trade and Industry to explore the opportunities for exporting to east Africa.

The help to our exporters from our embassies has improved dramatically during the past 10 years. However, we should find out how the volume of that support to the commercial sector compares with that from other countries, and how it stands as a ratio of the total budget. Do any embassy evaluations take place year by year of their commercial impact on the area or country in which they operate? Are they given targets to achieve? Perhaps

we should examine how Germany operates its commercial sections, how it appoints its commercial attachés and how they operate.

We need to assess the value of overseas aid, not only for ourselves but for the countries receiving it. We must examine the entire policy, not with a soft, but with a hard-nosed approached. We should ask why other countries —there are a few exceptions—are either increasing or holding level their overseas aid, which is usually tied more closely to a much higher ratio of bilateral to multilateral aid compared with ours. The ratio in France is 6:1 whereas ours is 1:1. Yet as we reduce our aid and other countries increase it, we are getting back 75 per cent. of our bilateral aid out of the £604 million that we gave in 1983. On the aid and trade provisions of £32·7 million, we achieved a further £98 million worth of extra business expended on British goods and services. We also did well from multilateral aid. It is estimated that last year British goods and services equivalent to 120 per cent. of the £477 million which were expended came back in purchases by the agencies concerned.

These figures raise further questions. Do companies in other countries produce even better returns? Although I appreciate that that could be regarded as commercially confidential, we need the information about additionality to assess the effectiveness of our overseas aid. I hope that the survey commissioned by the Overseas Development Agency with St. Andrew's university will soon be available so that we can assess the effectiveness of our aid.

Our aid is strongly associated with the poorest countries. On that we should be congratulated. I am not saying that we should cut it, but I ask whether there is a value in providing aid to the more rapidly expanding sections, such as the far east, where other industrialised countries seem to concentrate. My right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) made that point most effectively.

That in turn prompts the question: why do other countries concentrate in that area? Are they more philanthropic? Do they care more? Or do they get a better return for their country by reducing unemployment through carrying out a complex calculation in computing the overall benefit to their country, known now ... calculating the social cost?

Finally, I turn to the question of the aid and trade provision. As I mentioned, about £32 million worth of aid generated a further £98 million worth of orders for companies in this country. I believe that that ratio is worth encouraging. However, the aid and trade provision is non-elastic in both time and country. Aid allocated in one year cannot be carried over to the next and aid allocated to a country for a year or for a project that is unspent cannot be re-allocated. With that type of ratio of return I wonder whether some flexibility could not be wisely built into that area.

The debate shows that we care. I believe that my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary made a strong case for our work in the disadvantaged parts of the world. We can be proud of what we do and we should not knock ourselves. However, we can combine practicality and concern for the disadvantaged. It could be that from all of this we might provide employment in this country at a far lower cost by a resultant additionality, which will bring benefits to this country, by establishing new markets as well as helping other nations in the emerging world.

9.4 pm

Mr. Richard Ottaway (Nottingham, North): The hon. Members for Walthamstow (Mr. Deakins) and for West Bromwich, West (Miss Boothroyd) mentioned population, and I associate myself with their remarks on that subject. The latter part of the 20th century stands out in history as a period of remarkable population growth. In the early part of the century, growth was at the then rapid rate of 1 per cent.; since then it has accelerated to twice that rate, and between 1950 and today the world's population nearly doubled from 2·5 billion to almost 4·8 billion.

That explosion is illustrated by two facts. The world's population is growing at the rate of 200,000 babies a day, which is equivalent to the population of a town the size of Southampton each day, or of a city the size of Birmingham each week. The highest growth is in Africa, where a country such as Ethiopia doubles its population every 27 years, and Kenya doubles its population every 17 years. A third of the world's population is aged under 15, and the percentage is increasing. Tomorrow's parents have already been born.

The increase in the world's population has dropped in recent years from 2·4 per cent. to 2 per cent., but so big is the explosion that numbers are still increasing in absolute terms. The percentage reduction is almost entirely attributable to the draconian policy of China, where marriage is delayed and families are restricted to one child for each couple. However, the population of the world continues to grow, and even if from tomorrow no couple had more than two children, the population would continue to grow for 60 or 70 years.

Until the 20th century, prosperity and population increase went hand in hand, but during this century, especially since 1950, population growth has been faster in developing countries where incomes are low. Of the 1984 world population increase of at least 80 million, more than 70 million will be added in the developing countries, which now contain about three quarters of the global population. A combination of continued high fertility and much reduced mortality has led to population growth of between 2 per cent. and 4 per cent. a year in most developing countries, compared with 1 per cent. a year in most developed countries. The hard facts are that growth at 1 per cent. a year means that, in 70 years, population merely doubles; at 3 per cent. a year, population grows eightfold.

It is most important that extrapolations of population should be treated not as predictions but as reasonable assumptions. If the projections of the World Bank are correct, population will grow from 4·8 billion today to 10 billion by 2050. The frightening fact is that 96 per cent. of the increase will be in the developing countries. At the present rate of growth, Ethiopia will have a population of 230 million, whereas its present population is 31 million.

Rapid population growth slows economic progress. As population grows more rapidly, larger investments are needed just to maintain current capital per person—physical capital in an infrastructure sense and human capital in the needs of education. With so many of the world's population under the age of 15, countries such as Malawi can expect the numbers of their schoolchildren to double or treble by the end of the century. A rapid fertility decline could result in savings of more than 50 per cent. in the school system 30 years from now—savings that could be used to improve the quality of schooling.

[Mr. Richard Ottaway]

High population growth means, first, rapid expansion of the labour market. In Nigeria, the high fertility of the 1970s guarantees that its working-age population will double by the end of the century. Even in Britain the post-war baby boom is having a significant impact upon the labour market, and is a root cause of increased unemployment.

Secondly, rapid population growth upsets the precarious balance between man and the environment. In many parts of Africa strains on natural resources are already acute. In Ethiopia the price of wood increased ten-fold during the 1970s, and it now claims up to 20 per cent. of household incomes. Competition for land is increasing; in the lowland area surrounding the Ganges in south Asia, population growth and competition for land has forced many people to live too close to the river, in the path of annual floods.

Thirdly, rapid population growth causes immense urban economic and social problems, with urban systems becoming more and more unmanageable. Sao Paulo in Brazil, which by the year 2000 could be the world's second largest city after Mexico City, was smaller in 1950 than Manchester. Who would have thought that London, which in 1950 was the second largest city in the world, would not even be ranked in the 25 largest cities by the end of the century?

It clearly follows from what I have said that I strongly believe that more of our overseas aid programme should be spent on population policies in an effort to slow population growth. Many of today's problems are attributable to population growth. We now know that Government programmes can and do make a difference. Many developing countries have shown that fertility can be substantially reduced, and over a short period. It was once assumed that reducing fertility in developing countries was linked to economic prosperity and incomes rising to levels enjoyed by today's developed countries. This view seems to be confirmed by the declining population growth in Korea, Singapore and Hong Kong.

However, development in a vast number of countries is so slow that we cannot afford to wait, and the Government should not hesitate to assist where they can to minimise the catastrophic effects of population growth in the world. In recent years, population decline has been linked to a different kind of development, that of education, health and alleviation of poverty. The decline in the birth rate since 1965 was much more closely associated with adult literacy and life expectancy that was GNP per capita.

An analysis of the drop in the population growth shows two fundamental policies working in harmony with each other to contribute significantly to a decline in population growth. One is more widespread education, especially for women, and the other is easier access to contraception. Family planning programmes are shown to be ineffective when it is difficult to operate programmes without some educated women to staff them. Equally, education has had a minimal effect where family planning services have been unavailable. The effects of the two together, however, have been powerful. Evidence from household surveys in India, Egypt and Nigeria shows that parents have fewer children when the education and family planning are readily available.

Some 87 countries in the developing world, representing about 95 per cent. of its population, now provide publicly-subsidised family planning programmes. Tremendous progress has been made in improving the access of couples to information and services, but much more needs to be done. Nearly all programmes fail to reach most rural people, even in the towns and cities the quality of service is often poor, and discontinuation rates of users are high. Of the 26 countries that have yet to introduce family planning programmes, nearly half are in Africa.

About $2 billion is currently spent on public family planning programmes in developing countries each year. The World Bank, in its excellent publication entitled "World Development Report 1984", estimates that today, any move to meet the unmet needs of women who would like to space or limit births but who are not practising contraception, would require another $1 billion a year. It states that if developing countries are to achieve a rapid decline in fertility leading to a developing world population of 6·5 billion by the middle of the next century it is estimated that $7·6 billion by the end of the year would be required. To have a standard decline, leading to a developing world population of 8·4 billion in 2050 would require $5·6 billion. These figures may sound a lot, but an official of the World Bank estimated earlier this week that to double the current programme would require only a 0·5 per cent. cut in other aid programmes.

Like the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Deakins), I believe that there will be many more famines like the current one in Ethiopia, and that the current population explosion is a contributory factor to the difficulties that the world is facing. I accept the financial constraints that any Government will have upon an aid programme but believe that a modest increase in the proportion allocated to population policies will have a significant influence on world population, and will ease the problems that we leave to our grandchildren. An increase in population growth means an increase in the demand for aid. Time is not on our side, and these decisions need to be made now.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Robert Hughes.

Mr. John Stokes (Halesowen and Stourbridge): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. So far, nobody has spoken in favour of the Government. I wish to do so, but I have not yet been called.

Mr. Speaker: I am still calling Mr. Robert Hughes.

9.13 pm

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): That is the best speech that I have ever heard the hon. Member for Halesowen and Stourbridge (Mr. Stokes) make.

We are having this debate because the nation was sickened, as I was, by the harrowing television pictures from Ethiopia. The saddest thing of all is that many of us on both sides of the House have sought to bring overseas aid to the front of our debates for many years, with little success. The Foreign Secretary's response was inadequate. It was bereft of compassion, care, understanding and hope for the future. But the Foreign Secretary was candid about one thing and that was simply that countless thousands will die and countless thousands will face a future of indescribable degradation lest our economic recovery is imperilled.

The truth of the matter is that our economic recovery is as real as the oasis that appears in the desert, which turns out to be simply a mirage. We have completely failed to see overseas aid other than in terms of emergency or some other sort of food aid. We have done nothing about rural development, developing infrastructure or curing the legacy of colonialism—the lack of transport.

The Foreign Secretary had no idea of what the future holds. All he did was to shuffle through the figures and leave his hon. Friends on the Back Benches confused, not about whether there was a cut in overseas aid but about precisely how much it would be. No Government in history have ordered their international affairs to solve the problems of poverty and famine. If our generation cannot do it we bequeath a dreadful legacy to those who follow and who must try to solve it.

9.15 pm

Mr. David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): I am proud that my party chose this subject on one of its rare opportunities to propose a motion to the House. The debate is significant because it is the first to be held under the new ten-minute rule. By its conclusion, 28 Members will have had a chance to speak, which proves the success of the experiment. In that 28 I am not including the hon. Member for Halesowen and Stourbridge (Mr. Stokes) whose valuable contribution drew attention to another feature of the debate—that nobody had spoken for the Government. The hon. Member for Broxtowe (Mr. Lester) put it well and moderately when he said that there was in the House tonight a shared sense of disappointment. Others have put it more strongly than that.

Let me dispose of one matter at the start. I do not propose to go into the question of our membership of UNESCO. To be candid, that announcement has nothing whatever to do with the debate because it does not affect the budget for the coming year in any way. But no doubt it is useful to fill up newspaper space when there is nothing else to say.

I hope that the Minister will reply to the point made by the right hon. Member for Clydesdale (Dame J. Hart). If she is right that the disputed area of UNESCO's policy covers only 13 per cent. of the budget, the Government's reaction seems excessive. I understood that the whole point of giving a year's notice to an international organisation was to enable that organisation to adjust its administration and budget to the fact that a member was to depart. If we are criticising the administration of UNESCO—I understand that that is one of the main criticisms—it is not calculated to help it to announce a conditional withdrawal and then say we might stay in after all in a year's time.

The main topic of the debate the aid budget. It cannot be said too loudly, too forcefully or too often that whatever gloss is put on the figures or however they are juggled the truth is that for 1985-86 Britain's official contribution to world aid is being cut in real terms because of the combination of real inflation and the drop in the value of the pound sterling since the figures were first calculated in the early part of this year. At the moment it is too early to put a figure on it, but various estimates that I have had put the figure between 2 and 3 per cent. in real terms. Let us not disguise the fact that the announcement made this afternoon means that we shall be contributing in terms of real resources to the poorer parts of the world in the next financial year less than we have been doing.

A further issue, separate but related in our motion, is the expenditure on the British Council and the BBC external services. Through nearly all my time in the House I have believed that there were three areas of public expenditure from which Britain derives a great deal more than it puts in. One was the British Council, one was the external services, and the third was the subsidy that we gave to the fees for students coming from overseas to our colleges and universities. All three areas have in common relatively trivial expenditure and quite excessive results for the expenditure that they receive. All three have been grievously harmed by the Government.

Since the announcement this afternoon, the British Council has reminded us that it has already suffered a cut of 20 per cent. in its budget since 1979. The hon. Member for Stroud (Sir A. Kershaw) who, I think, is a vice-chairman of the British Council, said that he estimated that the cut announced means a 3 per cent. reduction in the council's budget. The council's other vice-chairman, the hon. Member for City of Durham (Mr. Hughes), implied that he would have to reconsider his position. The House should not underestimate the damage that we are doing to that valuable service, which most hon. Members who have travelled abroad have seen for themselves.

We have already been through a period in which the external services of the BBC have been trimmed. I thought that the right hon. Member for Blackpool, South (Sir P. Blaker) made a telling point when he said that with the further 1 per cent. cut we would be broadcasting fewer hours to the world than Albania. That is a terrible thing for a country with our reputation and history to maintain.

In the light of the cuts all round, I am bound to agree with the right hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, South-East (Mr. Pym) that the amendment is lacking in integrity. I do not see how anyone can say that the Government's aid programme is being maintained unless that is qualified by the phrase in the amendment "consistent with" the Government's

"overall economic and foreign policy objectives".

Nor do I see how the House can be invited to endorse the Government's continued support for the British Council and the external services of that BBC when that support is delining before our very eyes. The drop in the aid budget would be serious enough were it not for the record of the past four or five years which has been mentioned many times in the debate. When the Conservative party came to office we were spending about 0·52 per cent. of our gross national product on official aid. That figure has now fallen to 0·35 per cent. But an analysis of the figures reveals an even more serious situation. Since 1979 all the OECD countries except Britain have been increasing their real official aid contributions. The figure for Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Sweden and the Netherlands is up by 5 per cent. and for Austria, Finland, France, Italy and Norway it is up by over 10 per cent. Thus, in the OECD league table Britain is the only one to go in to the negative column as having decreased its aid over that period as a percentage of GNP.

Moreover, an analysis of the shift in our bilateral aid to the 50 poorest countries shows that in 1979 about 40 per cent. of it went to them, whereas the figure has now fallen to nearer 30 per cent. Thus there has not only been a reduction in real terms but, sadly, the balance of our official aid has been shifting. According to the figures, it is the poorest countries that have been suffering most.

[Mr. David Steel]

I should like to take up a point that was made strongly by the Foreign Secretary but with which I disagreed. He talked about the increase in private investment since the lifting of exchange controls. I agree that private investment and trade have a major part to play in assisting the developing world. However, we should be clear that private investment is not the same as aid, but is something upon which people expect to get a return. It cannot be put in the same altruistic humanitarian bracket. Moreover, the figures that the Foreign Secretary gave us show that the amount of the increase in private investment that goes to the poorer countries is infinitesimal. The figures that he gave us included, for example, the great expansion in private investment in countries such as Singapore and Hong Kong since the lifting of exchange controls. People are naturally getting a very good rate of return there, but by no stretch of the imagination can it be said that that is part of Britain's humanitarian effort in the world.

I hope that the Minister will restrict his consideration to the real topic, which is the official aid programme. At one point the Foreign Secretary almost gave us to understand that the country's entire programme of economic recovery might be blown off course unless the overseas aid programme took its fair share of the cuts all round. To repeat that awful word coined by the former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath), this is automaticity of a most extraordinary kind. Even if one examines the Government's theology of monetarism, it is not true to say that they have accepted that every part of Government expenditure must take an automatic cut. Other hon. Members have given examples during the debate. The right hon. Member for Blackpool, South spoke of the £552 million expenditure this year on the Falklands. There is no question of that expenditure having to take an *x* per cent. cut because that has been decreed by the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

The same is true of the Trident missile programme, which was first reported to the House in 1980 at £5 billion, although the latest estimate is about double that. Again, the clear evidence is that when the Government decide politically, rightly or wrongly, that they wish to spend in a certain direction they do it. I shall not deal with that argument, although I feel strongly about it. All that the House asks is that the Government operate the same standard on the overseas aid programme and that they use their political will to decide not to cut aid.

Many references have been made to public opinion. It is encouraging that the public has realised that the long-term solution does not lie in loading Hercules aircraft with grain from Europe and flying it out. The public realises that problems such as irrigation, construction, soil erosion, horticulture and population control have to be solved if we are to avoid repeated disasters.

We all have memories of particular overseas aid projects. One of the most powerful images that will remain with me all my life is that which I gained when I visited a village of about 5,000 people in Botswana. One member of the Peace Corps had worked there for a year and had transformed the living standards of those people by digging three wells and building a water storage tank. Even if that man does nothing else in his life, in politics, business or in any other sphere, he will have done more to help people than most people in their entire lives.

The Voluntary Service Overseas programme has a budget of less than £5 million. We could do a lot more to use the energies of our young and skilled people, many of whom are unemployed, and to direct them into overseas aid programmes.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer announced a possible £1·5 billion tax cut for next year. We have not said that such an amount should be used for overseas aid. That sum is more than is spent on the whole overseas aid programme. We have not even said that we should give 10 per cent. of possible tax cuts to the programme. All that we have said is that the programme should be kept as it is. That is a modest request.

The right hon. Member for Taunton (Mr. du Cann) was right when he said that people had been writing to hon. Members pleading with them not only to help dying children but to prevent more catastrophes. Mention has been made of leading public opinion. In this case public opinion is leading us and the Government should respond.

9.27 pm

The Minister for Overseas Development (Mr. Timothy Raison): We have had a serious debate, which is as it should be. A galaxy of Privy Councillors and many other informed and eloquent speakers have addressed the House. The House has been full. Again, that is as it should be and I welcome it. I welcome a major debate on aid and our other overseas activities.

Many specific points with which I agree have been made. The House understands that our aid programme has to deal with the desperate crisis in Ethiopia recently as well as long-term development. We must never forget that. The House has shown its respect for the work done on behalf of the Foreign Secretary and the many branches of Government for which he is responsible. We welcome that. We have no doubt about the quality of the work done on behalf of the Foreign Office and of the country as a whole.

The debate has revealed some misunderstandings and my task is to try to clear them up. I cannot answer every point so I shall write to hon. Members on both sides of the House about their specific remarks. I think, for example, of my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) and others.

Tonight, I shall try to concentrate on the major themes of this important debate. The House will understand if I tend to concentrate on my own area of responsibility as Minister for Overseas Development. I am proud to serve in that role and I believe that my Department is doing first-class work.

Important points have been raised in this debate which fall outside the scope of my section of the Foreign Office. I shall first address some of the points made about those other areas that are within the responsibility of my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary. An important point has been made about overseas risen costs. I am, for the moment, talking not about the aid side of the operation where the picture is different, but about the other activities that are the responsibility of my right hon. and learned Friend.

More than one hon. Member referred to the observations made by my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary on the Foreign Affairs Select Committee report on the FCO estimates. The Committee had commented on the impact of risen costs on the FCO diplomatic wing and the British Council. I shall quote

what my right hon. and learned Friend said in Cmnd. 9367 which was published last month in reply to the Select Committee. His words are important, and I know that hon. Members will listen carefully to them. My right hon. and learned Friend said:

"rises in expenditure resulting from exchange rate movements and differential inflation will be considered as requirements based on changed economic assumptions . . . Parliament will when necessary be invited by a Spring Supplementary Estimate to vote those resources which the Foreign and Commonwealth Office cannot find from offsetting savings".

My right hon. and learned Friend defined those savings as those which are

"acceptable to Ministers in the light of the Government's foreign policy requirements and its responsibilities for British interests overseas, including cultural interests."

The command paper explained that the arrangements will apply to the British Council's overseas risen costs as well as the FCO's. My right hon. and learned Friend went on:

"In fixing the longer term programmes of the Department in the Public Expenditure Survey, account will be taken of changes of economic assumptions up or down in setting the baseline for future years."

That means that, as far as is acceptable, the British Council and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office will be compensated for adverse movement in exchange rates and overseas inflation. First, all possible offsetting savings should be sought. I think that the House should see from that statement by my right hon. and learned Friend that we are not up against an immovable brick wall.

Sir Paul Bryan (Boothferry): Does that proviso cover the BBC overseas service?

Mr. Raison: I gather that the answer is yes.

Mr. Geoffrey Rippon (Hexham): It is obvious that this statement will repay careful study and that it is necessary to do so. Does it mean more or less money this year, for anything?

Mr. Raison: With respect, that is hardly fair. We cannot at this stage say what it will mean. It is clear from the statement available to the House that we must consider whether it is possible to deal with the impact of these risen costs by offsetting savings. The statement holds out the prospect that, if it is not possible to do that, it will be possible to find the additional money. That is an important statement, and I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Hexham (Mr. Rippon) will take note of it.

Mr. Spearing: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way, especially in view of the time. It is a pity that the Foreign Secretary did not draw that matter to our attention in his speech although I did. When the Minister says that Ministers will decide, does he mean Ministers in the Foreign Office or Ministers including the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Prime Minister?

Mr. Raison: The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well the system of collective government. His question is frivolous. I quoted clearly what my right hon. and learned Friend said. Hon. Members may wish to study the text which is available. I believe that what I said is of significance to the debate.

Mr. Stuart Holland: Will the Minister clarify what he has said? He appears to be saying that if there are foreign risen costs and if our exchange rate changes, there will be cuts, and that those decisions will not be taken by his Department but by the Government.

Mr. Raison: I said that Parliament will when necessary be invited by a spring Supplementary Estimate to vote those resources that the FCO cannot find from offsetting savings. That must be a decision by Ministers. There is no alternative to that. I am repeating to the House a statement which I think is of significance. I hope that the House will think carefully about what I said.

In the case of the British Council, my right hon. and learned Friend has judged that, as against £7 million of overseas risen costs, the council should find offsetting savings of £1·2 million and should be compensated by the balance of £5·8 million added to the planned provision for the council for 1985-86 agreed last year. That is a cash increase not a cut.

In his interesting speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Sir A. Kershaw) said that the offsetting savings of £1·2 million which the council must find represented 3 per cent. of the council's budget. The total resources available to the council are the £67 million core budget, now to be increased by £5·8 million, plus £11 million further contributions from ODA, for example, for the administration of technical co-operation, and £23 million of reciepts from English language teaching and educational services, making a total for 1985-86 of over £100 million. The £1·2 million savings are thus about only 1 per cent. of that figure. I hope my hon. Friend derives some reassurance from that.

We must not exaggerate the offsetting savings that the FCO is having to make. Our final decisions on FCO expenditure next year will take account of future overseas price movements. I am confident that the adjustments that my right hon. and learned Friend has already made will be sufficient for the present to deal with that problem.

My right hon. and learned Friend has announced an increase of over £2 million for the BBC audibility programme. Reference has been made to the great importance, which my right hon. and learned Friend entirely accepts, of ensuring that those important services can be heard and he has, therefore, agreed to that increase. It will enable important relay stations to be built in Hong Kong and the Seychelles earlier that envisaged, with completion by 1987 rather than 1988.

My right hon. and learned Friend has also announced an increase of £750,000 towards the BBC's risen costs. They are not overseas risen costs such as those of the British Council, but improved pay and allowances for BBC staff. Those increases are in addition to the planned figures estblished by the February 1984 public expenditure White Paper. He is asking the BBC to absorb a further £1·2 million beyond those figures of risen costs to pay for increased staff allowances. That compares with the planned and agreed provision for the external services of £86 million to which should be added the £15 million spent by the FCO broadcast group on relay stations in Cyprus and elsewhere, operated on behalf of the BBC. So to that £101 million he is adding a further £2·9 million.

The BBC external services are still broadcasting 720 hours a week, which is higher than the figure in 1979 when we came into office. Since 1979, the provision available to the BBC external services has grown by 14 per cent. in real terms. That is a good and not a bad record.

Mr. Johnston: The simple fact is that the BBC external services budget has been cut by £1·2 million. Is not that the case? What effect does the Minister think that will have on the service it provides?

Mr. Raison: The hon. Gentleman must understand that my right hon. and learned Friend is asking the BBC to absorb an element of £1·2 million, but at the same time he is making other resources available to it. I do not think that anybody can look objectively at that picture and deny that what my right hon. and learned Friend is doing is on balance thoroughly helpful to the BBC.

Mr. Bowen Wells: Will my right hon. Friend explain the matter in layman's language? Are we partially compensating the foreign and diplomatic budget, which includes the external services, for overseas risen costs? We are not meeting the whole of the risen costs; we are meeting part of them. If that is so, it is the first time that that budget has been so underwritten.

Mr. Raison: May I refer my hon. Friend to the quotation in the earlier part of my speech? The situation is set out clearly in the paper. The House knows perfectly well that I am not saying that there is an automatic compensation factor. The passage that I quoted shows that there is the possibility, if the need is there, for a compensation factor to apply. The House will recognise that that is of real value.

I turn to the aid programme, which is the area of my own responsibility. The facts are clear. The 1983 expenditure White Paper said that the 1985-86 net aid programme would total £1,130 million. The 1984 White Paper said that the 1985-86 net aid programme will still be £1,130 million. That sum represents an increase of £31 million over the current year's figure.

The speculation, the rumours, the alarms and excursions have been proved wrong. The aid budget is not being cut by £40 million, £60 million or even, as suggested in the newspapers, £160 million. We are exactly on course, we are exactly on the previous projections, and the aid programme stands as it was.

We have been discussing overseas costs. There the situation concerning the aid budget is different. They are much less likely to be unfavourable because there is much less of a dollar component in them than in the other parts of the Foreign Office.

Mr. Stuart Holland: The Minister has not answered the point that was raised by several hon. Members. The 1985-86 figures are given in cash terms and not in constant prices. Do they or do they not take account of inflation? If inflation is 5 per cent., it will be a cut of 2 per cent.

Mr. Raison: The hon. Gentleman is an economist and knows perfectly well that the old practice of the automatic updating of figures for inflation has been ended and we have moved on to cash terms. *[Interruption.]* The increase that is represented is about 3 per cent. That is the increase in cash terms. *[Interruption.]*

It may be a cut—*[Interruption.]* It depends on the rate of inflation. We are talking about next year's rate provision. I accept that the increase for next year may not match the level of inflation. On the other hand, over the three-year period of last year, this year and next year, we confidently expect to keep the aid programmes in pace with inflation. We are faced with difficult economic pressures, including public expenditure pressure, and I regard it as a considerable achievement that we are able to maintain the aid programme at this level. I am glad that we have been able to do so. The rumours and suggestions of a cut which have been spread over the past few weeks have been proved to be unfounded.

Mr. Holland *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Vauxhall (Mr. Holland) has intervened on a number of occasions and the Minister is not giving way now.

Mr. Holland *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Raison: Hon. Members on both sides of the House who take a genuine interest in the aid programme—I am happy to say that it seems that their numbers are increasing—know that Britain's aid programme is respected across the world for its quality and its achievement. The basic purpose of the programme is to help long-term development. We must help countries to help themselves. We must help them dispense with the need for short-term emergency aid.

Dame Judith Hart *rose*——

Mr. Raison: No, I shall not give way.

It is the poorest countries which need most assistance. However, the larger poor countries such as India and Pakistan need help as well as the least developed countries. Our aid programme is focused on the poorest countries, especially in the Commonwealth. In 1983, 79 per cent. of our bilateral aid went to the poor countries eligible for IDA funds with an income per head of less than $800. This compares favourably with the record of other donors and with that of the previous Labour Administration.

Our programme is based on grants rather than loans, which is a factor of great value in these days of mammoth debts. It embodies an important emphasis on technical co-operation and manpower aid. It is geared to achieve the maximum results, often in collaboration with other donors. The days of dispensing aid without caring too much about the results are over. We all know that aid has often achieved too little in relation to expenditure especially, perhaps, in Africa. We must insist that what we provide is put to use. That is why we have put the emphasis on increased donor co-ordination, improved appraisal of projects and improved evaluation of them after they have taken place.

Mr. Steel: Will the Minister take up the question which has been raised by several hon. Members and explain his calculations on the lost purchasing power of the overseas aid programme because of the reduced value of the pound since the calculations of a year ago and in the light of his optimistic forecast of inflation? If he believes that there is no cut, why does he not accept the motion?

Mr. Raison: I have told the House what the figure is and given it the percentage rate of increase next year in cash terms over this year. There is no secret about the estimate, and the House can make its calculations. This is part of a picture against which we have managed, with considerable difficulties, over a three-year span to maintain the real value of the aid programme. In the circumstances, I regard that as no mean achievement. I believe that the quality of what we are providing is regarded by the world as quite exceptional.

It is crucial to achieve effectiveness, and that is why we have placed stress on the European Community's food strategies in African countries and the so-called policy dialogue within the Lomé convention. The House will know that that is the Community's aid and trade agreement with the African, Caribbean and Pacific countries.

I wish to say a few words about Lomé III. In Brussels on Tuesday we reached the final Community position on the next convention. We agreed on a total for the next European development fund of 7·5 billion ecu or £4·4 billion. Of this, 100 million ecu will go to the overseas territories and the rest to the ACP countries. That represents a substantial increase in real terms over the last convention and is a good figure by any standards. It will contribute especially to developments in Africa where it is most needed. Many Commonwealth countries, of course, will benefit from the convention, as they do now.

At the same time, however, I am only too well aware of the pressure of multilateral spending, including Community spending, on our total aid budget. Therefore, I have had to stress in the negotiations that there is a strict limit to what we can spend on Lomé out of our aid budget. The result, in my view, looks very satisfactory. The Community has accepted that there should be an upper limit to our contribution to Lomé III of 1,243 million ecu or £740 million. This represents no more than our present share of the 7 billion ecu figure. In other words, there is a useful reduction—from 17·6 per cent. to about 16·8 per cent.—of our share of the convention. That money will not, therefore, be lost to our bilateral programme. It has been a very hard negotiation but the result is a good one and I hope that even today the ACP has accepted it in Brussels so that the convention can be signed in Lomé on 8 December.

Dame Judith Hart: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The House is aware that there is to be a Division at the end of the debate, so it is extremely important that we should be clear about the position. I have been trying to intervene, as have my hon. Friends. In order to vote——

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is unfair for the right hon. Lady to seek to raise a point with the Minister through me. That is not right.

Mr. Spearing: The Minister has not replied.

Dame Judith Hart: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Is it a point of order for me, or a point that the right hon. Lady would like the Minister to answer?

Dame Judith Hart: As the affairs of the House are involved and a Division is to take place based largely on the Minister's answer, it is important to have clarity. To that extent, I suggest that it is a point for you, Mr. Speaker. The point of clarity is that there is to be at least a 3 per cent. cut——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Minister has eight minutes left. No one knows what he is going to say.

Mr. Raison: As you say, Mr. Speaker, I have eight minutes left. During that time I intend to continue making the points that I wish to make about our aid programme and to answer the debate.

Mr. Faulds: Obfuscating.

Mr. Raison: The kind of interventions that we have had do not help.

Another important point about the aid programme stems from the fact that about 40 per cent. of our aid programme now goes through the multilateral agencies — the Community, the World Bank and the United Nations agencies. When we consider what Britain is doing about development and relief we must recognise that our contribution is not just the bilateral contribution — British aid in the most obvious sense—but our share of multilateral actions, especially in the Community. Specifically, when tackling both the development problems and the urgent relief needs in Africa we have to do so both nationally and as the provider of one fifth of the Community's resources. In considering our future plans in sub-Saharan Africa, we shall and must have that in mind. There has been criticism of what the Community has been doing in Africa. The facts should be noted. First, it happens that Ethiopia represents the largest single programme under the Lomé convention. On the question of food aid, I believe that much has been contributed already, and I have made it my business in Brussels to stress the need for the Community to plan its programme for 1985 and to make sure that food aid is directed to the areas where it is most needed.

I turn for a moment to the question of UNESCO. My right hon. and learned Friend announced in his speech the Government's decision to give notice that we will leave UNESCO at the end of next year. He made it clear that we shall be prepared to reconsider our position towards the end of next year in the light of the results of next October's general conference in Sofia, if substantial progress has been made in the areas which we have specified as in need of reform.

I welcome the support of my right hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, South (Sir P. Blaker) and others of my hon. Friends for the step which my right hon. and learned Friend has announced. Let me stress that we hope that sufficient reform will be achieved, and that we shall play our full part in working for it—just as we have done over the past year, thanks largely to very hard work by our officials. We have been in the van of the reform movement, and we shall remain there. But the option of giving notice has always been clearly there, ever since my noble Friend the Baroness Young spelled it out in another place on 25 January this year.

Many arguments have been put for and against particular courses of action. Our judgment is that the way we have chosen represents the best way of keeping up the pressure, while establishing the ability to make a clean break in a year's time if that finally seems right. It is our own decision, and certainly not one taken on the coat-tails of the United States. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] They have not pressurised us in any way; nor indeed have they played a full part in the reform movement, as we intend to do.

One thing strikes me strongly about the public debate on UNESCO: the defenders of the way in which UNESCO has been working have been few indeed. Even the right hon. Member for Clydesdale (Dame J. Hart) has not defended it. Everywhere the need for reform is accepted, whether it be reform in its programmes, its operation, its politicisation, its management, its financing or its attitude towards free speech.

Have we made enough progress in dealing with those deficiencies? That is the question. There has been some progress, but there is still a long way to go. In many respects the crunch will come when promises are or are not

[Mr. Raison]

turned into decisions by the time of next year's general conference. That is why we shall make our final review of the position after that conference has taken place.

It is time for me to sum up. As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor said on 12 November, the provision for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office as a whole in 1984-85 was £1,800 million and in 1985-86 it is £1,870 million. That is in line with the White Paper. That increase of £70 million represents an increase of 4·5 per cent. Of that increase, £31 million goes to the net aid programme, so that our projected figure of £1,130 million is maintained.

Mr. Holland *rose——*

Mr. Raison: Overall, there is an increase in the budget of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office which is in line with inflation. However, there are special cost factors overseas—often, though not always, adverse—and my right hon. and learned Friend is having to do some pruning. I remind the House that the Government are firmly committed to the control of public expenditure. That is what the electors voted for last year. My right hon. and learned Friend has made it clear that he regrets that he has to make changes, but I hope that I have shown that by no stretch of the imagination could those changes be regarded as drastic, draconian or severely damaging. Such a suggestion is wholly ridiculous.

As in so many other respects, we shall be able to afford the services that we should like only when we have secured the country's economic base. I am glad that I have been able to maintain my projected figure for——

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed) *rose in his place and claimed to move*, That the Question be now put.

Question, That the Question be now put, *put and agreed to*.

Question put accordingly, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 184, Noes 311.

Division No. 15] **[10 pm**

AYES

Abse, Leo
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Bagier, Gordon A. T.
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnett, Guy
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Anthony
Boothroyd, Miss Betty
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'mline E)*
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Brown, R. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne N)*
Brown, Ron *(E'burgh, Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Buchan, Norman
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Ian
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Carter-Jones, Lewis
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Thomas
Clay, Robert
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S.)*
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cowans, Harry
Craigen, J. M.
Crowther, Stan
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Dormand, Jack
Douglas, Dick
Dover, Den
Dubs, Alfred
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eadie, Alex
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Forrester, John
Foulkes, George
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
Freud, Clement
Garrett, W. E.
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Golding, John
Gould, Bryan
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hamilton, W. W. *(Central Fife)*
Hancock, Mr. Michael
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Hart, Rt Hon Dame Judith
Harvey, Robert
Haynes, Frank
Hefter, Eric S.
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart *(Vauxhall)*
Home Robertson, John
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, Dr. Mark *(Durham)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hume, John
John, Brynmor
Johnston, Russell
Kennedy, Charles
Kilroy-Silk, Robert
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ronald
Lester, Jim
Lewis, Ron *(Carlisle)*
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McCartney, Hugh
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McGuire, Michael
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
McKelvey, William
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Robert
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Maxton, John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meacher, Michael
Meadowcroft, Michael
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Michie, William
Mikardo, Ian
Miller, Dr M. S. *(E Kilbride)*
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Nellist, David
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Park, George
Patchett, Terry
Pavitt, Laurie
Pike, Peter
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Rt Hon Reg
Prescott, John
Randall, Stuart
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Rhodes James, Robert
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, G. *(Coventry NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, J. W.
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Ross, Stephen *(Isle of Wight)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ryman, John
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Silkin, Rt Hon J.
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'kl'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Stewart, Rt Hon D. *(W Isles)*
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Thomas, Dafydd *(Merioneth)*
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Wainwright, R.
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert
Weetch, Ken
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Welsh, Michael
White, James
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Wilson, Gordon
Winnick, David
Woodall, Alec
Wrigglesworth, Ian
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. A. J. Beith and
Mr. John Cartwright.

NOES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arnold, Tom
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Sir H.
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Vall'y)*
Baker, Nicholas *(N Dorset)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Benyon, William
Best, Keith
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, John
Body, Richard
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'to'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Boyson, Dr Rhodes
Braine, Sir Bernard
Bright, Graham

Brinton, Tim
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Browne, John
Bruinvels, Peter
Bryan, Sir Paul
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon A.
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nick
Butcher, John
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(N Luton)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carlisle, Rt Hon M. *(W'ton S)*
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, W. S.
Clark, Hon A. *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Clegg, Sir Walter
Cockeram, Eric
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Corrie, John
Couchman, James
Cranborne, Viscount
Crouch, David
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
du Cann, Rt Hon Edward
Dunn, Robert
Durant, Tony
Edwards, Rt Hon N. *(P'broke)*
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evennett, David
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Fairbairn, Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Anthony
Fenner, Mrs Peggy
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fletcher, Alexander
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Freeman, Roger
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Gardner, Sir Edward *(Fylde)*
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Greenway, Harry
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, E. *(B'y St Edm'ds)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Gummer, John Selwyn
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, John
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Havers, Rt Hon Sir Michael
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hawkins, Sir Paul *(SW N'folk)*
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, J.
Hayhoe, Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Hickmet, Richard
Hind, Kenneth
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Hooson, Tom
Hordern, Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Stratf'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(G'ldford)*
Howell, Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hunt, David *(Wirral)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jackson, Robert
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(W Herts)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Joseph, Rt Hon Sir Keith
Kellett-Bowman, Mrs Elaine
Kershaw, Sir Anthony
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knight, Gregory *(Derby N)*
Knight, Mrs Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lewis, Sir Kenneth *(Stamf'd)*
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter, *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Neil
MacGregor, John
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New F'st)*
McQuarrie, Albert
Madel, David
Major, John
Malone, Gerald
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Antony
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mather, Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Miller, Hal *(B'grove)*
Mills, Sir Peter *(West Devon)*
Mitchell, David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Fergus
Moore, John
Morrison, Hon P. *(Chester)*
Mudd, David
Murphy, Christopher
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Normanton, Tom
Norris, Steven
Onslow, Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Oppenheim, Rt Hon Mrs S.
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Sir John *(Harrow W)*
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Parris, Matthew
Patten, Christopher *(Bath)*
Patten, John *(Oxford)*
Pattie, Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Pollock, Alexander
Porter, Barry
Powell, Rt Hon J. E. *(S Down)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Price, Sir David
Prior, Rt Hon James
Proctor, K. Harvey
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rees, Rt Hon Peter *(Dover)*
Renton, Tim
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Robinson, Mark *(N'port W)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
St. John-Stevas, Rt Hon N.
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shersby, Michael
Silvester, Fred
Skeet, T. H. H.
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spence, John
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stevens, Martin *(Fulham)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(N Hertf'dshire)*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, J.
Tapsell, Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Terlezki, Stefan
Thatcher, Rt Hon Mrs M.
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, David
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Wall, Sir Patrick
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Watson, John
Watts, John
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Wheeler, John
Whitfield, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Robert Boscawen and
Mr. Ian Lang.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 33 (Questions on amendments), and agreed to.*

Mr. Speaker *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House commends the Government's substantial support for development in the Third World including the encouragement of trade and investment; welcomes its prompt response to the famine in Ethiopia and elsewhere; approves the maintenance of the Government's planned aid programme

[Mr. Speaker]

consistent with its overall economic and foreign policy objectives; and endorses the Government's continued support for the British Council and the BBC external services.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at this day's sitting, the Friendly Societies Bill may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour. — *[Mr. Archie Hamilton.]*

Orders of the Day

Friendly Societies Bill

Considered in Committee.

Clauses 1 to 4 agreed to.

Bill reported without amendment.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the Bill be now read the Third time.—*[Mr. Archie Hamilton.]*

10.16 pm

Dr. Oonagh McDonald (Thurrock): As we said on Second Reading, the Opposition do not oppose this measure. it has the agreement of the friendly societies and merely ensures that life policies which have already been issued are legal. The Bill arose from the changes that were made during the Finance Bill to friendly societies' limits, when the Government saw fit to make life less comfortable for the 4,000 pre-1966 friendly societies by lowering the limits of their tax-exempt business on the grounds that there was abuse or fiddling—a claim which was later withdrawn in Committee—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Robin Corbett (Birmingham, Erdington): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am sorry to interrupt my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Dr. McDonald), but for those who wish to hear what she is saying, is it within your powers to ask those hon. Members standing behind the Chair to conduct their conversations elsewhere?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): I understand the hon. Gentleman's point, and I find it difficult to hear the hon. Lady. I hope that hon. Members leaving the Chamber will do so quickly and quietly and that other hon. Members will listen to the hon. Lady's speech.

Dr. McDonald: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Perhaps I may now conclude the enthralling points that arise from the Bill.

During the Finance Bill Committee stage the Opposition tabled amendments to reverse the Government's decision, which was debated fully and adequately. Similar amendments were tabled on Report, but were withdrawn in the interests of hastening the Report stage of the Bill. We believed that we had already warned the Government in Committee. We were then a little surprised to learn that the Minister, in the correspondence with the friendly societies that he had to have to sort out their legal position, was unkind enough to suggest that the Opposition were unwilling to do anything to protect the friendly societies, such as tabling and debating amendments on Report. I am sure that that was an aberration on the part of the Minister and he did not mean to be quite as unkind and unfair to the Opposition. I am sure that, when he replies to the debate, he will make that point clear.

It is necessary for the Bill to go through, to protect current policy holders. We cannot have any objection to that as we also wish to protect their interests.

10.21 pm

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Ian Stewart): There are two main aspects to the proposals in the Bill. The first concerns the validity and tax treatment of policies taken out in good faith by 300,000 policyholders in recent years. The second concerns the business that friendly societies will be allowed to do in future, and the limits applicable to tax-exempt policies. The Government decided that it was right to act promptly to solve the problems that had arisen in these areas. Let me emphasise that the policyholders affected have, and have had, no cause to worry. The legislation includes provisions that place their policies in the same position as they have previously believed them to be. Therefore, policyholders and friendly societies will continue to receive the favourable tax treatment that they expected when the policies were taken out.

As regards the future, it is necessary to remove doubts that have arisen about the legitimacy and tax treatment of various kinds of policies issued by friendly societies. In particular, the application of the tax-exempt limits is now to be clearly defined. One consequence is that it will no longer be necessary to restrict the business of societies established since 1966 so tightly, and they will now be permitted to issue endowment as well as whole life policies. They will be able also to offer policies to all adult members, and not just to those with dependants, as has been the case up to now.

As I explained on Second Reading, many of the consequential provisions that are suitable for a Finance Bill will be included in the Finance Bill next year. The hon. Member for Thurrock (Dr. McDonald) mentioned the debates that we had in Committee on the Finance Act 1984. These problems are not entirely related to the change of the tax-exempt limit and some of the provisions of the Bill will be of benefit both to the traditional friendly societies as well as those that have been established since 1966.

I take this opportunity to express my approval of and support for, the friendly society movement which, for 200 years or more, has made a valuable contribution to society, combining philanthropic and social purposes with financial provisions. I also express my thanks to the Opposition for the passage of the Bill, enabling a helpful measure to get on to the statute book as fast as possible.

I also thank the chief registrar and his staff and members of the Inland Revenue for the speed and efficiency of their response when this problem came to light. In particular I mention Mr. Alec Wilson, the assistant registrar, who was closely involved in this process and in the preparation of the Bill. Mr. Wilson, who was on duty for the Second Reading debate last Friday, has fallen seriously ill since then. On behalf of the House, I convey to him a message of gratitude and of good wishes for his recovery.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 79(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.)

Consular Relations

That the draft Consular Relations (Privileges and Immunities) (People's Republic of China) Order 1984, which was laid before this House on 22nd October, in the last Session of Parliament, be approved.

Rating and Valuation

That the Rating of Caravan Sites (Scotland) Order 1984, dated 8th October 1984, a copy of which was laid before this House on 17th October, in the last Session of Parliament, be approved.—*[Mr. Archie Hamilton.]*

Question agreed to.

CIVIL AVIATION BILL [MONEY]

Queen's Recommendation having been signified—

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Civil Aviation Bill, it is expedient to authorise the release of the Civil Aviation Authority from its liability to repay money lent to it under section 12(2) of the Civil Aviation Act 1982 or section 10(2) of the Civil Aviation Act 1971 up to a maximum of £6 million.—*[Mr. Archie Hamilton.]*

Social Security (Contributions)

Resolved,

That the draft Social Security (Contributions, Re-rating) (No. 2) Order 1984, which was laid before this House on 12th November, be approved.

Resolved,

That the draft Social Security (Treasury Supplement to Contributions) (No. 2) Order 1984, which was laid before this House on 12th November, be approved.—*[Mr. Newton.]*

10.25 pm

Mr. Michael Meacher (Oldham, West): I beg to move,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Social Security (Contributions) Amendment (No. 2) Regulations 1984 (S.I. 1984, No. 1756), dated 8th November 1984, a copy of which was laid before this House on 12th November, be annulled.

Although other recent changes in the social security rules as announced in the Chancellor's autumn statement —I refer to changes such as the flawed restoration of the 5 per cent. cut in invalidity pension, the restrictions on board and lodging charges claimed by private home owners and restrictions on young people leaving home and claiming benefit—have had a great deal more publicity, the changes proposed by the regulations are much more significant and, in one case in particular, much more damaging. That is why the Opposition have sought to pray against them this evening.

By far the most serious and reprehensible change is the proposal to reduce the Treasury's contribution to the national insurance fund from 11 per cent. to 9 per cent. That seemingly small switch conceals a cut in potential benefits of no less than £530 million. The background to that lies in the Government Actuary's report on the financial state of the national insurance fund, which shows an estimated surplus for the current financial year 1984-85 of £661 million. That favourable position is expected to continue into the next financial year 1985-86 so it is not short-lived and it is in no way an aberration.

Since the contributory principle is presumed to operate —the Government have never formally denied that— and since contributors have therefore paid into the fund with a contractual expectation that those on benefit will receive commensurate benefits, the only reasonable course for the Government to take would be either to increase benefits or to reduce contribution rates or to adopt some combination of the two. In fact, the Government have chosen the one alternative that is not reasonable, which cheats those on benefits of their entitled rights, which goes against the whole post-war tradition of the fund—to cut yet again the Treasury supplement.

I cannot protest too strongly to the House this evening that that is a gross abuse of the national insurance fund. The fund is being transformed into a Treasury lapdog in order to serve the function of making the Treasury's revenue-raising role so much easier. In practice, it means that the Department of Health and Social Security is no longer operating an insurance system; it has opened a bucket shop for the Treasury.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has raided the national insurance fund in order to scrounge £0·5 billion this year to assist with reducing, in as secret and furtive a manner as possible, his notorious over-run on public expenditure. Every hon. Member knows that he overshot his target this year by more than £1·5 billion, and has screwed back one third of it at the expense of those on

benefit who are mainly pensioners and who would otherwise be getting higher pensions, which have been paid for. That is the meaning of the regulations.

This is the fourth time that the Government have played that trick on pensioners. In 1980, they reduced the Treasury supplement from 18 per cent. of contributions to 14·5 per cent. Then they reduced it to 13 per cent. Last year the Chancellor did it again, and reduced it by a further 2 per cent. to 11 per cent., thereby saving the Treasury £450 million. The other side of the coin is that he was cheating pensioners of £450 million which they could otherwise have received. Under these regulations the supplement has been reduced by yet another 2 per cent. to just 9 per cent., which is half the level that this Government inherited from the previous Labour Government.

In all, therefore, by 1985 the Treasury will be paying into the national insurance fund a sum that is £2,000 million less, on an annual basis, than it would have been if the 18 per cent. level inherited from Labour in 1979 had not been tampered with. That is the significance of the regulations. That is either a measure of the cut that the Government have brought about in benefit levels which would have been achieved if the arrangements inherited from Labour had simply been continued, or it is a measure of the deliberate shift a more regressive system of taxation, in the form of national insurance contributions which have had to be raised much higher than would otherwise have been necessary. It is because the Government's policy in that respect is unjust—and gratuitously unjust, because it is not necessary — because it is yet another redistributive device by this Government that favours the rich by hitting further at the poor, and because it subverts the national insurance fund into an instrument for pegging public expenditure rather than meeting need, that we feel we must pray against the regulations.

I repeat that higher pensions and other benefits have been budgeted for and paid for. It is only the Treasury's deliberate intervention in the form of this hole-in-the-corner device that is preventing higher pensions from being paid. If DHSS or Treasury Ministers had any guts —I say that to the Secretary of State, and am glad to see him here—they would have come to the Dispatch Box and made the following public announcement: "Contributors have paid for higher pensions but we have decided not to increase pensions in line with the contributions made. We have decided instead to use the money for other purposes. Instead we have sacrificed the pensioners' money to maintain the Chancellor's puff that he is controlling public expenditure." That is what the Secretary of State should have told the House.

I cannot say too strongly that it is iniquitous that pensions are not being raised higher when the Government Actuary estimates that, even after this lower Treasury supplement is paid into the national insurance fund there will still be a surplus on the national insurance fund of £834 million for the next financial year. That sum, plus this reduction in the Treasury supplement, could have been used to increase pensions next Monday by an extra 50p a week for every single pensioner and by £1 for every married couple in retirement. That is the measure of what the Government are denying the pensioners, partly by these regulations.

We have a further reason for opposing the regulations. A second order amends the lower and upper earnings limits in line with inflation. The national insurance contribution is a regressive means of raising revenue. The lower earnings limit is substantially lower than the tax threshold. Moreover, as soon as earnings exceed the limit—this affects low paid, part-time women workers — contributions are levied on earnings below the limit and above it, thereby imposing a greater burden on the low paid. We are talking about the national insurance contribution trap in the same way as we talk about the poverty trap.

An upper earnings limit above which contributions are not levied — at about one and a half times average earnings — means that a much lower burden is placed upon the high paid. The relevance of what the Government have done is that the lower earnings limit is linked to the flat-rate retirement pension. Had pensions under this Government still been uprated in line with average earnings and not with prices, as they were under the previous Labour Government, the pension would now be about £36·85 a week for a single pensioner instead of £34·05. That would have meant rather higher upper and lower earnings limits.

The fact that the lower earnings limit is lower than it would have been means that the poor are forced to pay more for their benefits. The fact that the upper earnings limit is lower means that the well-off pay less for their benefits. That is the other reason why we object to the regulations and believe that they are unfair.

The regulations abuse the role of the national insurance fund for the purpose of counterfeiting lower public expenditure targets. They deny benefits to pensioners and others who have paid for them. As part of this Government's redistributive programme from the poor to the rich, the regulations increase the contribution burden on the poor and reduce it further for the rich. For those reasons we strongly oppose them.

10.38 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Health and Social Security (Mr. Tony Newton): Before I deal with the comments by the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher), I shall outline the purpose and main features of the regulations associated with the prayer.

This is a regular, annual, exercise in which the Government bring before the House their proposals for national insurance contribution rates and related matters.

I had hoped that the hon. Gentleman would acknowledge that for the second successive year there is to be no change in the rate of class I national insurance contributions. I understand the complaints when national insurance contributions are increased. It would have been pleasant if some reference had been made to the fact that this year they are not to be increased. The lack of increase benefits both employees and employers and reflects something which the hon. Gentleman's speech conspicuously failed to reflect—a determination to keep the tax contributions burden as low as possible.

I also hoped that the hon. Gentleman would mention that the year under discussion will be the first in which employers will receive full benefit from our abolition of the huge burden placed on them by the last Labour Government in the form of the national insurance surcharge. *[Interruption.]* I wonder how many jobs in the constituency of the hon. Member for Oldham, West were lost as a result of the national insurance surcharge. If the hon. Gentleman represents a constituency in which no jobs were lost because of the imposition of the national

[Mr. Tony Newton]

insurance surcharge, he must be unique among Members of Parliament. The abolition of the national insurance surcharge is alone worth more than £800 million to employers in the full year 1985-86. That, too, is part of the background to what we are debating.

The hon. Member said that, although the rate of class 1 contributions remains constant, there is, as usual, a change to the lower and upper earnings limits for employees' and employers' contributions. We are simply fulfilling the requirements laid down in the Social Security Pensions Act 1975 which requires the lower earnings limit to be equal to or no more than 49p below the basic rate of retirement pension and the upper limit to be between 6·5 and 7·5 times that rate. A pension rate of £35.80 next year — it will represent a real increase in the value of retirement pension in the period during which the Conservative party has been in office — points unavoidably to a lower earnings limit of £35.50, if we follow the usual practice of dealing in multiples of 50p.

The upper earnings limit permits a little more discretion. It would have been possible to extend it to £268·50, but the figure that we have chosen—£265—represents a 6 per cent. increase on the current limit of £250 and is broadly the same as the general increase in the level of earnings. It is equivalent to 7·4 times the basic pension rate and therefore is close to the maximum legally permitted within the range of 6·5 to 7·5 times that limit, again as laid down in the Social Security Pensions Act 1975.

I do not think that any of us would say that we think that the existing limits for lower and upper earnings are perfect and should stand unquestioned for all time. Clearly, the operation of those limits is one of the aspects that we shall be considering in relation to the social security reviews. Everyone would acknowledge that some features of the lower earnings limit, including the bunching of quite a lot of employment aspects which bring one just below the earnings limits—for example, hours and pay rates—raise some question marks.

I hope that the hon. Member, if he follows the full logic of his remarks, will acknowledge that merely to sweep away the existing arrangements and, for example, to exempt all earnings below the lower earnings limit from contributions payable by those whose total earnings are above the lower earnings limit would cost, according to the last estimate that I saw about £6 billion in revenue. Where then would all the hon. Gentleman's commitments about higher benefits and the rest go? I hope that the hon. Gentleman will at least acknowledge that, whatever the criticisms that may be made about the operation of the present system, a number of difficult questions are involved in considering how best the system might be altered. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will simply accept from me that we shall be looking at these problems in a constructive spirit—I am especially glad to see my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State nodding his head in what I take to be agreement—in the social reviews that we are undertaking.

Most people earn between the existing lower and upper earnings limits, and so will be virtually unaffected by these changes. Their contribution will rise only in so far as their earnings rise. The contributions of employees with weekly earnings of over £250 will increase by up to £1·35 per week, and up to £1·05 in the case of contracted-out employees, because of the increase in the upper earnings limit. For the same reason, employers will have to pay increased contributions for employees with high earnings. The maximum increase will be £1·57 per week. Again, that will be slightly different for contracted-out employees for whom they will be £1·01.

If there are those in the House—I sense that there will not be too many on the Opposition Benches—who are worried about the additional burden that may represent for some employers, I should also observe that another significant factor in the proposals that the Government are currently putting—if I may stray a little, Mr. Deputy Speaker, from the proposals that we are debating—is that we intend alongside the proposed extension of statutory sick pay, to relieve employers of the cost of the secondary contributions that they make on payments under that scheme. We intend to introduce that relief on existing statutory sick pay in advance of our proposals for extending the scheme as a whole from April, 1986.

That will mean savings to employers of up to £40 million a year from their national insurance contributions on their payments for spells of sickness pay up to eight weeks—as well as meaning in the longer term that they will not bear the costs of employers' contributions on the additional payments of SSP which they would make from April 1986 if Parliament endorses the proposals in the Social Security Bill that we shall be debating on Monday.

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): I was most encouraged to hear what my hon. Friend said about the lower earnings limit. There is now a widening gap between the starting point for the payment of national insurance contributions and the payment of tax. It seems that if we do nothing about it that gap will widen judging from what my right hon. Friend the Chancellor said recently. In his review, will my hon. Friend consider the possibility of removing the link with the single person's pension to see whether we could substitute a new link perhaps with the starting point for tax?

Mr. Newton: I note my hon. Friend's suggestion. He will understand that while we are studying thoroughly and, I hope, reasonably openly, many social security issues, I do not wnat to be taken too far down the path of commenting on that in detail.

I ask my hon. Friend and perhaps the hon. Member for Oldham, West to recognise that, apart from the financial consequences that might flow from alterations in the existing arrangements which would plainly have to be taken into account, raising the lower earnings limit in a way that leaves more people outside the national insurance system means also leaving them outside the rights conferred by that system to receive benefit in certain contingencies. If people are freed from paying national insurance contributions, they are in certain circumstances paying a price as well as gaining the immediate benefit of not having to pay the contributions while they are employed. There are many people for whom that balance would be difficult to draw, a fact which Ministers and Opposition spokesmen should take into account.

Hon. Members will be aware that self-employed people pay their contributions in two parts—the flat rate class 2 contribution and the profits-related class 4 contribution. As it is not proposed to increase the class 1 rate, it follows that no increase is needed in the class 4 rate which is derived from it. The profits limit for class 4 contributions

rises automatically each year like the earnings limit for class 1 contributions. The figures proposed this year are £4,150 and £13,780, the latter figure being 52 times the upper earnings limit.

The formula for determining the class 2 rate gives a figure of £5·05 a week. However, for the past few years we have set that rate at a figure 20p below the one given by the formula as a deliberate and modest but helpful incentive to small businesses. I am glad to say that we have been able to increase that abatement to 30p so that the new weekly rate of class 2 contribution will be £4·75—an increase of only 15p a week.

The effect of the changes is that for self-employed people who pay only class 2 contributions there will be an annual increase of £7·80. But for those with profits between £4,150 and £13,000 there will be a reduction of £4·80 a year, assuming the same level of profits as in 1984-85. Like employees who earn more, those self-employed who make higher profits will, of course, pay more. For those with profits of or above £13,780, the new upper profits limit, the increase will be £44·34 a year—less than £1 a week. The small earnings exception from class 2 liability also rises automatically—in this case from £1,850 to £1,925 a year. Lastly, the proposed voluntary class 3 rate is, as usual, 10p below the class 2 rate, giving a figure of £4·65 a week from next April.

I should like to refer to some of the remarks that the hon. Member for Oldham, West made about the Treasury supplement to the national insurance fund. Without attempting to engage in a lengthy debate with him about the philosophy and purpose of the fund, I must observe that his remarks appeared to show a misunderstanding of the fact that the national insurance scheme, whether in relation to pensions or anything else, is not a funded scheme; it is a pay-as-you-go scheme.

The implication of the hon. Gentleman's approach to the scheme appears to be that, if there is more money in the fund, that should automatically be paid out to the beneficiaries. The more normal way of looking at the position would be that if the fund is taking in more money than it needs to pay the benefit rates, the benefit should accrue to contributors. I do not want to engage at great length now in that argument, but I do not believe that the Government of whom the hon. Gentleman was a member, or any other Government of whom I am conscious in the years since the national insurance fund was set up, has operated the fund on the basis that if the income from contributions rises at any time, the automatic consequence of that is to increase the benefits that are paid out. I do not believe that the fund could sensibly operate on that basis.

Mr. Meacher: The Minister has not answered my point. Where there is a substantial surplus running into several hundred million pounds, and where there has always been a Treasury supplement substantially larger than the Government are now permitting it to be, there could be a significant increase in pensions, which I estimate to be 50p a week per pensioner, or there could be a cut in contribution rate. My objection is that the Government have done neither of those things but have used the opportunity to grab back the money so as to pretend that they are holding public expenditure in check.

Mr. Newton: I move on to the point which I think is most significant in relation to the hon. Gentleman's remarks—his apparent belief that the way in which the expenditure on benefits is being financed represents a steady reduction in the burden on the taxpayer in comparison with the burden on the contributor.

It has to be recognised that in recent years the tendency has been for a growing amount of social security expenditure as a whole to be met directly by the taxpayer out of the Consolidated Fund—in particular, as the hon. Gentleman has rightly acknowledged, in respect of supplementary benefit, but also to a significant extent as a result of the growth in non-contributory benefits of various kinds.

In his remarks the hon. Gentleman also appeared to fail to acknowledge that the proportion of benefit expenditure met by general taxation has risen substantially overall in recent years—from about 40 per cent. of total benefit expenditure in 1976-77 to about 49·5 per cent., estimated, in 1984-85. Against that background, it does not seem unreasonable—I accept that this is a matter on which there can be differences of judgment—to say that it is appropriate to maintain a balance which is less heavily weighted to increase the burden on taxpayers given the developing structure of the payment of the benefit system itself.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): If we follow the Minister's logic, should we expect him to take another 2 per cent. next year? As the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) has said, the Government have halved the contribution since 1980. Is he implying that he will take another 2 per cent. next year?

Mr. Newton: I am not implying or intending to imply anything for the future. Given the way in which the burdens of social security expenditure have changed in recent years and the way in which the pattern of social security expenditure has changed in recent years between contributory and non-contributory benefits, it does not seem to be unreasonable to say that the funding of contributory benefits paid out of the national insurance fund should be met increasingly by contributions directly from contributors rather than from contributors' contributions from the taxpayer. The taxpayers' effort should be directed increasingly at the benefits which properly and rightly fall on the taxpayer, which is the growing part of benefit expenditure which has nothing to do with the national insurance fund. I do not want to be taken as saying anything about what conclusions might be drawn from that in any other year as that will be a matter of judgment at the time. I merely say that a reasonable set of judgments have been taken over a period.

Mr. Tim Smith: What is the theoretical justification for the Treasury supplement? Why do we have one? Is there a historical explanation?

Mr. Newton: The theoretical justification goes right back to the Beveridge report and the concept that the national insurance system was a tripartite collaboration between employees, employers and the taxpayer. That concept was based on contributions from the first two and general taxes from the third. When we consider how the world, the social security system and the pattern of national insurance contributions has changed since the Beveridge report was published, we quickly come to the conclusion that to lean on that original concept some 40 years later would be to lean on a stick so far bent as to be on the verge of breaking. Indeed, I would say that the stick would be broken already.

[Mr. Newton]

The speech of a Minister on such an occasion is geared inevitably towards employers and employees, those who are concerned with the existing labour market and especially those who are employed within it. I hope that the House will not forget, especially certain Labour Members who have challenged me from a sedentary position, that national insurance can be a significant factor in influencing the level of employment. Employment is rising——

Mr. John Prescott (Kingston upon Hull, East): Part-time employment.

Mr. Newton: Employment is rising against the background of a rising population of working age. The burdens of the national insurance system are an important factor in that. When considered in the wider perspective, the most important single feature of the order, together with the other matters that I have referred to such as the abolition of the surcharge and our proposals for contributions and statutory sick pay, is that the burden of contributions on employers next year is expected to be significantly less in real terms than in the current year despite the rising labour force. We believe that that will be a significant contribution to one of the aims that we all share, which is to improve the prospects for jobs.

11 pm

Mrs. Margaret Beckett (Derby, South): I followed the Minister's argument with great interest. It could be summarised as follows. The Government's economic policy is failing, has failed and is seen to fail. There is mass unemployment, which they expect to continue to rise. The burden of that mass unemployment will fall increasingly not on the portion of the burden borne by the taxpayer, which is a relatively fair way for the burden to fall, but on this regressive form of tax—that is, national insurance contributions. As mass unemployment rises, the burden will fall more on the poor and less on the rich. That is the logic of the Minister's argument.

If we look at the Government's record during the past year or so, we realise that, as the Minister pointed out, employers' contributions in the coming year will be significantly less. That is in line with the pattern of the Government's record which has meant a rise in the contribution of employees.

There has been reference to the level of the lower earnings limit — substantially less even than the supplementary benefit level for a couple, let alone a couple with a family, and less than half the level of supplement for a one-child family. It is an indication of how regressive is the tax and how much it falls on the lower paid.

The balance of the fund is rising as contributions rise and benefits fall. We hear a great deal from the Government about value for money and efficiency. As my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) has said, the surplus in the fund in the present year will run at £661 million. He has dealt admirably with that point, and I do not propose to dwell on it.

However, I propose to refer briefly to the balance in the fund. The Government are, characteristically, showing some divergence between their actions and their words. They speak constantly of efficiency. They speak of how they are against waste. They speak of taking the advice of those who tell them what the balance of expenditure should be. But the advice of the Government Actuary is, and has been for many years, that the minimum level of the balance in the fund should be maintained at 16·6 per cent.

We recognise that the Government might want to run it a little above that figure. Indeed, last year, when similar orders were debated in another place, the Government spokesman said that the balance was running comfortably above what the Government Actuary had recommended — it was scheduled to run at 21·7 per cent. of the benefits payable from the fund. Next year, the Government propose to run the balance at 27 per cent. of the benefits payable from the fund — 10·4 per cent. above what the Government Actuary recommends. That may sound a rather obscure figure, but if we recognise that it is £2,348 million more than the Government Actuary said was prudent to keep in the national insurance fund, it makes the constant claim not only by Ministers from the Department of Health and Social Security but by the Chancellor that there is not enough money to pay benefits look more than a little ludicrous.

For £2,348 million we could pay not only the increase in benefits to the unemployed, and put them all on the long-term rate—which the Government continually say that they cannot afford — but also the full increase in child benefit that the TUC sought at the time of the last Budget, and the increase that my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West identified as an additional 50p for every pensioner and £1 for every married couple. We could probably throw in the invalid care allowance as well. That is not, by anybody's standards, prudent management—it is waste, and inefficiency at the cost of the most vulnerable in our community.

We are running somewhat late and I know that hon. Members do not want to dwell on the details of the order. I ask the Minister to deal with one further point. I note that even with this level of surplus and balance in the national insurance fund, the Government hope that the further changes will increase those balances even more. I wonder why. The Government's record and rhetoric make two possible answers spring to mind. One of them is that the Government are seeking to promote the argument that we cannot afford the pension scheme introduced with all-party consent in the social security legislation of 1975, because of the burden that will fall on contributions. It will enhance that argument if the Government shift the burden of social security expenditure towards contributions and away from the taxpayer. I wonder whether it is in support of their argument that the pension scheme must be cut back that the Government wish to see the balance and the surpluses continue?

The other possibility is just as likely, or even more so. It is that the Government themselves do not believe their own forecasts of economic prosperity. I note from the Government Actuary's report that he costs out every increase in unemployment of 100,000 at an extra cost of £190 million in public expenditure. I therefore again ask the Minister to tell us whether the excessive surplus and the excessive balance that the Government keep in the fund reflects their actual expectations of economic prosperity and the future trend in unemployment.

The Government must tell us one way or the other. Either all their words about greater efficiency mean nothing or their words about an expectation of reduced

unemployment and an increase in economic prosperity mean nothing. They cannot believe in both. The Government must choose which explanation they prefer.

11.7 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State Health and Social Security (Mr. Ray Whitney): This is the first time that I have had the privilege of speaking from this Dispatch Box as a junior Minister at the Department of Health and Social Security, and I am happy to have the opportunity to do so. I have found the debate a somewhat surprising experience. The hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) seemed to be describing a world that I found difficult to understand.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): The real world.

Mr. Whitney: It has little to do with the reality of the financial position of the country, or the excellent management of the social security system by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of States

The hon. Gentleman commenced by talking about what he called the notorious over-run in public expenditure. It was difficult to imagine that those remarks could be coming from the Opposition, because we constantly hear Opposition Members demand greater and greater over-runs in public expenditure. The number of tens of billions of pounds which they demand seem to depend on what day of the week it is.

To hear a complaint about a notorious over-run in public expenditure—a far cry from accurate complaint, in any case—was my first surprise. The second was the hon. Gentleman's colourful comment that my right hon. Friend was operating a bucket-shop for the Treasury. Only 10 days ago, my right hon. Friend announced an addition, over the public expenditure White Paper, of nearly £0·5 billion on the social security budget, taking it to nearly £40 billion a year. He can hardly therefore be described as running a bucket shop for the Treasury. It is a record which has added, since we came to power, 27 per cent. more in spending in real terms. Of course, that is accounted for in part by the existence of 700,000 more pensioners and in part, sadly, for reasons that we all understand, by an increase in unemployment. We on the Government Benches realise, though the Opposition may not, that there are also real increases in the rates of benefit. It was surprising to hear the Opposition use that particular attack.

The main concern was of course the question of the Treasury supplement and the role that it plays in the calculation of the social security budget. That point was dealt with by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, but, as the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) also touched on it, perhaps I should seek yet again to make the point clear. We have to examine both the Treasury supplement and the contributions from the Consolidated Fund. It is therefore essential to take account of what has happened in recent years:—the Treasury contribution has increased greatly. It was interesting to examine the time when the hon. Member for Oldham, West was a Minister in the Department of Health and Social Security as, at that time, some 40 per cent. of benefit expenditure came from the Treasury. It will be 48·5 per cent. in the next financial year. The arguments that my hon. Friend the Minister advanced clearly show why it is right that, in this re-rating, we take the opportunity to reduce the Treasury supplement from 11 per cent. to 9 per cent. That is especially so as, for the second year running, we have held the employer's and the employee's contribution steady. That is an important record, especially when it is set against the fact that this is the first year in which employers will benefit from the abolition of national insurance surcharges, which Labour introduced.

The hon. Member for Derby, South mentioned the size of the national insurance fund. A careful balancing act is involved. The Labour Government recognised that but they forget the case for the upper and lower limits, for example, when they were happily transferred to the Opposition Benches. The balancing act with the national insurance fund involves keeping a prudent head of benefit as a working reserve. In March 1986 it looks as though we shall have something like 14 weeks head of benefit. That can be regarded as par for the course. In March 1981 the national insurance fund stood as high as 17 weeks head of benefit and in March 1983 it went as low as 10 weeks. We are proceeding along a middle course above the level of any incipient danger, considered by the Government Actuary's Department to be about nine weeks head of benefit, but well below the more cautious reserve which has been thought right at other times.

That is an adequate state of affairs and I hope that, with the benefit of the explanation offered by my hon. Friend the Minister of State and that which I have offered, the Opposition will accept it has been a considerable achievement to have held steady the Class 1 national insurance contributions, to have increased the levels of benefit ahead of prices, to have protected pensioners and all other beneficiaries and, above all, to have held the balance of the national insurance fund so that employers are helped. We have avoided the notorious over-runs of expenditure of which the Opposition are so fond which would sound the death knell of our hope and intention to restore employment and prosperity. I therefore urge the House to reject the prayer.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 58, Noes 162.

Division No. 16] **[11.14 pm**

AYES

Alton, David	Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*	Home Robertson, John
Barron, Kevin	Hughes, Dr. Mark *(Durham)*
Beckett, Mrs Margaret	Hume, John
Beith, A. J.	Kirkwood, Archy
Bell, Stuart	Leadbitter, Ted
Boyes, Roland	Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'mline E)*	Loyden, Edward
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*	McDonald, Dr Oonagh
Brown, R. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne N)*	McGuire, Michael
Brown, Ron *(E'burgh, Leith)*	McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
Canavan, Dennis	McKelvey, William
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*	McNamara, Kevin
Clarke, Thomas	McWilliam, John
Clay, Robert	Marek, Dr John
Clwyd, Mrs Ann	Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S.)*	Meacher, Michael
Cohen, Harry	Meadowcroft, Michael
Corbett, Robin	Miller, Dr M. S. *(E Kilbride)*
Corbyn, Jeremy	Nellist, David
Craigen, J. M.	Pike, Peter
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*	Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Deakins, Eric	Prescott, John
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*	Rogers, Allan
Gould, Bryan	Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*	Rowlands, Ted
Hancock, Mr. Michael	Skinner, Dennis
Heffer, Eric S.	Smith, C.*(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*

Spearing, Nigel
Welsh, Michael

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Don Dixon and
Mr. Frank Haynes.

NOES

Alexander, Richard
Amess, David
Arnold, Tom
Ashby, David
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*
Baker, Nicholas *(N Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Benyon, William
Best, Keith
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Braine, Sir Bernard
Bright, Graham
Brinton, Tim
Brooke, Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Bruinvels, Peter
Buck, Sir Antony
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Couchman, James
Cranborne, Viscount
Dorrell, Stephen
Dover, Den
Dunn, Robert
Durant, Tony
Evennett, David
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Anthony
Fenner, Mrs Peggy
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Freeman, Roger
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Ground, Patrick
Gummer, John Selwyn
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Harvey, Robert
Hawkins, Sir Paul *(SW N'folk)*
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Hickmet, Richard
Hind, Kenneth
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Howarth, Alan *(Stratf'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hunter, Andrew
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(W Herts)*
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
Knight, Gregory *(Derby N)*
Knight, Mrs Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Lang, Ian
Lawler, Geoffrey
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Peter, *(Fareham)*
Lyell, Nicholas
MacGregor, John
Major, John
Mather, Carol
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Montgomery, Fergus
Morrison, Hon C. *(Devizes)*
Murphy, Christopher
Needham, Richard
Newton, Tony
Normanton, Tom
Norris, Steven
Page, Sir John *(Harrow W)*
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Prentice, Rt Hon Reg
Rathbone, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Rippon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Silvester, Fred
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speller, Tony
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stevens, Martin *(Fulham)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, J.
Sumberg, David
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Terlezki, Stefan
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thurnham, Peter
Tracey, Richard
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, David
Walden, George
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Watson, John
Watts, John
Wheeler, John
Whitfield, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wilkinson, John
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Michael Neubert and
Mr. Archie Hamilton.

Question accordingly negatived.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 79(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

Customs and Excise

That the Customs Duties (ECSC) (Amendment No. 5) Order 1984 (S.I., 1984, No. 1306), dated 15th August 1984, a copy of which was laid before this House on 17th August, in the last Session of Parliament, be approved.

That the Customs Duties (ECSC) (Amendment No. 6) Order 1984 (S.I., 1984, No. 1452), dated 11th September 1984, a copy of which was laid before this House on 11th September, in the last Session of Parliament, be approved.—*[Mr. Peter Lloyd.]*

Question agreed to.

COMPANIES CONSOLIDATION (CONSEQUENTIAL PROVISIONS) BILL *[Lords]*

Ordered,

That the Lords Message [20th November] communicating the Order, That the Companies Consolidation (Consequential Provisions) Bill *[Lords]* be referred to a Joint Committee on Consolidation &c. Bills, be now considered.—*[Mr. Mather.]*

Lords Message considered accordingly.

Resolved,

That this House doth concur with the Lords in the said order. —*[Mr. Mather.]*

Message to the Lords to acquaint them therewith.

Harwood Methodist Infants' School, Bolton

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr Peter Lloyd.]*

11.25 pm

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): May I say how glad I am that we are having an Adjournment debate tonight, and thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for making available this opportunity to debate the future of Harwood Methodist infants' school. The school is not only the last remaining Methodist school in Bolton, it is believed to the oldest Methodist school in the country. Therefore, the local authority's proposal to close it is of concern not only to local residents but to all the people of Bolton and to all Methodists. I welcome in the public Gallery Mr. John Morgan, national education secretary of the Methodist Day Schools.

Bolton has a long history of voluntary schools. The Methodist tradition is especially strong in Bolton, and the school, which dates back to 1822, contributes to the strong Methodist community in my constituency. There is great concern among my constituents about the future of religious education. We await anxiously the publication of the forthcoming Swann report. Parents in Harwood were horrified to learn that teachers in the authority's schools have been instructed never to mention the name of Christ in schools. The Secretary of State must stand up to Labour-controlled local authorities which wish to reduce parents' right to have proper religious education for their children. Too many voluntary denominational schools are being forced to close in Bolton. This is the second in my constituency this year, and a third in Bolton is threatened with a similar fate. Schools are faced with closure because of falling pupil numbers and limited financial resources. If financial resources did not count, we could have one-to-one teaching for all our children.

During the past nine years, primary pupil numbers in that part of my constituency have decreased from more than 1,400 to little more than 1,000. We all accept that something must be done to reduce excess capacity. Harwood is a popular place in which to live, and proposals have been submitted to build a further 1,000 houses in the area where the school is. Harwood historically was well served by voluntary primary schools. The three oldest schools—all voluntary—are preferred by parents. The two Church of England schools are more than fully subscribed, and the Methodist school used to be fully subscribed until the local authority built two additional primary schools close by. Those two additional schools have created the excess capacity of 1,000 desks for 500 pupils.

The council considered three schools for closure in 1981—the two new local authority schools and the Methodist school, which had been rebuilt as an infants' school in 1964 in accordance with the council's policy then to have separate schools for infants and juniors. However, because the council changed its policy and wished to integrate infant and junior schools, it chose in 1981 to pick on the Methodist infants' school and to close it, and change its nearby junior school into a new county primary school. The council attempted to justify this bureaucratic decision in 1981 on the grounds that the Methodist school was the smallest school of the three options considered and would therefore cause the least disruption. However, in terms of admissions, the infants' school is not the smallest, but the biggest school. In the age group four to seven, it has 50 per cent. of the pupils of the three schools, and this year over half total admissions.

Despite the threatened closure, parents clearly prefer this school. The council has chosen the most popular school to close, and the one whose closure will result in the smallest financial savings. Merging the Methodist infants' school with the nearby junior school will do nothing to ease the problems of the other two primary schools.

This explains the storm of protest that has arisen. Over 2,233 objections have been sent with a petition to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science. Faced with this level of protest, and the realisation that its original choice was not in the best interests of parents, the council has retired behind a bureaucratic smokescreen, saying that there would be just as many objections if any other school were chosen for closure.

However, the danger is that a further closure might still be necessary. The chairman of the education committee told parents on 18 November last year that their objections could lead to a second school having to close.

Parents and governors of the Methodist school have repeatedly asked for the financial costings behind this decision but have been told that costing does not come into it. In a letter on 16 November 1983, I was told by the council that:

> "Financial factors cannot be quantified at this stage."

The director of education added:

> "I intend that the relevant information on running costs will be made available"—

but that—

> "other financial factors cannot be quantified, for example possible capital receipts from the sale of site and premises."

A year later, we are still waiting for all these facts. The council can only say that:

> "There are complex legal and financial procedures in terms of evaluating and apportioning assets."

Parents believe that the council would be £300,000 better off if one of the other options were chosen. The failure to disclose this information can mean only that the council is incompetent, or that it has in mind a second school closure as soon as this one is out of the way.

It was the council's decision to propose closing the Methodist school to my hon. Friend the Minister. I am disappointed that he has not found sufficient grounds to oppose the council's decision, despite the fact that the Government have disallowed 55 closure schemes out of 650 school closure proposals over the past five years.

Has my hon. Friend the Minister been given all the facts? The parents have submitted four weighty volumes of evidence to him. I have them here, and I hope that they have been read. Parents have been denied access to what the governors described as the most vital information of all—the financial costings for each option projected to next year on the latest admissions data. On what grounds has my hon. Friend made his decision? If on grounds of parental choice, or quality of education, the parents' evidence shows that he has had the wool pulled over his eyes by the council. Is he satisfied that he has done all that is possible. Does he consider that his powers are sufficient to see that justice is done? If the public are to have confidence in him, should not his powers be widened? If

[Mr. Peter Thurnham]

he has only half the facts, should he not be empowered to ask for all the facts? Can he monitor the implementation of his decisions? For instance, will there be sufficient provision for children with special needs?

This matter goes again before the full council on 12 December. It is not too late for the council to reconsider its decision. The education committee meets on 28 November, and on this coming Monday, the chairman of the education committee meets the officers. The councillors should demand the full financial costings for all three options, and I call on my hon. Friend the Minister to use his influence to force the council to reveal the full figures. Failing that, the parents have a case for the local ombudsman.

In conclusion, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I should like to thank you for allowing me this opportunity to debate the future of this historic Methodist school. This unjustified closure proposal would unnecessarily destroy 160 years of Methodist history. It would further reduce religious educational opportunities in Bolton. It would reduce parental choice. It does not give significant financial savings. Worst of all, it does nothing to reduce the problems of excess capacity at the other two schools where the authority says that there is a danger of a closure of a second primary school in Harwood.

I urge the council to think again before it is too late to save the school. It is not too late for the council to submit a better proposal to my hon. Friend the Minister. I appeal to my hon. Friend for an urgent meeting to discuss how he can use his influence with the council, to ask for the full financial facts behind each of the options to be laid before the public. Councillors will then have no option but to oppose this disastrous decision to close unnecessarily this unique school in order that a better proposal can be put before my hon. Friend the Minister.

11.35 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Bob Dunn): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham) on his success in raising this issue, which is clearly of great concern to his constituents. I must, however, make clear to the House from the outset that the Department's letter of 6 November last said that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is minded to approve the proposals from Bolton local education authority to cease to maintain Harwood Methodist infant school and Houghfold county junior school and to establish a new county primary school in the premises of the latter. The final decision has yet to be taken because my right hon. Friend is consulting the local education authority, as he is statutorily required to do, about a modification that he has proposed to postpone the date of implementation from 1 January 1985 to 1 September 1985. That was the purpose of the Department's letter of 6 November. I understand that the authority is to discuss the proposed modification at the next meeting of its education and arts committee next Wednesday.

In addition, as my hon. Friend knows, I cannot debate with hon. Members or other objectors details of proposals which fall to my right hon. Friend to decide. It is also my right hon. Friend's practice not to provide objectors with detailed reasons for his decision where he approves proposals. Where my right hon. Friend has approved proposals, it may be taken that he has generally accepted as sufficient the main arguments advanced by the proposers and has conceded that the merits of the proposals outweight the objections to them. I hope therefore that my hon. Friend will understand if I do not seek to answer the detailed points he has raised on these particular proposals. I intend rather to consider the general issues which my right hon. Friend has to address in reaching his decision on statutory proposals.

Proposals made by local education authorities under section 12 of the Education Act 1980 fall to my right hon. Friend to decide where, as in this case, they relate to voluntary schools; where they attract statutory objectors; or where my right hon. Friend gives notice to the local education authority within two months of receiving the proposals that he wishes to decide them. For all other section 12 proposals the authority must determine whether or not it wishes to implement the proposals. My right hon. Friend considers each set of proposals which falls to him to decide on its individual merits. He has to take account of all the relevant factors including educational and financial considerations, the arguments advanced by the objectors and his own policies as set out in circulars 2/80, 2/81, 4/82 and in administrative memorandum 4/84 and to assess whether the balance of advantage lies in approval, rejection or approval with some modification of the proposals.

Educational considerations have to be a major factor and the issue which my right hon. Friend has to seek to decide is whether the proposals will lead to improved educational opportunities for the pupils involved or at least to no worsening in them; whether adequate arrangements have been made for the redeployment of teachers affected by the proposals and whether the proposed transitional arrangements will minimise the disruptive effect of the proposals on pupils' education.

Financial considerations also have to be a major factor in my right hon. Friend's decision. The number of pupils in primary schools has fallen by over a quarter since its peak in the early 1970s: a similar fall will occur in the secondary sector between now and the end of the decade. This fall in the pupil population has inevitably led to a substantial surplus of school places with its consequential drain on resources. While we recognise that some of this surplus can be put to effective use to improve the educational opportunities for pupils and that some of it should be retained against a future upturn in pupil numbers, we have in circular 2/81 encouraged local education authorities to seek the financial and educational benefits of taking surplus places out of use by the removal of temporary accommodation and the closure of whole schools.

It is vital to the Government's policy of seeking to restrain local authority expenditure and of seeking better value for money that authorities continue to seek opportunities to rationalise their provision. I should stress here that it is not simply the direct financial savings on premises expenditure, important though those are, that my right hon. Friend considers in reaching his decision on proposals, but equally important is whether the proposals will allow the available resources to be used to better effect. Small schools need more generous resourcing than the average if they are to provide their pupils with the appropriate range of curricular experiences, and, with sharply falling rolls, an increasing number of schools is

having to be generously resourced. Within a fixed level of resources overall, this can only be at the expense of pupils in larger schools.

Proposals, especially those which seek to amalgamate two or more schools in the premises of one of them, frequently require capital expenditure. While it might be argued that this could nullify the estimated revenue savings, it has to be recognised that in many cases the revenue savings will not be possible without some adaptation work. My right hon. Friend has, therefore, to assess whether the capital expenditure that would be involved would represent good value for money in terms of the revenue savings it would bring and the potential educational benefits to the pupils.

My right hon. Friend has, of course, to consider all the arguments advanced by those objecting to the proposals. What he has to consider is whether those arguments collectively are, or any one of them individually is, of such force as to outweigh any financial or educational merits which the proposals may have. Those objecting can and do, of course, challenge educational and financial arguments put forward by the authority in support of its proposals. My right hon. Friend having heard the arguments from both sides has to try to assess where the advantage lies.

Finally, my right hon. Friend has necessarily to consider how far the proposals are consistent with his policies as set out in circulars 2/80, 2/81 and 4/82, and administrative memorandum 4/84. One of these policies is that of maintaining the balance between county and voluntary provision; and I can assure my hon. Friend that my right hon. Friend had careful regard to this, as well as to all the other matters to which I have referred—not least because the number of Methodist voluntary schools in the country is already much reduced. The circulars also cover the general educational and financial considerations to which I have referred and include, in addition, evidence of parental preference, the need for adequate prior consultation, and the need for adequate time between the publication of proposals and the proposed date of implementation. This last factor is relevant to the proposals with which my hon. Friend is concerned, since in my right hon. Friend's view it would be preferable if there were to be a longer period before the proposals are implemented to allow the authority and the teachers involved more time to plan for the amalgamation.

As I said earlier, my right hon. Friend has to assess where the balance of advantage lies having considered all the factors and all the information available to him. He cannot reject proposals simply because he would have preferred alternative proposals: the responsibility for publishing proposals rests with local education authorities and the governors of voluntary schools, and not with my right hon. Friend. He cannot substitute his judgment for theirs. Even his power to modify proposals is limited and is most commonly used, as in this case, to defer the date of implementation. Any modification he proposes must leave the proposals substantially unchanged, otherwise he would incur the risk of successful legal challenge in the courts.

I recognise the strength of feeling of those objecting to the proposals to close Harwood Methodist infants school, and which has prompted my hon. Friend to raise this issue in the House. Nevertheless, I hope that he will accept that my right hon. Friend has reached his view on the proposals only after the most careful consideration of the factors and has not simply ignored the arguments of the objectors.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at sixteen minutes to Twelve o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 23 November 1984

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PETITIONS

Adult Education (Value Added Tax)

9.35 am

Mr. Michael Hancock (Portsmouth, South): I wish to lay before the House a petition on behalf of 2,332 constituents who attend the Portsmouth institute for further education and who wish this Parliament to urge the Government to pray against the imposition of value added tax on certain adult education courses and for the repeal of legislation enabling value added tax to be imposed. They do so conscious of the fact that many of the courses that they are attending are under grave threat from the imposition of value added tax and they wish this House to ensure that the Government alter the regulations pertaining to value added tax on these courses as speedily as possible, because otherwise many of the courses will no longer be available to the people of my constituency and others in this country.

To lie upon the Table.

Human Embryos

Mr. John Evans (St. Helens, North): I have the honour to present a petition signed by 2,962 residents of my constituency who are responding to the Government's invitation to the general public to comment on the report of the Warnock committee. They state:

Wherefore Your Petitioners Pray that the House of Commons will take immediate steps to enact legislation which forbids any procedure which involves purchase or sale of human embryos, the discarding of human embryos, their use as sources of transplant tissue or as subjects for research or experiment (unless this is done solely for the benefit of the embryo concerned.)

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): I beg leave to present a petition in the name of the Rev. Mitchell Williams of The Manse, Eastcote Lane, Northolt, Middlesex, and a substantial number of constituents of Ealing, North which is similar to that presented by the hon. Member for St. Helens, North (Mr. Evans). For the convenience of the House, I shall summarise.

The petitioners assert that human life exists from the moment of conception, that man is made in the image of God, that life is therefore totally sacred and not be violated at any stage by law or by any other enactment of this House or anywhere else. I strongly support my constituents in that view.

I shall repeat, because it is so important, the final part of the petition about which the House has already heard from the hon. Member for St. Helens, North:

Wherefore Your Petitioners Pray that the House of Commons will take immediate steps to enact legislation which forbids any procedure which involves purchase or sale of human embryos, the discarding of human embryos, their use as sources of transplant tissue or as subjects for research or experiment (unless this is done solely for the benefit of the embryo concerned.)

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Later——

Mrs. Elizabeth Peacock (Batley and Spen): I beg leave to present a petition to the House on behalf of 150 of my constituents. It follows the lines of those presented earlier. That being so, I shall merely reiterate the important part of it:

Wherefore Your Petitioners Pray that the House of Commons will take immediate steps to enact legislation which forbids any procedure which involves purchase or sale of human embryos, the discarding of human embryos, their use as sources of transplant tissue or as subjects for research or experiment (unless this is done solely for the benefit of the embryo concerned).

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

To lie upon the Table.

Mr. Roger Gale (Thanet, North): I have the honour to present a petition on behalf of Mrs. Chapman, of Avenue gardens, Cliftonville, Mrs. Sinclair, of Thanet road, Margate, and 256 of my constituents in Cliftonville, Margate, Westbrook, Garlinge, Westgate on Sea and Birchington.

Not wishing to pre-empt this morning's debate, I simply say that the petition is similar in vein to others already presented. My petitioners

welcome the statement in the report of the committee of inquiry into human fertilisation and embryology (the Warnock report) that 'the status of the embryo is a matter of fundamental principle which should be enshrined in legislation' and its recommendation that the embryo of the human species should be afforded protection in law.

It has my fullest support.

To lie upon the Table.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I have pleasure in presenting to the House a petition entitled

"Petition for the protection of the human embryo,"

which has been presented to me by, and which I present to the House on behalf of, a substantial number of residents of the villages of Alderley Edge, Chelford, Capesthorne, Nether Alderley and Over Alderley in the Macclesfield constituency, which I have had the honour to represent in the House for 13 years.

My constituents feel very strongly about the Warnock report. They affirm that the newly fertilised human embryo is a real, individual human being and therefore they oppose all such practices as are recommended in the report which discriminate against the embryo or violate his or her human dignity and right of life.

Wherefore Your Petitioners Pray that the House of Commons will take immediate steps to enact legislation which forbids any procedure which involves the purchase or sale of human embryos, the discarding of human embryos, their use as sources of transplant tissue or as subjects for research or experiment (unless this is done solely for the benefit of the embryo concerned).

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

To lie upon the Table.

Unwanted Pregnancies

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): I beg leave to present two petitions to the House. The first is from 28 residents of my constituency, and reads:

To the honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled. The humble Petition of UK Residents Sheweth that unwanted

[Mr. Chris Smith]

pregnancy is a risk to young women's health, wherefore your Petitioners pray that your Honourable House do urge the Secretary of State for Social Services that:

Young women's rights to obtain contraceptive advice and information and contraceptive drugs or devices, with or without parental consent, should not be further restricted by changes in DHSS regulations or by law, as this would only result in an increase in unwanted pregnancies.

Facilities for young women and men, whether under or over the age of 16, to obtain contraception and advice on abortion if they need it, in confidence and without fear, should be substantially expanded and publicised in all parts of the country.

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray."

To lie upon the Table.

Supplementary Benefits

Mr. Chris Smith: The second petition is from 2,000 residents in my constituency and the neighbouring constituency of Islington, North, and I am delighted that the Secretary of State for Social Services is present to hear it.

It reads:

To the honourable the Commons of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled, the humble petition of residents of the London borough of Islington sheweth that we protest against this Government's decision to cut the Supplementary Benefit of nearly 2 million pensioners, disabled people and others on long-term benefit by clawing back £1 from their heating additions. We are appalled that the Government has chosen to save money by cutting the benefits of the poorest and most vulnerable members of the community. Wherefore your petitioners pray that your Honourable House do urge the Secretary of State for Social Services to withdraw this contemptible amendment immediately. And your petitioners as in duty bound will ever pray.

To lie upon the Table.

Pensions (Increase)

Mr. Don Dixon (Jarrow): With your permission, Mr. Speaker, and that of the House, I beg leave to present a petition on behalf of the pensioners of the Tyne and Wear and Durham area bearing more than 5,000 signatures.

I, too, am pleased that the Secretary of State for Social Services is here because the petition is protesting that next Monday, 26 November, is uprating day for Britain's pensioners. On that day they will qualify for a meagre increase in their pensions. However, it is one week late. The increase should have been paid this week. The Government have invented a 53-week year and delayed the pension increase, thus robbing pensioners in Great Britain of £35 million. This is the second time in six years that the Government have held up the pension increase. The last time was by two weeks.

It is appropriate that the petition, which is about pensioners, is presented today at the beginning of an important debate on the protection of life at its very inception. I have no doubt that hon. Members will be presenting very strong arguments on the Warnock report.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tyne Bridge (Mr. Cowans) is presenting the petition with me. It reads:

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your Honourable House will pass legislation to repay the increase which has been lost to pensioners by the delay of one week.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

To lie upon the Table.

Human Fertilisation and Embryology (Warnock Report)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Lang.]*

9.46 am

Mr. Speaker: Before I call the Secretary of State, I should inform the House that because of the number of hon. Members who wish to speak I intend to apply the time limit of 10 minutes between the hours of 11.30 and 1 o'clock. However, I ask those hon. Members who are fortunate enough to be called before 11.30 to bear in mind that many other colleagues are waiting to take part in this very important debate.

The Secretary of State for Social Services (Mr. Norman Fowler): I too, will seek to work towards what you have just suggested, Mr. Speaker.

When the world's first test tube baby was born in Oldham in 1978 the event was seen as a significant advance for medical science and represented new hope for many couples who wished to have children. It marked the first time that the public had been made aware of what the technique of in vitro fertilisation, or fertilisation outside the mother's body, had made possible.

Just how rapidly events have proceeded since is demonstrated by the fact that some 600 babies have now been born as a result of this technique, more than 200 of them in Great Britain. Those figures are an indication of the pace of development and the spread of the technique.

Despite the acclaim excited by the birth of Louise Brown, it was apparent from an early stage that this and other developments in the field of infertility raised moral, legal and ethical issues which could not be left to be decided by default by those working in the field. Public debate had not developed to anything like the stage that it has today. But in July 1982, given the critical nature of the issues involved, I decided that it was essential to have the benefit of a wide-ranging inquiry and advice in that area. Therefore, I announced the establishment of an independent inquiry under Dame Mary Warnock. It was almost exactly two years later, in July of this year, that I published the inquiry's report.

I am of course aware of the extremely strong feelings which the issues covered by the report raise, both here and among the public, and I respect them, but I think that we can all agree that Dame Mary Warnock and her committee have done a great service in setting out clearly and cogently the issues to which we should all address our minds.

I published the report as soon as possible after receiving it because it was clear to me that, while the inquiry had reached detailed conclusions and made some 63 specific recommendations, it was essential that we should give the widest opportunity to the public, both individuals and organisations, to express their views on them.

It does not seem to me that this is the traditional kind of consultation exercise that we have known in the past, for it is not just a matter of deciding on each of those 63 individual recommendations. The debate goes much wider and it embraces fundamental moral issues. As the Warnock committee said:

"Barriers, it is generally agreed, must be set up; but there will not be universal agreement about where these barriers should be

placed. The question must ultimately be what kind of society can we praise and admire? In what sort of society can we live with our conscience clear?"

That is why it is important for there to be a wider public debate on the report. That is also why the Government were anxious for the House to have this early opportunity to debate the report.

We have already had a substantial number of comments on the report which, as with the debate that took place three weeks ago in another place, have demonstrated the wide differences of view about many of the issues raised and the strength with which those views are held. While obviously I recognise the strength of those feelings, I hope that the House will agree with me that the issues should be debated with tolerance to other views, with some humility and with the aim of reaching as much agreement as possible. I recognise that full agreement will not be obtained, but I believe that the House and the Government would be failing in their duty if they did not aim to provide a satisfactory framework within which we can release the benefits of medical advance while at the same time guarding against abuses that would undermine the special respect that is owed to the family and children and to the creation of human life.

My main purpose this morning will be to listen to the debate. I do not intend to delay the House for long. My intention is to allow hon. Members to express their views. My right hon. and learned Friend the Minister for Health, who will be in overall charge of consultation here, will sum up at the end of the debate. I do not, therefore, propose to set out in detail the whole range of issues addressed by the Warnock report. I should like to dwell briefly on some of the major questions which I expect to be of concern to the House.

Mr. W. Benyon (Milton Keynes): Do the Government accept that developments are occurring so quickly that there is a strong need for legislation to be enacted quickly?

Mr. Fowler: I think that the Government would accept that. I would go a little further and say that, whatever happens in terms of legislation, it will be necessary to examine some areas to ascertain the interim arrangements that can be made before the introduction of that legislation.

I shall consider the standpoint from which we have to approach this debate. The impetus for the development of techniques which the Warnock committee considered is twofold. There is the demand from childless couples for help in achieving what they would regard as their right —the right to have children of their own. There is also the capacity of modern medicine and science to delve ever further into the complexities and origins of life. Those pressures have opened up new opportunities but, in considering how to use them, we must take account of other and more fundamental issues—our duty to face up to the moral dilemmas that clearly exist and to ensure, perhaps above all, that the rights of children are satisfactorily protected.

The two main techniques in infertility treatment with which the Warnock committee had to concern itself are artificial insemination and in vitro fertilisation. Artificial insemination has been practised for many years, but its use still gives rise to substantial issues, particularly in relation to the rights of children born after artificial insemination when the semen used is not provided by the mother's husband — artificial insemination by donor, or AID. Perhaps the simplest issue relates to the legitimacy of an AID child. The committee concurred with the view of the English Law Commission which recommended in 1982 that such a child should be treated as the legitimate child of its mother and her husband. That is something about which, I imagine, there is some agreement.

There are other recommendations that flow from that one concerning the legal position of children born following some types of in vitro fertilisation procedure. The issues in those cases may seem more complex, but I think that it is clear that in our decisions we should be guided above all by what is in the best interests of the child.

The second issue arising mainly from artificial insemination which has recently increasingly become a matter of public concern is surrogate motherhood——

Sir John Biggs-Davison (Epping Forest): Is my right hon. Friend accepting that artificial insemination by donor is legitimate and that that goes without saying? That is not the opinion of everyone.

Mr. Fowler: I am not accepting anything. We will debate this matter. I make it absolutely clear that I am trying to introduce the issues to the House. Clearly the Government will have to come to the House, having heard the debate in the country and in the House, to make their position clear. Nothing that I say now should indicate a preconceived view.

Dr. Alan Glyn (Windsor and Maidenhead): Surely, if the legitimacy of the AID child is accepted, it would mean that the whole of the law on inheritance and responsibility would have to be revised.

Mr. Fowler: That is clearly the case. That issue was dealt with by the English Law Commission.

The second issue arising from artificial insemination which has increasingly become a matter of public concern is surrogate motherhood, where a woman bears a child for a childless couple with the intention that it should be adopted after birth by the couple concerned. The Warnock committee's view on that issue was basically that surrogacy is, in general, undesirable on moral and social grounds and that where any commercial element is involved it is simply unacceptable. That is a view on which I think there will be widespread agreement in the House and outside.

The committee recommended that commercial surrogacy should be illegal. In line with what I have just said to my hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest (Sir J. Biggs-Davison), that is a matter that the Government will have to decide urgently. I remind the House, and especially anyone thinking of entering into such an arrangement, that at present there are provisions under the Adoption Act 1958 which provide criminal sanctions against payment for the transfer of custody of a child with a view to adoption. The Government are therefore considering how far those provisions will apply in relation to commercial surrogacy and what further clarification of the law would be desirable.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): For the first time in his speech my right hon. Friend has mentioned adoption. Does he agree that if abortion, which I deplore, were not so available there would be more children to adopt for people who, sadly, cannot have children of their own, and that would be a much more acceptable way of enabling people to have a child? Does my right hon.

[Mr. Nicholas Winterton]

Friend agree that abortion is wrong as is the killing of a child? Does he agree that those children should be permitted to be adopted by people who cannot have their own children?

Mr. Fowler: I certainly agree with my hon. Friend on the importance of adoption, but the House will have to decide whether the opportunities for adoption preclude anything in terms of infertility and treatment of infertility. After all, that is the matter with which the debate is concerned.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): My right hon. Friend appears—I may be doing him an injustice; we shall see—to have come to the question of children who are in this world and to have jumped the stage of the embryo. May I have an assurance that my right hon. Friend will cover that aspect and assure us that the Government regard the embryo as totally sacred from conception, made in the image of God and something to be protected by the law?

Mr. Fowler: It is difficult to cover every issue within the first five minutes of my speech. It is inconceivable that I could make a speech without coming to that issue. If I may, I shall continue with my speech. If I am continually interrupted, I shall still be talking at lunch time.

I think it likely that there will be a large measure of agreement both in the House and outside with the Warnock committee's recommendations on surrogacy, but I am well aware that views on the whole question of in vitro fertilisation are much more divided. That applies not only to the question of research involving human embryos but to the implications of some of the developments in methods of handling embryos whether intended for research or reimplantation.

I have in mind, for example, the whole range of issues raised by the possibility of freezing embryos, and indeed not just the possibility but also the fact that frozen embryos are now being kept and subsequently used for implantation where a previous implantation has been unsuccessful. The potential problems are already beginning to be revealed in other countries. There have been cases involving embryos left in storage following the death of one or other of the parents. Self-evidently such questions will require to be addressed in any arrangements we make to regulate in vitro fertilisation. What we must recognise is that this is a fast-changing field in which the frontiers of what is possible are being moved frequently and in which we cannot necessarily expect to reach conclusions which will hold for all time.

The advance of science in this field has raised the acutest moral dilemmas — so fundamental that they involve judgments about the nature of life itself. It was a passage in the recent report of the Church of England Board for Social Responsibility, under the chairmanship of the Bishop of Birmingham—I hope Ministers may still quote the words of bishops — that set out particularly clearly the complex and fundamental nature of the moral issues that scientific advance has raised. That report asked:

"Should the traditional Christian heritage be modified in the light of modern knowledge concerning the progressive stages through which the embryo develops into an individual foetus? On the one hand there are those among us who believe that there is doubt about the significance of the progressive stages through which the embryo develops into an individual foetus, and (on the principle that the safer view should prevail) they hold that full protection should be afforded an embryo from the beginning. The majority of us however believe that modern embryology enables us to make a judgment of value and believe that (on the view that the more probably view should prevail) until the embryo has reached the first 14 days of its existence, it is not yet entitled to the same respect and protection as an embryo implanted in the human womb and in which individuation has begun."

That is the decision that the House and the Government must come to. It was not possible for the whole board to unite behind a single conclusion. Certainly I recognise that there would be stongly differing views on that conclusion in the House, but I believe that each of us must be prepared — as the Church of England board was prepared — to acknowledge and to take into account the full range of moral, as well as scientific, arguments that are involved in deciding the legitimacy of research. In other words, the issue cannot just be one of research; there is most clearly, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) said, a moral issue which must be decided and which goes to the centre of the debate.

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): It is important to have on record the fact that many members of the Church of England think that the bishops would be far better sticking to the virgin birth than to the test tube birth.

Mr. Fowler: That confirms my view that I should never have quoted the bishops, but I take my hon. Friend's point.

Mr. Leo Abse (Torfaen): Some of us may find the somewhat squeamish attitude adopted by some of the churches extraordinary in the light of the fact that parthenogenosis — virgin birth — has had such benign results as to give us Jesus Christ. I should have thought that there would be some hesitation, when Christian doctrine is founded on that belief, before there was sweeping condemnation from some quarters about the whole idea of in vitro fertilisation.

Mr. Fowler: I am not sure that that was the point that was being put. May I leave that issue to the debate?

On the issue of research, the pace of development in research is likely to be rapid in other countries even if it were not permitted here. That is also something that must be taken into account. Indeed, before the first test tube baby was born, a substantial amount of research on human embryos had already taken place. It was necessary first to develop the fertilisation techniques and then to study the implantation process to reduce the risk of subsequent miscarriage. Research is being conducted in other areas. I have in mind two types of abnormality — there is Down's syndrome and congenital abnormalities such as haemophilia and muscular dystrophy—where research is taking place.

There is no certainty that such research will be successful, and that also must be put in the balance. I mention—let me emphasise this—such considerations, not to imply that I or the Government have a fixed view about research, or that I regard the utilitarian case for research as outweighing the case that is clearly to be put against it but to remind the House that desirable outcomes from research are possible. That also is something which must be held in the balance.

The Warnock committee devoted a substantial part of its report to consideration of the ethical and moral

arguments about research on human embryos. Not all members of the committee were able to agree on all points and clearly the Government will need to consider carefully all the comments they receive. The committee's uncertainty was perhaps enhanced by the fact that the backcloth against which it was attempting to reach a view was constantly changing. The pace of development is such that during the course of its inquiry some novel concepts were brought forward in terms of treatment and research on which the committee had to form a view.

That saw its task as being to establish limits to what would be permitted, but it recognised that in a changing world new issues would arise which would require existing limits and understandings to be changed to meet them. It therefore recommended that a new statutory body should be established to regulate the provision of infertility services, research and all other aspects of this matter. There is a practical point here, and I return to the first point raised with me in an intervention. Even if at the end of the consultation we decided to create such a body there would clearly be a delay before the necessary legislation could bring it into effect, but the infertility services exist now and are expanding rapidly now. Research work is also taking place. Research and clinical activities are subject to some controls in the form of guidlines issued by the Medical Research Council in 1982 and by the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists and the British Medical Association last year. It is to the credit of those organisations that they took the initiative in establishing such guidelines. But those are purely professional and scientific bodies. I believe the Warnock committee was quite correct—I believe the view is echoed outside—in saying that there should be a substantial lay involvement in the supervision of work in this field. That is not the case at present. I shall therefore want to consider carefully—I say this directly to my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes (Mr. Benyon)—not only whether a statutory body should be established but how we can introduce more broadly based supervision arrangements in the short term. Developments in this field are moving too fast for us not to be ready to move with them.

Today's debate provides the House with an opportunity to discuss a matter which has been of growing public concern in recent years.

Mr. John Evans (St. Helens, North): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Fowler: I hope the hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I do not give way. I shall listen very carefully to what is said in the debate and the Goverment will consider not only today's debate but all the comments that they receive in response to the Warnock report before announcing their conclusions.

The debate which is taking place in Britain is paralleled by similar debates in other countries. In approaching that debate, I believe that we start with the advantage of the analysis that the Warnock committee has provided. Not only has the committee pointed out the difficulties; it has pointed to our duties. That is a fundamental point. The techniques which gave rise to the Warnock report, and the many difficult moral issues involved, cannot be wished away. The problems will not simply disappear. The responsibility rests with us in this House and with the Government.

Mr. Evans *rose*——

Mr. Fowler: The responsibility of this House, and of society as a whole, is to find some ground for agreement on the legal framework that will be necessary to control developments in this area in the future.

10.11 am

Mr. Michael Meacher (Oldham, West): I have always had a rather special interest in human fertilisation and embryology because the world's first test tube baby was born in my constituency in Oldham several years ago through the pioneering work of Dr. Steptoe. As a result of all the scientific advances that that event set in train, there is another much more important reason why this must surely be a unique debate in this House.

We are the first generation in the history of the human race to be faced with such ultimate questions as, "What is the nature and status of the human being?" and "Is there an absolute right to parenthood, whatever the cost?", when the answers to such questions are not merely theological or philosophical dissertations but will be reflected in scientific reality. Moreover, whatever answers or guidelines we may adopt now, I agree with the Secretary of State that we shall probably have to accept that changes in knowledge, techniques and cultural attitudes may well mean that medical codes of practice and legal sanctions will require constant review.

It is a subject that is fraught with fantasies of futuristic horror. Lurid associations with "Brave New World" embryology, Nazi medicine or Frankenstein experimentation, make debate between irreconcilable moral positions very difficult. It is to the credit of the Warnock committee that in this religious, philosophical, legal and ethical minefield its approach has been to accept the fundamental social and moral need for limits to be drawn, on the ground, stated in the foreword, that

> "A society which had no inhibiting limits, especially in the areas with which we have been concerned, questions of birth and death, of the setting up of families, and the valuing of human life, would be a society without moral scruples. And this nobody wants."

The committee goes on to say, in paragraph 7 of the foreword:

> "We realise that some people may think that we have set the limits, or have suggested that the barriers be erected, in the wrong places. But at least we hope that we have stated clearly what we think should be done, and exposed, as far as possible, the reasoning that lay behind our recommendations."

I believe that that is the right approach.

I should like to make it clear at the outset that, although I speak from the Opposition Front Bench, the views I express are my own personal views. These are not matters of party political contention; they are ultimate issues that in the end can be determined only by individual conscience. On that basis, it seems to me that there is not only an elegance and lucidity in the logical presentation of the report—no doubt befitting the Oxford philosopher who chaired it—but a certain coolness and rationality which, perhaps for the same reason, is sometimes slightly detached from the uncomfortable social world that we actually inhabit, where unequal relations of power between the classes, genders and races threaten to make an untidy mockery, in some respects, of some of its abstractions.

The most contentious issues in the report are research on live embryos, and surrogate motherhood. On the former, the committee was clearly divided, as is revealed

[Mr. Michael Meacher]

by the two expressions of dissent, B and C, on the issue, signed between them by seven of the 16 members of the committee. The majority recommended that experimentation be limited to 14 days after fertilisation, while a minority recommended a complete ban.

The question of when protection should be extended to the embryo—I repeat this most firmly—is at root a religious and moral decision, involving consideration of when life begins, what exactly constitutes life, whether life is defined by physical or spiritual concepts and, indeed, what protection itself actually means.

For those—I am sure that there will be many in this House—who believe that life begins at fertilisation and that full protection should be afforded from that point, the issue is clear. However, I have to point out that others take the view that the mere existence of the fertilised egg does not entail that it has the necessary and sufficient conditions for development to humanness, since it will need, for example, a sympathetic womb. On this view, the capacity to grow, achieved through nidation, marks the beginning of human life.

Others would postpone the beginning of life to the first growth of cerebral cells, at about 40 days. Others, again, highlight quickening—the point at which the mother begins to relate to the foetus as her baby—as the point at which they believe it acquires its absolute right to existence as a human person. All those latter opinions subscribe to the long established moral tradition that, sacred and precious though human life is from the beginning—whenever that exactly is—the protection afforded to it grows with the embryo's growth towards maturity.

However, even if the view is accepted that some time-limited experimentation on the human embryo should be allowed, there is inevitably a discrepancy of opinion about where that limit should lie. The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecology recommends 18 days after fertilisation, as that marks the beginning of the development of the brain and nerve cells. The Medical Research Council similarly proposes two to three weeks. Others recommend 30 days as the point at which the forebrain and eye develop, which herald the possibility of feeling.

The Council for Science in Society, in its important report entitled "Human Procreation", published in May this year, proposed six weeks, on the ground that the foetus could feel pain only when the complex nervous system was established.

It is clear from those different views that the issue is a moral one, that cannot, in the last analysis, be resolved by rational argument alone. The Warnock committee's case for the 14-day limit is that individuation is not complete until about 14 days. It appears that up to that point the embryo could split and form twins. On that view, the affording of full protection to the embryo flows from the point where, in a meaningful way, it has achieved status as an individual. Individuation is a significant factor in the delineation.

For those reasons, it seems reasonable that, subject to some such time limit—and as long as respect for human life is demonstrated by not allowing research except for the purposes of alleviating infertility or genetic disorder—research for those purposes should be accepted. I appreciate—it has already been made clear in the debate—that there are those who, from religious, philosophical or moral conviction, take the a priori position that all research on the human embryo is wrong and should be banned. I readily acknowledge the depth of their convictions and the strength of their feelings. However, for those of us who are not imbued with such inner certainty about those ultimate questions, the benefits of controlled research, closely monitored and regulated by a licensing body of the sort recommended by the Warnock committee, seem to be compelling.

First, and most importantly, the techniques have a great potential for remedying infertility. It is estimated that one in eight couples in Britain is infertile, which represents about 1 million people. That is an extremely large number. Infertility strikes at the essence of what is culturally defined as femaleness, and reproduction has been interpreted as the biological difference between men and women. Whether or not it is desirable, women are reared in a society which, in word and deed, implies that a woman is someone who has a baby.

Mrs. Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): I accept that it is important to try to help infertile women to have babies. Does the hon. Gentleman accept that, sadly, enough material exists in the form of stillborn babies or involuntary abortions?

Mr. Meacher: I do not believe that that is so. That source should be fully utilised, but further valuable and important advances could be made through research that goes beyond what the hon. Lady has referred to. For the reasons that I have given, I believe that to be justified.

Research that holds the prospect of reducing this blight on so many lives must be welcomed. Moreover, such work can reduce the incidence of miscarriage. At present, about 20 per cent. of natural pregnancies abort. Research in Edinburgh suggests that chromosomal irregularities are associated with the causes of miscarriage. But the potential for research goes much wider. Information could emerge on how a range of birth defects arises or on how cancer cells become malignant. It may also help to remedy genetic disease, which affects one in 50 children. One such disease—thalassemia—can now be identified in the foetus as a result of early work on embryonic tissue. Many treatments that we take for granted today derived partly from such work. The conquest of polio was partly achieved as a result of work on the aborted foetus.

For the future—it may be a distant future, but it is foreseeable—it could be possible to use cells, which divide to form specific organs in the embryo, to correct blood disorders or repair damaged tissue in the pancreas or even the heart, the brain or the liver of an adult.

However, I must express doubt as to whether it is wise to enshrine in statute a precise time limit for experimentation, whether 14 days or any other limit, for fear that it might be too rigid. There is as yet little consensus about when the cut-off point should be, and as we know well in the House, legislation could be notoriously difficult to alter if the general climate of opinion later was that the 14-day limit was too early or too late. Criminalisation of experimentation after what appears to be a relatively arbitrary date would seem inappropriate when, as the Secretary of State said, the matter involves rapid scientific change and calls for regular reappraisal. That was poignantly illustrated by the remark attributed to Mrs. Jean Walker, a member of the Warnock committee, who said:

"Frozen embryos did not exist when we started the inquiry, but by the time we finished, the first baby had been born."

Some flexibility is needed and can be built into the system without compromising control, which I would not wish to do.

Such a balance could be achieved by a licensing authority such as that recommended by the Warnock committee, with a lay chairperson and lay representation taking account of occupation, age, sex and differing religious, ethical and cultural views. It should be equipped with statutory powers to maintain the research and therapy within strict and enforceable boundaries of control. It should be required to publish an annual report setting out in detail current developments in the area, the guidelines being operated for approval and rejection of projects, and perhaps an assessment of research into the needs of families brought into being by the use of this technology, especially the needs of children born through AID or in vitro fertilisation.

The other central issue of the report is Warnock's proposal to outlaw surrogate motherhood. The committee's objections were based on the belief that bearing a child should be a personal and intimate relationship between mother and child, and that to embark upon a pregnancy without that commitment is somehow unnatural. Another objection is based on the breaking of the traditional sexual and parenting relationship that can be fulfilled only in marriage. There is also a question about deception as to the parentage of the child, and the objection that the surrogate might become corrupted by the money to be made from the activity.

The idea of surrogacy has been soured and abused by commercial exploitation, which is already widespread in the United States. The attempt of an American woman earlier this year to set up a scheme in London charging childless couples £16,000 to provide them with a baby, and offering a fee of £6,500 to the surrogate mother, caused widespread revulsion, I believe rightly so. Moreover, reports from the United States demonstrate the practical problems of breakdown where a handicapped baby is born or where the mother defaults. In several cases the biological mother has refused to honour the contract and hand over a perfect baby, while damaged babies have been rejected by both parties to the scheme.

The present legal position in Britain is that although surrogate motherhood is not illegal—it is difficult to see how it could be enforced—no contract between a couple and a surrogate mother has any legal validity. The Warnock report wishes to criminalise the commercialisation of the practice through surrogate motherhood clinics and to make liable at law professionals who assist the establishment of a surrogate pregnancy. Certainly, surrogacy and womb leasing make reproduction as marketable for women as sexuality has always been historically. Warnock's proposals to criminalise the procuring aspects of surrogacy, as opposed to surrogacy itself, has parallels with the present law of soliciting that are not happy ones.

The Council for Science in Society report "Human Procreation" to which I have referred, took the view that surrogate motherhood might be justifiable when the intending mother is physically unable to carry a baby herself. In those circumstances, it recommends that it should be arranged through a non-profit-making adoption agency. My view — I stress again that this is my personal view — is that with the possible exception of that very limited circumstance, Warnock's wish to ban surrogacy for profit is probably right and should be upheld.

This debate has been held in the course, and therefore before the completion, of the consultation period, for the reasons that the Secretary of State set out. It is my firm belief that there needs to be a good deal further public debate.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): My hon. Friend has made a thoughtful speech, during which he said several times that it is a personal statement, and I appreciate that. However, given the large number of representations that hon. Members have received — I have certainly received many from my constituents — opposed to the major recommendations of the report, will my hon. Friend make it clear that when the House of Commons votes on these issues, this matter, as it traditionally would be, will be conducted on the basis of a conscience vote, and that therefore there will be a free vote?

Mr. Meacher: I fully recognise the strength of feeling behind my hon. Friend's view. As my hon. Friend will know, a decision on that has not yet been taken—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] I would be surprised if my view did not have universal acceptance throughout the House.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): How can the hon. Gentleman say that such a decision has not been taken, when the real decision is the decision for every Member of Parliament individually as to how he votes on this issue?

Mr. Meacher: The hon. Gentleman is making an obvious point. I was merely saying that the matter has not been discussed, but I cannot believe that there could be any other conclusion than that there should be a free vote according to the individual consciences of every hon. Member. That follows from everything that I have said, and I cannot believe that anyone could take a different view.

There should be further public debate on this, and I am sure that there will be. For those reasons, I take the view, which is slightly different from that taken earlier, that there should be no hasty or precipitate legislation. However, it seems to me—again this is my view—that there is a need for action by Government in the fairly near future on certain limited points. I would define those as the outlawing of surrogacy, the banning of the sale of semen, the securing that babies born through AID are accepted as legitimate and the establishment of the licensing authority to exercise control through the setting and enforcing of standards for agencies in both therapy and research. Perhaps also, the Government should provide resources to ensure that professional counselling in this sector can play its proper and potential role. The latter is very important.

Such a package of measures, while wholly respecting the ultimacy of human rights, would offer a properly enforceable framework, in which, above all, there would be assistance to remedy infertility, so that many more childless families would be enabled to experience the richness of parenthood and a full human life. If the Warnock report helps to achieve that alone, it will have been well worth it.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ernest Armstrong): I remind the House that, even if speeches are limited to 10 minutes, the number of hon. Members anxious to catch my eye is such that not all will be able to speak.

10.34 am

Sir Bernard Braine (Castle Point): I agree with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services that the Warnock committee has performed a valuable service. Its report has brought to the attention of Parliament and the people activities now taking place under the cloak of helping to overcome the disturbing and distressing problem of infertility, and not a moment too soon. The report reveals developments in embryology that are already under way that will have dire legal, social, ethical and eugenic consequences for our nation and perhaps for all mankind.

Astonishingly, the committee performed its task without first considering the very question on which all else depends—the nature of the human embryo. It did so without any guiding moral principles. It has failed to recognise the human embryo as worthy of protection in all its stages of development. On the contrary, the embryos may be bought, experimented upon, sold, mutilated, frozen for up to 10 years, or simply killed when they are no longer of any use.

The Warnock report fails to defend marriage as the only proper framework within which children should be conceived and brought up. It views children as a product that can be born to unknown fathers, or even to fathers who have been dead for many years. One looks in vain for any reference to love or, more importantly, to the needs of children, who are our lifeline to the future.

True, the report makes proposals for curbing the worst excesses; for example, there are to be licensing arrangements. True, there is a welcome recommendation in regard to the commercial exploitation of surrogacy. True, it is recommended that experimentation on the human embryo should cease on the 14th day; and there is even an expression of dissent from three members of the committee on the use of human embryos in research. However, the general effect—I must speak as I feel—is repellent. Like the other place, I hope that the House will leave the Government in no doubt that that is its view.

I have been privileged to be a Member for almost 35 years, and never in all that time have I approached any subject with a greater sense of fear than this. As Lord Denning said in the other place:

"there is at the moment no law and no restriction whatever. Medical scientists and medical men can do as they like . . . without any control. These are dangers to our society."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 31 October 1984; Vol. 456, c. 541.]

On this the Warnock report offers us no comfort. It considers that the human embryo should have some status in law, but this is to be waived in certain specific circumstances. It argues that unless such a waiver is made, research for what it calls "beneficial purposes" will be frustrated. It used to be said that necessity is the tyrant's plea for every infringement of liberty. Necessity for research is a plea for snuffing out the life of human beings and is something that we should reject.

In the past, common law has protected the child who has quickened in the womb, and that was generally thought to be somewhere about the third or fourth month. We know now, as a result of genetic research, that that is not so, and that the human embryo from conception is growing and developing all the time.

Mr. Keith Speed (Ashford): Does my hon. Friend agree that this goes to the heart of the matter? If we accept that life begins at conception, as many religions through the ages have told us and as modern genetic science tells us, is it not arrogant to put ourselves in the position of God and be prepared to experiment or traffic in life?

Sir Bernard Braine: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and has put his finger on the crucial point. Practising Christians and Jews will recall the message that the Lord God delivered to the prophet Jeremiah:

"Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou cameth forth out of the womb I sanctified thee".

But if we are to speak solely in scientific terms, that can be put another way. We now know from genetic science that all the characteristics of the human person are found in the embryo from the moment of conception, so what right has anyone, however brilliant, to tamper with human life——

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Sir Bernard Braine: I am under an injunction to be brief, although, with respect, Mr. Speaker said that the time limitation would operate only from 11.30 am. I do not wish to delay the House unduly.

Lord Denning asked the key question about the human embryo in the other place, and his words need to be repeated:

"Is it a thing? God forbid! It is not a thing . . . I would suggest that the only logical point at which the law could start is that the child, the human being, starts at the moment of conception and fertilisation. From that point onwards there is a gradual development in its environment. So I would hold—and I would hope the judges would hold—that from that moment there is a living, human being which is entitled to protection just as much as the law protects a child. If it does protect it in this way, it cannot be sold or bought, it cannot be destroyed, it cannot be experimented upon for research or the like."—[*Official Report, House of Lords;* 31 October 1984, Vol. 456, c. 542.]

Six medical practitioners were members of the Warnock committee, in addition to the director of the Medical Research Council mammalian development unit. Yet, despite those seven experts, the report does not anywhere bother to tell us how it would define a human being. It tells us instead that the point at which a human embryo becomes a human being is purely a matter of arbitrary decision. But it cannot be a matter of arbitrary decision for hon. Members, who will have to provide protection at law.

Warnock comes up with a compromise that is based on no principle whatever, and says that experiments on the human embryo should be permitted up to 14 days but not beyond then.

How can any civilised society accept that on the 13th day the embryo does not count, it is just a piece of jelly; but that at one minute past midnight on the 14th day it suddenly becomes a human person who is entitled to the full protection of the law? Let the House reflect for a moment on the suggestion by Warnock that there might be all manner of magic cures for human beings if such experimentation is allowed. It says, for example, that there is no substitute for the use of human embryos in research into diseases such as Down's syndrome. But that is simply

not true. The world's greatest expert on that disorder, Professor Jerome Lejeune, submitted evidence to the Warnock committee. In the normal way, one would have thought that his evidence would have been noted. After all, it was Professor Lejeune who first established that Down's syndrome was due to an error in the chromosomes. Thus, he became the first scientist in the world to identify chromosomal disease. Since then, he has identified at least 20 more such diseases, and is generally recognised as one of the foremost geneticists in the world. Professor Lejeune's evidence made it clear that successful research is being carried out into possible cures for such disorders in centres all over the world, but without the use of human embryos.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): Even if Professor Lejeune were wrong and the only way of carrying out research was by experimenting on embryos, does my hon. Friend agree that if the destruction of human life is wrong, the fact that a benefit might flow from it cannot justify it?

Sir Bernard Braine: Of course, that is the central moral point. That is why the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) was right to demand some sort of assurance from the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher). Although the hon. Member for Oldham, West seemed to be speaking for himself, he was speaking from the Opposition Front Bench. If he wanted to speak solely for himself, he should have done so from the Back Benches. But the hon. Member for Monklands, West had the moral courage to stand up and ask for freedom to vote in accordance with his conscience.

Mr. Tom Clarke: I think that my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) behaved quite properly, and I was very proud of the speech that he made. I accepted the general tone of his remarks in the way that he intended the House to receive them.

Sir Bernard Braine: The hon. Member for Monklands, West is having to wrestle with his conscience and will have to make his own decision at some point, just like the rest of us.

Mr. Clarke: Nonsense. There is no conscience problem.

Sir Bernard Braine: There is for the rest of us.

The plain fact is that Lejeune's evidence was ignored because it did not fit in with the committee's preconceived ideas. It would surely have upset the apple cart to have to admit that there are far more efficient ways of finding cures than by the use of embryos. But the deception went further. There had to be members of the committee who would recognise that it was arrant nonsense to suggest that research on embryos up to 14 days would produce significant results. I shall explain why.

I am advised that the chances of accidentally producing an embryo with a genetic disease are very slight. That means that scientists would have to begin by deliberately trying to induce disease in the embryo. Having created an embryo with chromosomal abnormalities, they would then have to set to work to find a cure, which would involve waiting a considerable period of time, and far longer than 14 days. So, having taken the trouble to produce a diseased embryo or having poisoned one with drugs—which is another of Warnock's recommendations—is it really logical to stipulate any specific time at which its life should be terminated? Indeed, it is not.

Dame Mary Warnock herself seemed to recognise that when, in a BBC television broadcast on 18 July, she told millions of viewers:

"Of course, the 14-day rule may be changed."

The hon. Member for Oldham, West gratuitously implied that there are many learned bodies in this country that want it to be changed. In their view a 14-day limit is nonsense. I have little doubt that unless Parliament acts promptly, the rule will be changed. Indeed, it is highly probable that experimentation of an improper kind is already taking place.

Let us consider the framework within which such laboratory work is being done. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State knows that research is now being carried out within the guidelines laid down in 1982 by the MRC. There are six guidelines, but I shall quote just one, which states:

"Studies on interspecies fertilisation are valuable in providing information on the penetration capacity and chromosome complement of sperm from subfertile males, and should be supported."

That is where research is already leading us. The Warnock committee was plainly worried about that, and in paragraph 12.2 the report states:

"Both the hamster tests and the possibility of other trans-species fertilisations, carried out either diagnostically or as part of a research project, have caused public concern about the prospect of developing hybrid half-human creatures."

A little later, the report states that another cause for concern is

"the suggestion that a human embryo might be transferred to the uterus of another species for gestation. While the available animal work does not suggest that it is at all likely that human embryos could be nurtured in the uterus of another species, the possibility that such an experiment might be attempted must be recognised."

The report at least suggests that the latter possibility should be made a criminal offence. Good, but it is nevertheless clear that the report is happy about the existing MRC guidelines. It is prepared to recommend that the human embryo should be used up to 14 days on the strict conditions that the researchers abide by a new commandment—"On the 14th day, thou shalt kill." That is what the report recommends. That is what, according to Warnock, should be the law of the land.

It has long been accepted that war is far too serious a matter for generals. It is manifest that medical research of this nature cannot safely be left to medical scientists. It is supremely important that legislation on this aspect alone—never mind anything else—should be introduced without delay. The use of the embryo for experimentation is an affront to humanity, and there is no room whatever for compromise on the matter.

There is a further consideration which should be at the forefront of our minds. Parliament does not always speak with one voice, but, at least in the present century, it has had a keen interest in protecting children from exploitation, cruelty and neglect. Nowhere does Warnock pay any regard to the needs of children produced by the new techniques. It concerns itself solely with the need of individuals—not necessarily married couples—to have a child. Even Warnock admits that we do not know what is likely to be the long-term effect on the child of the freezing of the embryo. The truth is that we do not even know what the short-term effects of freezing may be. Medical scientists are not infallible. They make mistakes, like the rest of us. Some years ago, women threatened with miscarriage were given oestrogen. Not until the children

[Sir Bernard Braine]

of those pregnancies reached puberty was it discovered that the oestrogen given to the mothers had, in some of the children, caused cancer of the vagina. My right hon. Friend knows perfectly well how many other such disastrous instances could be quoted. Nowhere in the report are those problems investigated. Nowhere does the report discuss what legal recourse the children would have if—God forbid—they found themselves faced with a tragic disability as a result of being frozen at the start of their lives—I repeat, "at the start of their lives".

We need to ask a simple question: if it is discovered that in vitro fertilisation causes damage which is detected later in life, who will be held responsible in law? Will it be the parents, one of whom may have been dead for many years? Will it be the donor, the doctors, or perhaps the storage authority? I hope that my right hon. Friend will share with us his thoughts on that horrendous question. Meanwhile, I share my thoughts with him. It is time to call a halt to this wickedness and to outlaw, for good, experiments on the human embryo.

10.53 am

Mr. Leo Abse (Torfaen): I listened somewhat wryly to the opening comments of the Secretary of State about expedition and delay. It is now six and a half years since, with the hon. Member for Castle Point (Sir B. Braine), and on the day following the birth of the Oldham baby, I initiated a debate in Committee considering the genetic manipulation regulations in which I put forward a demand for a committee such as the Warnock committee. That was not all. I repeatedly asked for such a committee in questions to the Prime Minister, but it was not until March 1982, when I demanded in an Adjournment debate that such a committee should be set up, that any move was made.

I do not complain of delay on the part of the present Government. The delay was the responsibility of successive Governments. I do not complain of the delay on the part of the Warnock committee, which, in my view, has acted heroically and with extraordinary expedition in wrestling with complex problems.

I do not comment on the delay in order to show my own prescience but because I believe that there is now a need for expedition in precisely the areas specified by my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher). I believe that this is an area where decisions could be taken by the House, and that there is a further decision that should be taken. We should immediately set up the proposed central committee to ensure that the opportunity to have in vitro babies is not confined to patients in private clinics in the west end of London but exists throughout the National Health Service. I am profoundly concerned that womenfolk of Wales should have the same rights and opportunities to have a baby as do wealthier women who can make use of the facilities in private clinics.

In my view, the generosity of spirit of the hon. Member for Castle Point has been exploited by the familiar anti-abortion lobbies, which, whatever their value may be, have been unable to distinguish between the problems of abortion and those of in vitro fertilisation. The bad example set by the hon. Member for Castle Point and, in my view, by the House of Lords should not be followed. The debate should not be a wake. It should not be full of forebodings and woe. It should be a celebration. We should never forget the agony endured by the many women who are infertile. One married couple in 10 do not have children after many years, and most of that infertility is involuntary. That gives some idea of the scale of the problem.

I have my prejudices. I am prejudiced in favour of the family. I want to ensure that all who wish to enjoy an anchored and stable family life should be able to make use of the opportunities which science now affords. If one starts with that prejudice, one takes a very different view from that of the hon. Member for Castle Point.

The hon. Member for Castle Point has referred to the Bible. I remember the story of Abraham and Sarah. Sarah suggested to Abraham that Hagar should give him a son he lacked because Sarah was barren. The good Lord told Abraham that he would have a child by Sarah. The Bible records that Abraham laughed, and fell upon the ground with laughter. Perhaps that was not surprising. Abraham was 100 years old and Sarah was 90. However, a great miracle came about. The agony of Sarah, we should remember, is the agony that is suffered by all those in our community who are childless. If the myth is true, and if the good Lord had not been bountiful towards Abraham and Sarah, perhaps I would not have been here.

It was not only Abraham who laughed and mocked when he was told that a miracle could happen. People in this country laughed and mocked at Bob Edwards and Mr. Steptoe and all those engaged in the work. I am not thinking only of the churches. The Medical Research Council attempted to sabotage the work of those clinicians. The MRC insisted — and the Government were foolish enough to listen to it—that no funds should be given for the research that needed to take place. The secretary of the British Medical Association wanted to place a moratorium on the work of Professor Craft and others. If we had listened to such authorities, hundreds of children would not have been born to those who yearn to enjoy the greatest boon and blessing that anyone can be granted—the blessing of parenthood.

Unhappily, infertility seems to be increasing. That may be the consequence of too easy access to abortion facilities, of the coil or of the pill. It is certainly a consequence of the change in sexual conventions. Such factors lead to infections of the fallopian tubes and to other conditions. This is certainly not a time when the House should stand back and say that under no circumstances should we permit research which will make a greater degree of success available to all who long for the blessings of parenthood.

By what moral right does the hon. Member for Castle Point or anyone else say that we should stop research when thousands, perhaps millions of our womenfolk cannot have children? People must think the issue through more and not, in a spirit of moral censoriousness, believe that they should take a superior stance over those of us who most definitely take a contrary view.

It being Eleven o'clock, MR. SPEAKER *interrupted the proceedings, pursuant to Standing Order No. 5 (Friday sittings).*

Business of the House

The Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Biffen): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a short statement about the business for next week.

The business on the Opposition's fourth allotted day on Tuesday, 27 November will now be as follows: until about 7 o'clock a debate on an Opposition motion on the failure of Government policies to safeguard the natural environment and the national heritage of Britain, followed by a debate on an Opposition motion on the crisis in the shipbuilding industry.

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): I thank the Leader of the House for his statement. Is he aware that since the negotiations earlier in the week we have had the appalling announcement about further closures and redundancies in the shipbuilding industry? It seemed right that we should give immediate attention and consideration to that grave matter. My great worry about the pace of redundancies throughout the country is that we shall constantly have to demand from the Government time for debate on that urgent matter which affects so many of our fellow citizens.

Mr. Eric Forth (Mid-Worcestershire): This is the second time in two weeks that a change of business has been announced in a Friday statement. Will the Leader of the House recommend to right hon. and hon. Members that if they wish to know the business for the following week they should attend on Friday mornings instead of Thursday afternoons?

Mr. Don Dixon (Jarrow): Under this Government one cannot detail the business for the following week because there are so many redundancies. Only this morning I received a telephone call telling me that a Jarrow steel rolling mill was to be closed causing another 246 redundancies.

The unemployment rate in the area is far too high. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will see the Prime Minister and ask her to meet a deputation from south Tyneside council to talk about the dereliction and the deindustrialisation of south Tyneside. Unemployment is too high in Jarrow and south Tyneside. The people of Jarrow——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Member will be able to raise the subject on Tuesday if he catches my eye.

Mr. Dixon: Unemployment is too high——

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. John McWilliam (Blaydon): I thank the Leader of the House for agreeing to a change of business on Tuesday because in the north-east we are desperately concerned about the effects of cuts in the shipbuilding industry. We are worried not only about the yards themselves, but about companies in my constituency which supply the yards.

Will the Leader of the House take on board what my hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon) has just said and see whether he can ensure that the appropriate Minister is present to answer detailed questions which hon. Members representing north-east and north-west constituencies will want to ask about the redundancies?

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Is there not a relationship between the debate on Tuesday and the statement which might be made next week about the future of regional assistance? Would it not be appropriate if hon. Members had that information at their disposal at the time of the shipbuilding industry debate because on Wednesday hon. Members may discover too late that some areas are to lose regional assistance?

Mr. Biffen: A number of points of substance will be featured on Tuesday. In that debate I shall examine what the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) has said.

May I say to my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Forth) it gives me no pleasure to make on a Friday a statement adjusting business because it causes inconvenience to the House generally, and inconvenience to me in particular.

Mr. Dixon: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The information that we have received this morning is very serious. The Minister should have made a statement this morning about the redundancies. It is not good the Leader of the House making excuses. When he was in the Chamber yesterday he was gibbering away to his right hon. Friend the Prime Minister——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman knows that a point of order must be made to me, not to the Minister.

Human Fertilisation and Embryology (Warnock Report)

Question again proposed, That this House do now adjourn.

11.6 am

Mr. Abse: We turn to calmer waters.

I was drawing the attention of the House to the continued need for research. Certain stances are adopted. I should have thought that those with Christian beliefs would realise the historical need for great caution. I responded, in an intervention earlier. I did not do so frivolously, although I thought the intervention inept, and drew attention to the phenomenon of parthenogenesis as expressed through virgin birth which led to the benign consequence, according to Christian myth, of giving Christ to the world. I suggested that perhaps the churches should bear that in mind. I go further. When we talk about the attitude of religion to research we should bear in mind how the Pope originally acted towards Galileo when he condemned him for his insistence upon scientific truth.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): The hon. Gentleman refers to Galileo, but in that instance it did not matter whether he was right. Indulging in the act of creation matters very much indeed.

Mr. Abse: I do not understand that. If it did not matter the Pope would not have been in such a pother. I think that scientific truth matters in all circumstances, as all truth does. From Galileo's time to the time when Catholic Vienna thwarted Sigmund Freud in his attempt to publish and would not even grant him a professorship is long enough a period to make the Catholic and other churches recall and so be wary when they make an assault upon the advances of science.

There are many reasons for more research. The success rate of in vitro pregnancies should not be exaggerated. The expectations of those who want children should not be raised unnecessarily. Even in the replacement of single embryos the success rate is only between 10 per cent. and 15 per cent.

Who has the moral right to say that research which can be done only on a conceptus outside the uterus should not be encouraged? Who has the right to say that we should not encourage those who want to increase the incidence of success and so prevent the agonising of every woman who wants a child but cannot have one? Who wants that woe to continue if research would enable those women to have a child? I do not understand how women Members can condemn women who seek in vitro fertilisation and prevent them from taking advantage of research.

Mrs. Anna McCurley (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): I am surprised that the hon. Member for Torfaen (Mr. Abse) should confuse the wish to have a child with the moral right to have a child. I have borne a child. I did not have a right to have my daughter; I wished to have her. The confusion must be dispelled.

Mr. Abse: The intellectual confusion is in the mind of the hon. Lady. It is because it is such a fundamental right that it is set out in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights. It is there stated that everyone has a right to parenthood. To suggest that it is a mere caprice for a woman to have the benefit of bearing a child is to devalue womanhood and parenthood. I do not go along with the view presented by the hon. Lady.

Mr. Nicholls *rose——*

Mr. Abse: There are many other reasons why research is necessary, apart from increasing the incidence of success. As my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West mentioned in passing, there is need for more research to be undertaken on miscarriages. I understand that 60 per cent. of conceptions result in miscarriage. Fortunately, most miscarriages occur at an early stage. There can, however, be few who do not know how miscarriages can impinge upon families when they take place at a late stage.

Women outside this place are only beginning to be aware of the issues. I hope that they will take up the cause of all those who are undertaking dedicated research into miscarriages. If that requires work upon the conceptus —it is evident from the research that is taking place in Edinburgh that it does—I hope that women will insist that it takes place. Let us allow the work of scientists to go ahead to reduce the risk of miscarriages taking place at a late stage following a long period of expectancy on the part of the woman. Whatever judgments are made, I hope that moral superiority values will not be claimed by those opposed to this work. It is important that research continues to quench the miscarriages that are taking place. The research opportunities are happily becoming increasingly available.

Mr. John Ward (Poole): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. When Mr. Speaker was in the Chair earlier this morning, he said that the 10-minute rule for speeches would begin at 11.30. Will you consider protecting the interests of all Back Benchers, Mr. Deputy Speaker? It seems that there will be only two or three speeches before 11.30. If you were to decide to introduce the 10-minute rule now, it would assist us.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I have no power to alter the decisions of the House.

Mr. Abse: Judging by the mood of Conservative Members, it is time for an opinion different from theirs to be expressed. I believe that that opinion will be shared by millions outside this place when they become aware of the issues that are involved.

The Welsh Office has initiated an investigation into the high incidence of congenital disabilities in my constituency. There is a dismal record of congenital disabilities throughout the Principality. There is no region in Britain that suffers, for example, more from spina bifida than the Principality. In Gwynedd the figures are horrifying. However, there are those in this place who apparently believe that on moral grounds they can condemn the research that is taking place, which may be assisted by an examination of the conceptus. I am not prepared to say in future to those born with congenital disabilities that I took a decision in the House which made their condition more likely when the possibilities were that it could have been avoided.

Some congenital diseases are lethal but there is growing hope that we may be able to conquer them. Against that background I am not prepared to adopt the didactic views that are coming from the active lobbies. Those who sat on the Warnock committee heard the evidence of the whole scientific world and not that of one scientist. They came

to the conclusion that it was necessary for research to continue on embryos created for a specific purpose. Those who are dodging the issue, such as the members of the Church of England social responsibility group, by saying that only spare embryos should be used are not facing the realities. The number of spare embryos is diminishing increasingly. Multiple embryos are part of the injection process in in vitro fertilisation and that has a direct bearing on the diminishing number of embryos. The increasing use of freezing means also that the number of embryos diminishes. It is being realised increasingly, clinically, that we have no right to put back into the womb anything but the best embryo when a number are available. The embryo that is put back into the womb must be the one that is most likely to result in an unblemished baby. Research should not be based on spare embryos that are likely to be defective.

Sir Ian Percival (Southport): I have served in the House for a long time with the hon. Gentleman and I respect the strength of his convictions, but will he not equally respect the fact that there is widespread unease in the country about what is being done in the name of the objectives of which he speaks so passionately, and the speed at which they are moving? Does he agree that there is a real need for an early curb to be introduced while Parliament decides what to do? Whether that curb should be a moratorium such as the one sought by the townswomen's guilds or the 14-day limit suggested by the Warnock committee, and what the ultimate answer should be will be a matter for the individual conscience of all Members, decided by a majority vote in the House. Does not the hon. Gentleman recognise that there is widespread unease throughout the country and that that calls for early action by way of a curb by the House?

Mr. Abse: Of course there is anxiety. Some of it is well-founded but some of it is ill-founded. I hope that we shall explain to the nation that much of its anxiety is ill-founded. There are those who are apparently exploiting abortion issues and the matters that arise from them in a way that is doing a great deal of damage to research possibilities. It is no use talking about our scientists doing dedicated work as if they are enemy aliens who are engaged in criminal activity. They are a dedicated group and it is time that some hon. Members stopped taking such an insular view.

Our research scientists are already being tempted to countries such as Australia and the United States to the detriment of work that could be done to help the women of this nation. There is certainly need for control over a wide range of the matters considered by the Warnock committee but I suggest that the committee which decides whether research should continue should be separate from the committee that is now proposed. The committee proposed by Warnock will have a wide range of advisory and executive functions. It will be a heterogeneous group and, because it will be representing so many religious and ethical opinions, there will inevitably be coalitions and horse trading in dealing with research matters. That is not the way to deal with them.

There should be a separate committee, with tough powers, a lay chairman and medical and scientific members who could adjudicate on the propriety of the proposed research and decide whether it is frivolous or aims to improve the fertility of men, the possibility of conquering genetic diseases and the likelihood of women who have IVF succeeding in having a child. Those issues should be considered coolly and by a predominantly scientific committee in which the medical and scientific world has confidence. I ask the Minister to consider establishing such a committee.

We could then avoid this present easy talk of trying to bring scientists under the threat of the criminal law. Such a committee could monitor their work and would be far more effective than what is proposed.

I sense from the mood of the House that we shall hear more speeches in the same vein as those that have already been made by the hon. Member for Castle Point. It is a great pity that hon. Members who take such views do not give the same consideration to life when considering the nuclear issue. I do not hear them raising their voices against the spread of nuclear missiles and bombs, which could end——

Mrs. Kellett-Bowman: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Member for Torfaen (Mr. Abse) is bringing in material that is extraneous to the debate.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I remind the House that we are debating a motion for the Adjournment.

Mr. Abse: As a result of the nuclear build-up, the next generation could be the last generation. In those circumstances, there are other preoccupations that could come to the fore apart from those that are apparently coming to the fore in this debate.

I believe in life; I believe in the family; I believe that the millions of people who want to be parents have a right to become parents. We should set up a committee to monitor the research carried out by our dedicated scientists and make it more likely that we could have a community with far more anchored families.

11.23 am

Sir Gerard Vaughan (Reading, East): I can tell the hon. Member for Torfaen (Mr. Abse) that there will indeed be many more speeches from the Conservative Benches along the lines of those that we have already heard, because fundamental moral issues are at stake.

The hon. Member for Torfaen made a muddled speech and I was sorry that he confused an issue on which we are all in agreement. There is no argument about the fact that IVF can bring great happiness and benefit to many families who have not been able to have children. The point at issue, as was rightly spelt out by the Warnock committee, is the unease about embryonic manipulation. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State clearly set that issue before us when he talked about the moral, Christian and complicated legal issues involved.

We must settle those matters. We must not wait for the medical profession or public opinion to move one way or another. We are discussing fundamental problems which must be settled here. Also, we must not wait for other countries to decide for us. What we do in our society is a matter for us to decide, and we must take the responsibility. It is not sufficient to wait until events that are foreseeable occur and then decide whether they should have happened. We can foresee many developments that would be obscene and deplorable.

The hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) spoke about the benefits of embryonic research for various

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conditions. As a doctor, I would have been interested to hear whether the hon. Gentleman based his remarks on genuine medical evidence or was merely stretching medical speculation to cover advantages that we do not know will be gained.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State spoke about the human values at stake in the debate and rightly pointed out the speed with which events are moving. Research is moving so fast that we cannot wait much longer before taking action to monitor what is going on.

I do not agree with all the conclusions of the Warnock report, but it has done a great service for the House. As Hugo Young pointed out in a recent article in *The Guardian*, the report's initial reception was almost unanimously favourable. The BMA called it a "brilliant" report. However, Hugo Young pointed out that as time has gone by the report has not weathered well. He discussed the licensing authority, about which I am very worried, and pointed out that with

"a whistle of concern and a sanctimonious mutter"

the Warnock report

"would authorise and encourage the creation of embryos purely for research"—

that is different from doing research on embryos that are already available—

"the deployment for research of 'spare' embryos produced for an attempted fertilisation, the freezing of embryos for 10 years prior to their disposal."

It is an uncivilised concept that we should hold a human being in ice for 10 years and then destroy him. Mr. Young also referred to the sale of embryos under licence and concluded his moving article:

"If there is to be any respect for the embryo it should surely, in morality, be a total respect".

My view is that the next logical step is to accept that, while the ovum and the sperm have a potential for life, life begins at conception. It is unacceptable to bank fertilised ova and to experiment on human embryos, even for the first 14 days. It is wrong to implant five, six or seven ova into one woman's uterus, as has already happened, and to indulge in surrogate mothering, a matter on which I agree with the Warnock report.

Other issues flow from all this work. What about the wider concepts? What about animals and genetic manipulation? What is our view on inserting parts of living animals into human beings? The baboon heart incident was regarded by many of my constituents as offensive, obscene and unnecessary.

As the Warnock report reminded us, there is the possibility of implanting fertilised ova into animals. The sheep-goat has already shown us the possibilities opening up of human-animal fusion; the mythological centaur begins to become an awful potential reality.

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): Is not one of the most insidious threats and risks to humanity that if, even under tightly controlled laboratory conditions, we allow so-called closely controlled experiments during the 14-day period, even the most stringent statutory authority could not ultimately control the nature of the experiment? Only the scientific technicians in charge of the experiments will be able to decide.

Sir Gerard Vaughan: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I have paid particular interest to the sort of research being undertaken, and whole areas of research now being considered are, I believe, wholly against the concept of any civilised human society.

The hon. Member for Torfaen referred to the atomic issue. In the recent television series on C. P. Snow's books we were reminded that the atomic scientists in the 1940s got round to examining the long-term implications of much of what they were doing, and examining their consciences, only when it was already too late because the reins of decision had been taken out of their hands. If we do not act with authority, and rapidly, we shall find that scientific experiments intended for one purpose only have already rushed far ahead of what is acceptable.

The Warnock committee is right. We must set barriers —limits which should not be crossed. But who is to set those barriers, what should be the limits, and when? There is great urgency in this matter. The barriers should be set by this House, not by people outside. We, as a civilised Chamber and as a civilised society, should say that there is a limit to going too far down this road. Let us set it quickly and clearly.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the House that I am now applying the 10-minute time limit on speeches.

11.32 am

Mr. Michael Meadowcroft (Leeds, West): I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for calling me to speak. I sympathise with the two or more hon. Members who will not be able to contribute to the debate because of the length of a previous speech.

Like so many hon. Members who have spoken, I commend the members of the Warnock committee for their brave attempt to grapple with some of the issues that need such vigorous thought. Of course, some criticism can be made of the way in which the committee conducted its business — for example, the lack of dimension from some of the women's organisations that might have added to the spectrum of opinion in the committee.

A new build-up of moral issues is coming before Parliament for decision. We are concerned very much more with scientific advances than with other questions that are particularly and peculiarly ethical matters. I suspect that this issue is only one of a number that we shall have to debate. As hon. Members have said, it is crucial to debate those issues here. We must determine that science will not dominate our deliberations and decision making, but rather will serve our decisions.

The hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher), in his excellent speech, said that we must approach these issues with considerable intellectual vulnerability. To try to pretend that we can suddenly and easily find answers is to approach the issues with an arrogance that is not befitting this House. However, to do nothing is as dangerous as doing the wrong thing. I am tempted to suggest that we put the hon. Members for Castle Point (Sir B. Braine) and for Torfaen (Mr. Abse) into the same room and let them fight it out. That could be a substitute for another Warnock committee. The hon. Member for Torfaen suggested that there should be almost no controls, while the hon. Member for Castle Point suggested almost total control. We cannot reach a decision on these issues by taking such rooted positions.

It is important to consider some of the constraints upon our decision making on such issues. A hierarchy of

constraints may be impinging on our decision making. There is the real issue of whether there is a natural order within society that one disturbs at society's peril. Are there physical and psychological constraints that we must take fundamentally into account when we decide on pragmatic issues that have come before us because science has reached a certain point?

I find sex selection alarming. What will be the outcome of being able to select the sex of a child? That takes us further and further into the realms of eugenics—and history has shown that to be appalling in its consequences.

Are there values in the wider community that are imperilled by decision making on such issues? They may not be as physical as some of the physical and psychological effects on the individual, but they are no less real. We may undermine the security and stability of our community if we make the wrong decisions.

If there are no absolute rules—and I accept the opinion of the hon. Member for Castle Point—where do we fix the relative rules? We are talking about permissive powers—not about forcing people to do something. What is repugnant to one person may not be so repugnant to another. Therefore, we must accept that it may be right for the House to determine that certain possibilities are available to people for them to take up if they are not as concerned about that issue as others may be.

There will be conflict between the benefits to one group and the damage to the deeply held views of others. Those views have been forcefully expressed this morning. There is legitimacy in the views expressed in the petitions presented this morning. We must ask whether those wishes and deeply held feelings are capable of being legislated for. It is not a question of saying that the views are not legitimate or are not an appropriate expression of moral outrage; the question is whether we can legislate for them and whether we must take into account side effects. We may have to take a step-by-step approach to evaluate the effects of the decision before moving on. I accept that there is an urgency about some of these matters, but some of them could be left until we have seen the effects of earlier decisions on society.

There is a crucial need to protect people from exploitation—sexual exploitation, financial exploitation and even exploitation by society because of the pressures that may be put upon them. At the root of the debate is the question of infertility. We are told that 10 per cent. of partnerships do not have children. Unfortunately, that figure has been plucked out of the air—there is no scientific research to back it. Perhaps it would be valuable to study the accuracy of the figures, and decide how many partnerships voluntarily did not have children.

It is a natural and understandable human desire to have children. However, sometimes family pressures are put upon people to have children. There is also pressure from society—a hidden view that someone is not a complete person unless she has had a child. It is possible that too much pressure is being put upon people and that that affects the way in which we are considering the issue before us.

Those of us who in our eyes are fortunate enough to have children need to be humble and sensitive towards the feelings of those who do not. However, we need to have more counselling and support available to enable people to decide, perhaps even a freer atmosphere, whether they wish to have children under any system.

I do not think that the advances in science, technology and knowledge have necessarily been very beneficial when they have produced multiple pregnancies. It can hardly be argued that that is a natural consequence of what has been achieved in recent years.

Not only will the large issue not go away. The individual issues within it will not go away either. In that respect it is necessary to consider some of the individual issues.

One area where there may be greater support in the House is that of the licensing of experimentation and the work which may go on. I suspect that there will be broad support in the House for the view that it is necessary to have a considerable lay element within such a licensing authority rather than risk its being dominated by the medical profession or other scientific backgrounds.

A question has been raised about whether the benefits of the technology are to be freely available. If they are not, to whom are they to be available? Who is to decide who should benefit from it? Is it to be available from the National Health Service, or will there be some form of medical choice so that people may avail themselves of these new techniques? I suspect that the National Health Service will have to provide some of these services freely and that it cannot be left to the private sector.

I accept the report's conclusions on AID—*[Interruption.]* I suspect, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I have run foul of the 10-minute rule.

Cold print cannot effectively cope with the weight of emotion that there is on this subject. We still have to legislate and deal with the issues as they come before us.

11.43 am

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): The conception of human life, the formation of the body and, eventually, birth are both mysterious and miraculous. The hon. Members for Castle Point (Sir B. Braine) and for Torfaen (Mr. Abse) quoted from the Old Testament scriptures, and I suppose that I shall be in order in quoting from the same scripture. King David said:

"I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well.

My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth.

Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them."

I was interested to hear the hon. Member for Torfean say that he believed the Old Testament in respect of his own lineage and then question the lineage of Jesus Christ. I remind him that the Old Testament scripture makes it clear that Christ would be virgin born, in the prophecy of Isaiah. I am sorry that I have not more time to deal with that now. However, I do not believe that the Christian religion is a myth. I believe in the virgin birth of the Lord Jesus Christ.

My first criticism of the Warnock report is that nowhere in it is there provided a reasoned exposition of what has been called the scientific status of the embryo. The committee states the view of those who say that a human embryo cannot be thought of us as a person or even as a potential person. I can only draw the conclusion that the committee accepted the non-personhood theory of the embryo by the fact that it recommended its use as a guinea pig.

I hold that the right to life is more important than any other right—even the right of the family. I believe that

[Rev. Ian Paisley]

the embryo has human life and therefore is a human person. If we tamper with that embryo we tamper with a human being.

Mr. Thurnham: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Rev. Ian Paisley: I cannot give way to the hon. Gentleman. I have only 10 minutes, and I have already had to use five of them to deal with the comments of the hon. Member for Torfaen.

The committee also holds that the embryo should have some status in law, yet it maintains that the human embryo may be sold. I thought that the House had repudiated slavery long ago. To buy and sell the living body of a human being is slavery and is barbaric. For Warnock to say that the embryo should have a special status and then to say that it is a saleable commodity is at best contradictory and at worst hypocritical.

The embryo may be frozen. For the first time it is suggested that we should make legal a medical procedure which is not to aid the person concerned. Who can say what will happen when the embryo is frozen? We are told that the current ignorance of the possible effects of storage is accepted by all—even by those who produced this report.

It is to be experimented upon up to the 14th day after fertilisation. Yet it has been recognised even in this debate that there is a great difference of opinion about whether it should be 14 days, 30 days or even more. I say that from its conception it is a human being and must not be tampered with.

Then we have the suggestion of drugs and what should happen when they are used. Even Dame Mary herself, during a BBC television programme on 18 July said:

"Of course, the 14-day rule may be changed."

We all know that it will be changed. Once scientists have 14 days, they will agitate for more and the matter will escalate.

Interspecies fertilisation is an abominable thought. We have been asked whether we have the moral right to say anything about this. We have the moral right, the legal right and the duty to defend human life. That is what this debate is about.

I am glad that the recommendation of the committee is to ban surrogate parenthood. I do not see why a rich couple should be able to hire the womb of a poor person and pay for what they want. That is totally immoral, and the House needs to reject it out of hand.

11.48 am

Mrs. Renée Short (Wolverhampton, North-East): I am glad to have the opportunity to intervene in what so far has been an all-male debate. That is a pity when we are discussing a subject which concerns women just as much as men, although I accept, of course, that women must have the assistance of men to procreate.

In July the Parliamentary and Scientific Committee, of which I am chairman, invited two members of the Warnock committee to address it. It is a pity that more of the hon. Members present today did not listen to them, because they might have got rid of some of the antique prejudices that they have been expressing.

Professor John Marshall, of the Institute of Neurology, opened his statement by saying:

"I think that during the lifetime of most of us there have been three events that have had a cataclysmic effect upon us. The first was nuclear fission which has given us the opportunity to annihilate our species; the second was the landing of the first man on the moon which has altered our whole cosmology; and the third was the birth of Louise Brown in 1978, the first child born as a result of in vitro fertilisation."

Professor Macnaughton, who is professor of obstetrics at Glasgow, said:

"Most of us are fortunate in having no difficulty about having children and we do not appreciate how overpowering a problem it is for a couple who cannot apparently have a child. People will say, 'Well, it's not a killing disease.' That is so. It is not like cancer. But I have had in my 24 years of dealing with this two patients who actually committed suicide because they could not cope with infertility. It is indirectly a very serious condition."

The Warnock report addresses a number of problems that have received a great deal of attention in the media, much of it sensational and ill-informed. Infertility is a real problem that causes immense distress to those couples who suffer from it.

Mr. Dykes *rose*——

Mrs. Short: Those of us who have been able to prove our fertility cannot comprehend how distressing it is to be unable to have one's own child. There are people who say that we should not do anything to help an infertile couple to have a child. Apparently, that is the belief of Conservative Members, but the Warnock committee rejected that view. It went on to consider several ways in which the distress caused by infertility could be relieved. Some of the matters discussed in the report are controversial, and we have heard expressions of that during this debate. Surrogacy and embryo freezing are controversial. I do not think that the House really comprehends that fact, even though it is almost an all-male House. *[Interruption.]* I said that it is almost an all-male House. There are only about 19 women in the House.

Male infertility occurs in about 40 per cent. of partnerships. AID has now been accepted as a proper way of treating the problem. In 1960 a report was published stating that that method was unacceptable and undesirable and should be strongly discouraged. That was 1960, and medical science has made progress and public opinion has changed. The method has developed, so that about 1,000 children are born each year as a result of its use. If that proposal had been crushed at the beginning, many families would not have been able to have a child. Legal problems, including paternity and inheritance, must still be resolved. It is time that the Home Secretary gave some attention to absolving the donor from all rights and duties towards the child. That would regularise the position.

In vitro fertilisation was developed during the past 10 years. It is still fallible, and its present success rate is only between 15 per cent. and 25 per cent. Steptoe and Edwards pioneered IVF. The problem of multiple births—this is an acute problem—connected with this technique has yet to be resolved, but I am sure that if medical science is allowed to continue its work that will happen.

Surrogacy is the issue that causes great concern today. The woman who bears the child will not have contributed any genes towards that child. The child is not genetically hers, although she gave birth to it. Reference has been made to the position in America, where this technique has developed. For large sums of money, agencies organise surrogate mothers, but I think that we would find that approach to be unacceptable. Legislation may be required to deal with that development as well.

There is another view that surrogacy should not be accepted. We all know that it is not possible to put the

clock back once a technique has been developed and proved safe. It is difficult to prevent those procedures from being carried out. There is rightly great concern about the fact that research is conducted on human embryonic material. The Warnock report recommends that such research resulting from IVF should be permissible but controlled. The evidence given by the Royal Society to the Warnock committee showed that important studies are being undertaken into other aspects of human embryology that can be advanced only by research on human, as distinct from animal, embryonic material. We must bear that point in mind. There is a need for this work to be a matter for local ethical committees, as is already the practice for other research in this field.

It is surprising that Conservative Members have said so little about the proposal to set up a licensing body, comprising lay, scientific and medical members and a lay chairman, and an inspectorate to ensure that the terms of a licence are properly observed. I believe that such a licensing body would provide adequate safeguards to cover all the anxieties that have been expressed.

Many people believe that it is wrong to experiment on a human embryo. I believe that that is a matter for individuals to decide for themselves. Having achieved in vitro fertilisation, progress will not be halted, so inspection and regulation are important. That is why it is so necessary to set up a proper licensing body. I hope that we shall not lose sight of the fact that a child needs two loving parents and a stable relationship with a father and a mother, for the establishment of the gender role is important. The report takes a pragmatic view and states:

"we could react only to what we knew, and what we could realistically foresee."

That is the basis of the report. The report states:

"in our pluralistic society it is not to be expected that any one set of principles can be enunciated to be completely accepted by everyone."

That must surely be true of every major breakthrough in many areas of medical research. At the beginning, a breakthrough is not always accepted by everyone, but it is generally accepted when it has proved itself. The committee went on to say:

"This is not to say that the enunciating of principles is arbitrary, or that there is no shared morality whatever. The law itself. . . sets out a broad framework for what it morally acceptable within society . . . Individuals or communities may voluntarily adopt more exacting standards."

The expert bodies and witnesses called before the committee and the committee's evidence and recommendations present us with the basis of a proper scientific and legal set of rules and safeguards which I hope the whole House will accept. I hope that the Home Secretary will take on board the clarification of some of the difficult legal issues that are involved in in vitro fertilisation.

11.56 am

Mrs. Elizabeth Peacock (Batley and Spen): I speak today not only as a Member of the House but—as we have been told, fortunately—as a mother of two sons. In the light of the Warnock report I believe that it is for Parliament and the country as a whole to determine our attitudes towards experimental practices for the next 20 or 30 years. As many people will appreciate, the scientific world has come a long way in the past two or three years from the first test tube baby, to womb leasing and to the possibility of baby manufacturing. I and many other people find it incredibly frightening that the moral, legal and social aspects of these developments remain largely unrecognised, little considered and unable to adapt to the scientific progress. If the Government do not act now—this year, this month or even this week — we shall merely encourage exploitation, mismanagement and social disaster.

A recent example from Australia serves to show that the report of the Warnock committee must be acted upon immediately. There are in a Melbourne hospital two frozen embryos who may or may not be entitled to inherit 8 million Australian dollars from their "parents" killed in a plane crash. No one appears to own the embryos, and there is doubt whether the embryos have legal status. It appears to be up to the doctors to decide their fate. Science is again light years ahead of ethics and the law.

It is easier to deal with these problems under three broad headings—problems of multiple birth by drugs, in vitro fertilisation and surrogate mothers. The immense effect on the lives and welfare of childless couples is beyond compare, and we have already heard that some have even been driven to suicide. While we all recognise the plight of thousands of parents who are unable to have children and while we can appreciate their feelings of being cut off from the rest of their age who are happy parents, we must question the use of the so-called fertility drugs. They are undoubtedly a boon to childless couples, but how controlled is their use?

The woman from Liverpool who last year gave birth to six healthy babies was understandably delighted, but will she still appreciate her fortune in 10 years' time? While it may be somewhat churlish to bring the matter of money into the subject of the value of human life, we must consider the social consequences of what we are doing. Is it good for society, the community or the immediate family, for a woman to give birth to six children at once?

In Hammersmith, an unmarried 31-year-old woman gave birth to four children—test tube babies—when she already had four children. Is the massive addition to her household a social as well as a scientific triumph?

A further aspect of the new fertility drugs is that comparatively little research has gone into their long-term effects. Do we know how they will affect a woman's body over a 10, 15 or 20-year period? Once again, we appear to be playing at guessing, with human lives as stakes. When will we have specific guidelines on the use of those drugs?

In vitro fertilisation is the second matter that I wish to raise. Many hon. Members have already spoken on the subject. It has been rightly heralded as a new era for infertile couples, but it has brought with it incredible dilemmas. If we allow multiple fertilisation, do we allow the doctors to discard unwanted or imperfect human embryos? Do we allow embryos to be grown merely for research? Is it then murder if the embryo is allowed to die? Will we in the future allow the growth of human embryos in laboratories for use as spare part supplies of tissue and organs?

As the legislation stands at the moment, there is nothing to prevent the growing of embryos in vitro for up to, say, 30 days before allowing them to die. The Warnock report has limited that to 14 days, and demands criminal sanctions to prevent trans-species fertilisation and unauthorised use.

[Mrs. Elizabeth Peacock]

The simple fertilisation of a woman's egg by her husband's sperm which is then replaced in her womb seems acceptable. It is the other possible permutations which raise legal and moral questions.

The Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church have published their response to the Warnock report on human embryology. There is a considerable distance between them on the vexed question of when life begins. The Anglican document prepared by the Church of England Board for Social Responsibility is close to the Warnock judgment — that there is a real difference between an embryo at its earliest stage of existence and from about 14 days onward. A minority on the board, however, were close to the Roman Catholic position that human life starts at conception and should enjoy full protection from that point.

Under the Warnock report the number of eggs to be replaced is not limited but the number of children from any one donor is to be restricted to 10. The storage of embryos is limited to 10 years, but there are no guidelines on the use of spare embryos within the 14-day period, and that will worry many of us. We seem to be allowing the growth of spare organs from the cells of an embryo. Will society accept an artificially created organ bank? In a recent MORI poll, 51 per cent. of people were against all experiments on embryos, and 75 per cent. were against the production of embryos solely for use in research. Will society accept the sale and purchase of human embryos —an embryo marketing board? The ideas are horrific. As for the use and abuse of human embryos up to the 14-day limit, how can Parliament legislate to introduce such an arbitrary limit based upon the difficult concept of the so-called primitive streak? What will happen in cases where the so-called primitive streak appears on day 13? Do scientists continue within their legal rights or do they stop on that moral boundary?

Is it the same Government who legislate to give far greater rights to laboratory animals yet at the same time encourage the use of human beings in such ways?

It is imperative that we act now on this report to limit all forms of experiment or research, and to go further and ban all forms of IVF except where the wife's ovum is fertilised by her husband and replaced in her womb. If we do not take such a positive stance we create innumerable legal problems of inheritance, such as we have seen in Australia. I hope that that will prevent arguments about maintenance, custody of and access to the child developed from the ovum of its legal mother and the sperm of a donor, or from the husband's sperm and the ovum of a donor. Despite the obvious relief that these techniques can provide for childless couples we must, at least for the time being, limit IVF to the husband-wife permutation.

Only when we can come to terms with the social and legal problems of this development can we allow science to progress. The legal recommendations suggested by the Warnock report and the English Law Commission are unwieldy in practice and will seem illogical to many people. It is possible that the genetic mother is no longer to be the legal mother. Although it is difficult to see what other compromise the Warnock committee could have reached, it has avoided the bold step of limiting IVF to the one permutation, which would have allowed a necessary breathing space.

I realise that I am running close to your time limit, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but if the Goverment do not wish to go down in history as the Administration who turned a blind eye to the highly questionable genetic tinkering that worries and frightens many people in this country they must intervene to draw acceptable lines to control fertility drugs; to limit IVF; and to end commercial exploitation of human birth.

12.6 pm

Ms. Jo Richardson (Barking): There has been enormous interest and a great deal of informed and—I am sorry to say—ill-informed opinion and discussion on this subject. I can well understand the fears that people have about the technologies opening before us. There is no doubt that people are apprehensive and wonder what will happen.

It is right for us to discuss the subject, but we should be discussing it as rationally as possible. It was proper to set up the Warnock committee to study these complex issues, and the Government ensured that doctors, lawyers, scientists, theologians and high level social workers were represented on it, who could give their views and come to decisions — some of them varying. They were all eminent people, and they were all experts. But there was one group of interested and informed people that was not represented — women. Despite the fact that women produce children and are the central subject of the report, I find it staggering that the Warnock committee did not include a lay representative from, perhaps, some substantial women's group.

Furthermore, when we come to the evidence that the Warnock committee received, and which is listed at the back of the report, we see that there is a large body of evidence from many different women's groups — The Mothers Union, The British Housewives League, the League of Jewish Women, the Maternity Alliance, the National Council of Women in Great Britain, the Soroptimists, the Rights of Women and the National Federation of Women's Institutes—but none was called to give oral evidence. They all submitted written evidence. There is no star against any of their names at the back of the report.

I also find it staggering that the Committee did not take any of their views into account orally. Hon. Members have probably received a brief from the National Federation of Women's Institutes which states:

> "We regret that there was no representative of a woman's organisation on the Warnock Committee and that no woman's organisation was invited to give evidence."

I remind the House that the Women's Institute is not a way-out, lefty, loony, feminist group; it represents 350,000 women in the rural communities and is regarded with great respect. It produces some very fine material.

I believe that there is a gap in the thinking of the Warnock committee, distinguished though its members were. If legislation is introduced, this House will eventually be asked to decide. But this is a male-dominated House, and that dominant male voice will decide the future of millions of women. I share the view of my hon. Friend the Members for Torfaen (Mr. Abse) that those women have a right to be heard and a right to have their interests protected.

The Warnock committee recommended that the decision as to who should qualify for assisted fertilisation

techniques should be made by doctors, and that doctors should choose the people on whom those techniques are to be performed from

"heterosexual couples living in a stable relationship".

That recommendation denies the woman and her partner some choice, and leaves it in the hands of a particular group of people—doctors—who may not necessarily be the right people to decide.

The committee took evidence from Dr. Edwards and Mr. Steptoe of Bourne Hall clinic but I was surprised to find that it did not take evidence from Mr. Robert Winston, who is the head of a very big infertility clinic at the Hammersmith hospital, perhaps the biggest in the country and perhaps one of the biggest in the world. Hammersmith hospital practises not only IVF but a range of infertility techniques, yet the committee did not see fit to take oral evidence from Mr. Winston.

As many hon. Members have said, infertility is a tragedy to those who want to have children. A significant number of women continue to be infertile because they are given the wrong drugs, often by inexpert general practitioners. Sometimes the women have been given the wrong drugs, for such long periods that they have passed the point at which they would be allowed to adopt a child.

The proposal that health authorities should review their facilities for the investigation and treatment of infertility is a very good one. I hope that the Minister, will be able to reassure us that, if the proposal is accepted, the funding for such infertility clinics, run by health authorities, will not be at the expense of women's health budgets in other directions, which have already been cut considerably over the past two or three years.

It is obvious that, as proposed in the report, a licensing board is needed to regulate the therapeutic use of IVF, artifical insemination by donor and embryo donation. That makes good sense. I echo the hope expressed earlier in the debate that the board will be composed of as many lay members as possible, because that is important.

I share the view of those who say that surrogacy should not be on a profit-making basis. That should be outlawed. But without a lot more thought and discussion I would hesitate before saying that no one should be able to take part in a surrogacy arrangement. It would be going too far too soon to say that a fourth party—a doctor, a nurse or someone who is supporting the three people principally involved—should be liable to prosecution, as suggested in the report. We should be cautious before including that proposal in any legislation.

The other main controversial issue is the regulation of research. I do not share the view of some Conservative Members that life begins with the embryo, or with the conceptus, as my hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen more correctly calls it. There should be an eventual limit to and some control of research. We all have nervous feelings about the kind of research which could take place. Nevertheless, having thought about it deeply, I am convinced that it would be wrong to limit research to 14 days or even to 40 days. There should be a separate licensing authority to control that research and enable it to be done in the interests of society and humanity. That is what research has done so far.

I welcome the report because it has opened up discussion of the subject. I hope that we shall have much more discussion before we take any further steps.

12.16 pm

Sir Hugh Rossi (Hornsey and Wood Green): My right hon. Friend is to be thanked for having commissioned the Warnock inquiry. There are cynics who will say that no Government Department ever sets up a committee of inquiry without being fairly sure of what it is likely to find. For that reason, I thank my right hon. Friend for the way in which he introduced the debate and for saying that he would keep an open mind on the subject.

There is undoubtedly a large volume of public concern over the way in which human embryos are being treated, which has been commented upon increasingly in the press. Lord Denning said in another place that medical men can at present do as they like with embryos. They can buy them, sell them, kill them, freeze them, and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Reading, East (Dr. Vaughan) said, even implant them in gorillas. There is no law to stop them. That is abhorrent to the vast majority of people in our society, as was shown by the MORI poll taken this summer.

In that context, I welcome three of Warnock's principal recommendations. The first is that the human embryo should receive some protection under the law—save that I would substitute "full protection" for "some protection". The second is that the unauthorised use of an in vitrio embryo should be a criminal offence. The third is that a new statutory licensing authority should be set up to regulate infertility services which involve in vitrio fertilisation or artificial insemination and related research. I agree with my right hon. Friend that lay involvement is essential, and I welcome his statement to that effect.

I urge the Government to legislate without delay on those matters to bring to an end the abuses which are the cause of so much public concern and distaste. I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement that he will consider making controls in anticipation of legislation.

However, I am unable to support some aspects of the Warnock report, and I would detain the House beyond 10 minutes if I were to list them all. If I say that I start, as do several of my hon. Friends, from the premise that the human embryo is a human being from conception—not a "potential human being" as posited by Warnock, but a "human being with a potential for full development"—hon. Members will readily conclude where my differences with Warnock lie.

It is interesting that, no matter how closely one reads the Warnock report, nowhere is there a denial that a human embryo is an individual human being from the moment of conception. Nor does it deny that human life begins at conception. Indeed, it spells out in paragraph 11.19 that from conception there is but continuous and well-charted development. From that premise, it becomes impossible to accept recommendation 12 that a human embryo may be used as a research subject for up to 14 days after fertilisation. As many hon. Members have said, nothing happens at the 14th day to justify the recommendation. The embryo does not change at that point from a pin head of jelly to a human being. The reference to the primitive streak is merely to take a convenient signpost in the process of development at which to reach a compromise with those who press for experimentation regardless of anything else.

Significantly, the report does not say that from conception an embryo already has the full genetic code to lead to its ultimate maturity. That is the most important

[Sir Hugh Rossi]

factor of all. Hence, the essential question to be asked is whether it is permissible to carry out experiments on human beings for the benefit of others. Whether there is a limit of four, 14 or 40 days is irrelevant; the difference is simply in what one can see, not in what is.

Other far-reaching consequences flow from the recognition of the embryo as a human being. As Lord Denning said, if it is but a thing it can be owned, sold, and bought. If it is not a thing but a human being, it belongs to no one. Instead it has rights as a human being. Above all else, it is a completely defenceless human being and therefore has the right to full protection from the rest of the community and its laws. It has the right to live, to develop, to grow, to be born, to become a child and to be brought up in a family knowing its mother and father. It has the right not to be dissected, not to be mutilated, not to be traded for the gratification of another human being, not to be frozen, not to be planted into the body of an animal or made into a half animal and half man. Those are the basic issues with which we are faced, and no amount of rationalisation by those who wish to justify experimentation can escape from them.

I appreciate that I have raised what the Warnock report calls moral questions

"that involve not only a calculation of consequences but also strong sentiments."

I believe that it goes far beyond that. We are concerned essentially with the legal definition of human life; from the way we define that flow all consequential rights and duties. Not every scientist or doctor may be wholly satisfied that life begins with conception, but complete scientific consensus is not a necessary basis for law. A basis for law is the consequence of that law upon our society and upon the rights and duties of its individual members. We define the legal beginning of human life otherwise than I have suggested at the peril of society as a whole.

12.25 pm

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): The speed of developments in this area have made imperative the intervention of Parliament in the control of embryological study. The Government were right to set up the Warnock committee to advise us on how to approach such difficult moral, scientific and legal questions. The Secretary of State was right to advise the House at the beginning of the debate that hon. Members should approach these matters in a spirit of humility, recognising that although decisions will have to be made by us, partly as matters of conscience and partly as matters of judgment, we must respect the views of those who do not share our standpoint.

I looked with hope to the report of the Warnock committee for guidance that would be so convincing that Parliament could legislate in this area with a sense that all the relevant issues had been considered carefully and that the conclusions and recommendations of the committee were underpinned by strong arguments. The committee claimed that its recommendations were supported with strong argument, but many of them—especially those in the more controversial areas—are not underpinned by strong argument.

The report is shot full of unstated premises, which may be common but which none the less are controversial. To take one example, there seems to be an assumption that AID is not only widely practised but that it is morally acceptable to society, and that an expansion of the practice would be desirable and would, in due course, remove some of the difficulties faced by children who are the product of AID. Another unstated premise is that the substitution of a natural parent by a donor in the process of conception is a treatment of infertility. It is constantly referred to as such, but it is not a treatment for infertility. At best, it may be a psychological consolation for one or more of the partners to a marriage that they have a child who is genetically related to one partner. However, this cannot properly be described as the treatment of infertility.

There are also a number of arbitrary recommendations in the report. I pick these out, admittedly in a random way, because the report does not give us the foundation on which we should legislate, and one has to illustrate this point by example. For example, it is suggested that a child who results from AID should be told certain facts about the donor. The two facts that it is recommended should be made known to the child when he attains the age of majority are his ethnic origin and his genetic health. There is no argument anywhere in the report as to why those two facts alone should be revealed, or why any much more wide-ranging information should not be revealed. That is a defect and falls short of the report's stated intentions.

The report makes a recommendation that embryos may be stored for up to 10 years. However, nowhere in the report is there any argument in support of that recommendation, and a recommendation does not carry any weight without arguments to support it. The report suggests that with AID no one donor should father more than 10 offspring, and speaks of the dangers of possible genetic difficulties resulting from too many donations. The figure of 10 appears likewise to have been plucked fom the air and is unsupported by any argument. On all the tricky and difficult decisions to which the committee has addressed itself, it does not support its conclusions with compelling arguments.

The report recognises in its introduction that the public would very much like these matters to be decided by reference to some principles, and that is a correct observation. The House finds it easier to legislate on such a sensitive subject by reference to principles, but we face the major difficulty that there is no common agreement as to what those principles should be. The Warnock committee, having presumably taken that view, failed to attempt to spell out any principles at all.

My intervention today is necessarily brief, as I hope that the House will have an opportunity to return to these matters in more detail when, as I hope, the Government introduce legislation to deal with them. Those of us who wish to influence legislation should declare, as far as we can, our principles. The first principle that I advance is that both partners in the marriage should be in as equal a genetic relationship to the offspring of that marriage as is possible. If there is a genetic imbalance in the relationship to the offspring, there is a potential danger not only to the relationship of the husband and wife to each other, but of the offspring to the two partners of the marriage. The Warnock committee acknowledged that that was a problem, but did not seem to form a view as to what should be the law that flowed from that recognition.

The second principle is a much more difficult one to enunciate with any degree of moral certainty, and that is

the point at which life begins. It is undoubtedly the case that the whole process of development and the whole potentiality of development from the moment of conception is a continuous one, interrupted by scientifically recognisable stopping points on the way. The difficulties of legislation to recognise the right of life as beginning on any of those stopping points are very real, and I do not take an absolute view on this. However, Parliament has to take a view and therefore has to take one that is most easily defensible.

Although I recognise the force of what the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) said about individuation, I nevertheless believe that the moment of conception is probably a better starting point, and accords more with the public's moral perceptions. I shall have to deal in summary only with the three major issues upon which the committee made recommendations because of the time limit. However, I accept its views about surrogacy almost in their entirety——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order.

12.35 pm

Mrs. Jill Knight (Birmingham, Edgbaston): I sometimes think that it would be a good thing if the Service Committees had placed on the wall of every hon. Member the saying, "Hard cases make bad laws." Of course it is hard not to have a child when one badly wants one, and the longer one is childless the more desperate one becomes. But it would be a very bad law indeed if, blinded by tears for the barren, we legalised Warnock's proposals.

For this House to allow experimentation on human embryos would be a terrible step—even if it was only for 14 days after fertilisation. Scientists and, indeed, some hon. Members, are already clamouring for more time than that, and no one can possibly avoid the conclusion that if scientists are allowed human embryos for 14 days it will not stop there.

Questions buzz round my head like bees. Who would monitor the age of the embryo? We can be sure that only experts could do it. Have we got so many medical experts that we can spare teams of them to go round monitoring the age of embryos, or will there be embryo inspectors? Would the scientists have to fill in a form to say that the embryo was the right age? Would the matter be left entirely to them? If so, would there be swoops at dead of night to see whether the embryo was 14, 15 or 16 days old? I wonder whether the fridge will be cleared out every so often. I do hope so. How can we possibly justify giving rights to 15-day-old embryos while denying them to 14-day-old embryos?

Would the scientists really down scalpels at 11.55 pm on the 14th day? Of course not. I have heard attempts made to justify that rule by the suggestion that the little thing may feel pain after 14 days. Well, good gracious me, if that is the only problem, why not anaesthetise them, then they would not feel pain? We could then go on, as the hon. Member for Barking (Ms. Richardson) wanted, to 40 days, six months or whatever. It would be impossible to enforce the time restriction.

Experimentation would undoubtedly go wider and wider. Once we accept that human life can be sacrificed in the name of medical science we are lost. To create human life especially for experimental purposes is fearsome. Much has been said about the number of people outside the House who strongly disagree with Warnock's proposals on that point. I draw the attention of the House to the opinion of the Royal College of General Practitioners. Its president said:

> "GPs are in a unique position to balance the debate between public and medical specialists. Our view is that experimentation would be to the detriment of society, overwhelming any progress made. Too many problems are involved when you start blurring the time at which you decide the embryo should be given full status."

It seems such a calculating business to flush an egg out of a woman, to obtain sperm from a man, and to mix the ingredients in a test tube before shoving it into the deep freeze. It is a bit like a housewife buying a packet-mix from a supermarket store, cooking it all up and then popping it in the freezer to save time at the weekend. As Lord Denning said in the other place:

> "Is that compatible with human dignity?" — [*Official Report, House of Lords*, 31 October 1984; Vol. 456, c. 541.]

Warnock prides itself on having taken an unemotional view on the matters placed before it. I am all for calm judgment but if the day has really dawned when we can feel no emotion about such things as fertilising an animal egg with human sperm or inserting a human embryo into a female animal, we have created a world that is utterly opposed to God's law. I am thankful that Warnock considers that it should be against the law to place a human embryo into an animal. However, the committee seems to consider that it is perfectly all right to mix up animal eggs and human sperm, so long as the process is subject to licence. The idea of a joint animal and human embryo created and used for medical experimentation is totally repugnant, and Warnock is wrong to assume that such developments could be stopped somewhere along the line. Let us not forget the sorcerer's apprentice, the man who rode the tiger and the story of Pandora's box. Once one breaches the principle that human life is sacred, there will be no stopping that line of development. There will be no final barriers, because it is almost impossible to say where the final barriers should be.

What of the children born as a result of such abnormal practices? Nowhere in the whole report does Warnock give any consideration to the life of the child who is being created. We look in vain for a recommendation that, before a child is artificially produced, some consideration should be given to its probable upbringing. Before a child is placed for adoption, the most searching and careful inquiries are made into the life that the child will have and the people who are to be allowed to receive him. Have they enough money? Are they loving people? Is it a good home? These matters are most carefully scrutinised if a child is to be adopted. In contrast, the Warnock committee is concerned only with the adults. Anyone who decided on a whim to have a child should be allowed to have a child in this way, never mind what kind of life that child might have. Single women, single men, and homosexual and lesbian couples, could all be accommodated from the test tube. There is only the somewhat weak caveat that

> "as a general rule it is better for children to be born into a two-parent family".

The emphasis everywhere in the report is on the wish of the adults. Not a thought is given to the child so frigidly and coldly created by science. Yet children are God-given, not man-made.

Questions about the life of the child must be buzzing around all our minds. The adopted child has the right now, under a law passed in this House, to find out about his parents and to go and see his mother. Why should a similar

[Mrs. Jill Knight]

right not be given to a child born in this way? But how on earth are all the facts to be known? The hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) says that there are two facts which such a child should have the right to know. An adopted child has the right to know much more than that, but if a child is born as a result of in vitro fertilisation, we may not even know what his antecedents are. It is wrong that adopted children should be treated so differently from children born by these methods.

How will children react when they find out that mummy never even knew daddy, that no love or human emotion was involved at their beginning, and that they had done a pre-womb stint in a cold store? What awful nightmares will a sensitive child suffer when he learns that?

What about the medical need to know one's family background? The child may need to know whether he may have inherited heart disease, or short-sightedness. How could he find out? It has been accepted that a great many children will never be told the truth about their beginnings. Children will be brought up living a lie. I tremble to think of the likely effect on them.

What will happen if a child developed by such methods is born with a handicap, is ugly, stupid or bad? I can imagine the parents' reaction. They would say, "Of course, this is not our child at all really. It's stupid and can't do anything but it was never ours in the first place." All sorts of dangerous questions are involved.

"O what a tangled web we weave,
When first we practise to"

conceive.

12.45 pm

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): I am happy to be speaking within the 10-minute limit because I am not sure that I can add a great deal to the debate. As it has progressed I have become more, not less, confused. That is not because of contributions by hon. Members, but because it is difficult to think coherently about the issues.

The Secretary of State said that he hoped that the debate would produce a coherent moral stance from the House of Commons. The Secretary of State's wish will certainly be unfulfilled. All that hon. Members are giving him is a check list of what they would and would not support in legislation. I do not want to do that. I prefer to examine the weakness of the moral position of those who oppose my view and the weakness of my own moral position.

The only hon. Member who has spoken so far who has consistently thought through accepting donation by third parties is my hon. Friend the Member for Barking (Ms. Richardson). She said that once one accepted the principle of donation there was no logical reason why one should not accept the principle of surrogacy, provided that no payment is involved. My hon. Friend did the House a service by thinking through to where we may land ourselves once we concede the principle of donation.

My own position is weak. If we were considering a Bill today, I should vote against any experiments on embryos. Many others would vote likewise. However, I accept that we are debating the issues today only because experimentation has already taken place. The advance of fertilisation outside the womb has taken place only because we have allowed that experimentation. I see the weakness in my position.

In a pluralistic society we have no agreed moral principles to bring to bear on the issue, but we have to draw a line. My view is that although we have already allowed experiments, I cannot support experiments beyond this point of time.

12.49 pm

Mrs. Anna McCurley (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): From what we have heard today there is an urgent need to regulate and legislate roughly within the framework of the Warnock report. Some aspects, like commercial surrogacy, can easily be isolated and acted upon more immediately. Further aspects require detailed study before legislation can be accomplished.

I am disturbed by the dilemmas highlighted in Warnock. I wish that I had the consolation of a standardised moral view. Perhaps my upbringing in the Church of Scotland, which demands an intellectual purism, is against me now. It denies me that comfort, but I must be in the majority in finding it difficult to square my views on abortion, for instance, with my repugnance to the creation in vitro of embryos for trading, experimentation and killing off. There should be a consistent principle in my mind, but there is not, because I see the logic of having a time when abortion is necessary, though that is destroying human life. I understand abortion is the destruction of human life and there is the balance that tells me that experimentation has the same effect. There should be a consistent principle in law to avoid problems arising later, but that will involve a lengthy exercise.

I shall not condemn the Warnock committee's report. Indeed, I congratulate the committee on its heroic effort. There are those who castigate it for an academic lack of passion, yet we challenge its moral views. I suspect that there is no balance in moral views. If we try to balance them, we only weaken or dilute.

I appreciate that infertility is perhaps the most shattering experience for any woman who partners and loves someone. I am lucky that I have been able to bear a child. This debate must highlight the compassion that our society has for the childless. Much of what we say today should be tempered by the other side of the coin which tells us that as much as possible should be done by providing consultation and advice centres, for example, for those who are in that unfortunate position. We should look for options to some of the rough stuff that we read about in the Warnock committee's report. Therapeutic techniques are important, and that is where our finances should go if we have the sympathy and compassion for the infertile that we profess.

We are facing a terrible dilemma. We are told that we have the right to have children, but that the world is over-populated. Should we be encouraging people to have children, which basically and technically they cannot have, in a world that we can hardly afford to feed? We know very well from recent problems in the Sudan and Ethiopia how difficult it must be for large families in those areas. At the same time, we want healthy children in our society, and in some ways that can depend on the experimentation which goes on to assist procreation and additions to the population.

The limits on embryo experimentation should be strict. I doubt whether it is necessary to produce embryos in vitro at all when there are sufficient pathological specimens readily available. I suspect that we are not being very

honest with ourselves, and perhaps the Warnock committee has not been very honest with us. I believe that Britain and other European countries have gone well beyond the experiments that we are discussing. I know that in Sweden 20 years ago a foetus was kept alive in a tank for 15 weeks before being injected with formaldehyde. If that happened 20 years ago in a so-called civilised country, I begin to wonder what is happening behind the closed laboratory doors in this country today.

The medical profession must put its house in order. Regulation, as well as legislation, is essential. It made my blood boil to read the statement that ethics must alter with technology. That smacks of Hitler's Germany. It was in response to that sort of view that Aldous Huxley wrote "Brave New World" in the late 1940s. Hon. Members may remember that in that book the savage killed himself because he could not stand the sort of life that existed on the earth—the unnatural existence, with cloning and experimental breeding.

Family life is important and we must preserve it. The difficulties involved in experimentation help to undermine the basic family unit which keeps this country going and on which all our legislation and moral principles are based.

In February, I attempted to introduce a Bill to outlaw commercial surrogacy clinics. I believe that the child matters more than even the wishes and desires of potential parents. I want children to be brought into a world of caring parents. We know that children who are born naturally are often not brought into such a world and that some couples who desire children through surrogacy would be very good parents. However, they are parties to the sale of children and, as has already been mentioned, we abolished slavery at least a century ago.

The child is stigmatised, because, whatever we say, he or she is initially illegitimate. The psychological damage caused to that child could be incalculable and might lead to all sorts of complications in his or her later family life.

Above all, the foul commercial element that is involved in the clinic not 50 miles from London, which already has six children in utero, must be outlawed as speedily as possible. It was reported to me that the person who runs the clinic, who is not a qualified doctor and has merely had some form of nursing training, has said what pleasure it gives her to see the joy that results from what is done at the clinic.

We are here not to condone one person's highly eccentric forms of pleasure, but to protect society, and we should do that. I hope that we shall shortly give all these matters urgent consideration and introduce legislation.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The next speech will also be bound by the 10-minute rule.

12.58 pm

Mr. John Hume (Foyle): I shall not need 10 minutes, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because I take a simple view on this matter. One's attitude to the Warnock report depends on one's basic view about whether a human embryo is a life. If one believes that, the Warnock report becomes unnecessary and can be put in the waste paper basket.

I believe that an embryo is a human life. Therefore, I do not advance to the next principle, which is that, for the first time, medical science should experiment on a human being not for the good of that human being. Man should not become the slave of science rather than vice versa.

A few years ago there was a magnificent and successful campaign in the House and in the media on behalf of thalidomide children. The principle established by that campaign was that an unborn child had certain rights—rights to be protected against injury from drugs or from anything else. If it has the right to be protected against injury from drugs, it has the right to be protected from experimentation and death.

If we do not accept the principle that an embryo is a human life, we find ourselves in a confused position—as Warnock did. He sets out to lay down moral principles, yet not one moral principle is stated in the report. He simply states a set of rules with no underlying principles. One example of the committee's confusion is that underlying the whole report is the feeling that the committee had a certain queasiness about the subject and that, therefore, it must genuflect towards certain liberal and social values——

Mr. Abse: Apart from the general confusion of the hon. Gentleman's views, he seems to have gender confusion. Warnock is a lady. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will not add to the confusion——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Torfaen (Mr. Abse) has already addressed the House at some length, and the 10-minute rule still applies.

Mr. Hume: I accept the correction of the hon. Member for Torfaen (Mr. Abse). I was thinking not of the gender of the author but of the report itself. The report declared that the embryo of the human species must have some protection in law. What protection does the committee propose? For every day of its 14 days existence it will be experimented upon, and, at the end of that time, it will be put out of existence. What sort of protection is that?

It is not often that there is total agreement between the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) and myself. Successive British Governments have, over the years, sought to find areas of agreement between us. Now that they have found such an area, they must act upon it and introduce the necessary laws.

1.2 pm

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): I declare an interest as the foster parent of a severely handicapped child who was advertised as needing parents. There are many such unwanted children—up to 20,000. Anyone with personal experience of children with such difficulties would not wish to minimise those difficulties but would wish to do everything possible to reduce the chance of children being born with such terrible handicaps.

I have been following the debate with close interest. I can testify to the strength of public feeling on the issue. Last month I held a public meeting with a panel of experts, and it was oversubscribed as soon it was announced. Some 200 people attended, with more than 300 people applying. I heard a full range of views.

The crux of the matter is events at fertilisation which, as my hon. Friend the Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) said, is a mysterious and wonderful moment. If it was not, we would not all be here today. But that magic, mysterious wonderful moment is not a perfect process. Those who believe that human life automatically starts from fertilisation must face the fact that not all embryos are human. Accidents occur and embryos are

[Mr. Peter Thurnham]

conceived that are not human. My hon. Friends the Members for Castle Point (Sir B. Braine) and for Antrim, North must face that fact.

I received a letter this week from Patrick Steptoe on that very point. He says that the fertilisation of eggs is not a perfect mechanism which takes place immaculately every time. An accident could cause an embryo, capable of development and of implantation, which under most circumstances could not be regarded as human. An accident, not just a deliberate act, could cause 69 chromosomes or even 92. Such an embryo would represent a new species if it survived.

If we accept that such embryos are not human, and that only some embryos are human, we cannot automatically demand the status of human beings for all embryos from the moment of fertilisation. This is a fundamental fact. Not all embryos are human. The issues are not black and white. Therefore, we must have some process which distinguishes between embryos which are human and those which are not.

I cannot support the case that we should wilfully implant in a womb an embryo which we know is not human. We must reject species which are not human or which would cause problems, cancers and other growths in the mother.

Mr. Dykes: Will my hon. Friend suggest when he thinks humanness begins?

Mr. Thurnham: This is the kernel of the matter, because we have to look at embryos to see whether they are human. That being so, I accept that embryos should be examined to establish that they are normal human beings. Only then should we agree to their implantation and development as human beings.

Research and experimentation must be strictly controlled and aimed at establishing that embryos are normal human beings and not aberrations. In any case, there is a natural process of rejection in the womb itself.

I comment briefly on some of the other recommendations in the Warnock report. I reject the buying and selling of embryos and their long-term storage. Storage should be for short periods only, extendable by agreement of both parents. Surrogate IVF should be limited to couples who can have their own genetic children.

I call for early legislation, and I was pleased to hear my right hon. Friend confirm that he had in his mind interim legislation at least on some of the more straightforward aspects. On some of the others, I hope that the House is not in a mood to pass the sort of legislation which years ago called for a man with a red flag to walk in front of every car. I look forward to early interim legislation, and I call upon my right hon. Friend to take action in this respect.

1.7 pm

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): In my view this is not an anti-abortion issue, and it is wrong that those who believe that it is have tried to hijack the debate for their own obsessive purposes. It is not an anti-abortion issue. It is a pro-fertility, pro-children issue, and that is how it should be looked at. We cannot throw away this opportunity to deal seriously with the deep unhappiness of unwanted childlessness.

The criterion in forming my view about the deliberations of the Warnock report is that of the greater good that its recommendations afford our society. I will have no part in any lobby or any argument whose recommendations will in practice discriminate, punish or prolong the needless misery of childlessness.

The issues investigated by the Warnock committee that I wish to discuss fall broadly into two main groups. The first is those concerned with aspects of medical practice and scientific research into infertility. The second is those concerned with accountability and control of such practices.

Infertility is a male problem as well as a female one. At the moment no one can answer a childless man when he asks, "Can I father a child?" The only ultimate test is penetration of an ovum by sperm. In a few laboratories sperm from infertile men are being used to test their ability to fertilise ova which have been donated voluntarily by women undergoing sterilisation. This is an important part of a prognostic investigation into male infertility. In my opinion it is preferable to attempted trans-species fertilisation. In any case there are limitations on what can be learned from the fertilisation of a hamster's egg.

The donation of ova by women for the tests has been made possible by the popular response of women. More than 40 per cent. of the women approached have agreed to the donation of an egg. However, there should be guidelines on the collection of ova from women, with written consent being obtained from them and with no exploitation involving money. There must also be strict regulation of the drugs used before that surgical operation with the first criterion being to protect the women.

If sympathy with the infertile informs our criteria, research of this nature is permissible to help overcome male infertility. In those circumstances, I cannot agree with the view that insists that once the ovum is penetrated in this way it has the same status and rights as you and me, Mr. Deputy Speaker. If we are to follow that endless reductionism, it is true to say that everything is alive—one cell, one sperm, one ovum. However, I go along with the Warnock committee's recommendations which set the 14 day limit on conceptus research and limits the nature of such research. Contrary to the report, I oppose testing toxic substances on embryos. As Warnock points out, however, voluntary regulation of aborted material has worked to the enormous benefit of pregnancy treatment. Therefore, why cannot statutory regulations via a licensing body work equally well for embryos derived from in vitro fertilisation?

Research into the following areas offers infertile women better diagnosis and treatment. The first aspect is spontaneous abortion. About 60 per cent. of normal pregnancies and almost 90 per cent. of in vitro fertilisations are spontaneously aborted. There is a lack of information on how to reduce that risk of abortion in infertile women. The spontaneous abortions are largely caused by abnormalities and stunted development in the foetus. Research is needed to establish the precise conditions to maximise the chances of viability through full-time pregnancy. Success would mean less emotional trauma for the would-be mother and a reduction in needless medical expense and time in post-abortion care.

Secondly, early detection of embryo abnormality and methods to perfect re-implantation screening of in vitro embryos would reduce the unhappy consequences of the present system of late screening and subsequent abortion.

Thirdly, research is needed into the origins and treatment of conditions that endanger the life of the newborn child. A number of conditions that arise uniquely in the early human embryo can threaten its survival. Research into the detection and origins of the therapy for malignant tumours and chromosome abnormalities in early embryos is justifiable when post-natal detection is too late to save the life of the child. Much benefit will come to society with the reduction in the unhappiness associated with infertility. For those reasons, I believe that a limited and highly controlled amount of experimentation is permissible and beneficial to society.

Another aspect involves accountability and control. The Warnock committee provides a good framework for controlling the practice of in vitro fertilisation and embryo transfer. However, the report is unsatisfactory in four other respects. First, medical practice must be contained within the NHS where proper controls can be ensured. There are many other examples in society where such controls cannot be made effective in private institutions. It is unethical to encourage profit making from human unhappiness arising from infertility. Once the practice is fully established within the National Health Service, highly priced offshore deals will lose their appeal.

Secondly, high technology has been accepted as the only focus of anxiety by Warnock. I believe that that is a mistake. There is a danger of high technology taking priority over other health care. The Warnock committee was probably blinkered by its obsession with "high tech". We should support initiatives in alternative medicines and therapies which may well be more effective and less medically contentious and expensive.

The third aspect relates to the licensing body. That was recommended by Warnock and is to include lay as well as medical and scientific representatives. I welcome that but hope that the representation is more open than that on the Warnock committee. That committee did not include representatives from women's organisations such as the women's institutes. Women and women's organisations should have a voice on fundamental issues such as those affecting their rights to choose to have children.

My fourth point is about social control. An element of social control is embedded in the Warnock recommendations. I object to forcing the infertile to fit into traditional family structures by restricting access to the new technology to couples. The married couple are not to be regarded as the only recipients of medical treatment. Treatment should be available to single men and women, who can already adopt and foster children. There is no place for the encouragement of dubious social judgments in medical family planning.

Once those unsatisfactory features have been dealt with, Warnock can contribute to the well-being of society through the elimination of the misery of infertility.

1.17 pm

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): Apart from the natural revulsion which I share with every person with whom I have discussed these developments, I have neither seen nor heard any evidence to suggest that anyone has the faintest idea where they will lead or what condition of life is in prospect for those who are selected for survival or those who are born of such persons.

This is experimentation gone mad. Why 14 days? Upon what basis can a distinction be drawn between those selected for survival and those to be destroyed? Those selected for survival are selected before the end of 14 days. It must be assumed that they will have life, for otherwise they would have no purpose for the researcher. The justification for destruction cannot be sustained on any logical basis, let alone the moral dimension.

Already in this country, at least 50 human embryos have been created and grown specifically for research. The implications of that for future legislation, for criminal law and for ethics are grave. Can we, in our so-called civilised society, condone, whether under licence or not, in any circumstances the development of human-animal hybrids — humanoids — the development of fully grown "unbeings" for the extraction of spare parts for surgery, or the use of surrogate mammals for human reproduction? I say, emphatically, no. Whether or not those scientific developments are sustainable now, the inexorable movement towards them will surely accelerate, and the proposed licensing authority will be pushed further and further down the slippery slope.

The nightmare creation of a super-race, and with it the super-prole, seems to be near at hand. With an ever-expanding world population, will not the temptation for future unscrupulous politicians to use the technique of cloning and the mechanism of sex and genetic selection, as a means of eliminating or containing unproductive, unwanted surplus people, become irresistible? We cannot and must not avoid that question or, indeed, any of the other questions raised by the new techniques. There will be those—there are already, including the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) — who dismiss all such matters as futuristic and implausible, but serious and respected medical experts tell us that it is within reasonable contemplation, and that the so-called successful experiments have only just begun.

I accept that the Warnock report specifically and rightly condemns certain practices, including commercial surrogacy — which is not the central issue — and recommends that they be made criminal offences. My view is that most, if not all, of the developments under review could be, and probably are, covered by the criminal law in a long line of cases from Bracton to Blackstone and down to the present day.

With regard to the administrative machinery proposed in the report, I have to admit that I was glad to note the proposal for a licensing authority. It is clear that that is the centre of gravity of its recommendations. I do not have the time to examine every aspect of what that would entail, but, particularly in the light of my concluding remarks, I invite the House to consider the potential precedents for legislation in this area — provisions taken from the Medical Acts and from the Medicines Act 1968, and the arrangements which are made to deal with the medical and ethical procedures under those Acts and within the General Medical Council and the British Medical Association.

The proposed licensing authority would be given power to determine ethical matters, although how it would fit in with parallel ethical and disciplinary committees and their standards needs much clarification. So do the unsatisfactory current Medical Research Council guidelines and related guidelines on the subject. We have to remember that the Medical Research Council began to engage in this kind of research only after the Steptoe-Edwards programme had been initiated in 1978.

I note that in the conclusions of the report there is reference to areas within which guidance must come from

[Mr. William Cash]

sources other than Parliament. I take that to refer to self-regulation within the medical profession, whose members include the protagonists of those very developments.

On the subject of self-regulation, I remind the House of what Dr. Michael Thomas, who was then the chairman of the BMA ethical committee, said in 1982 when the inquiry was first under way:

"We must say to the public, 'you cannot leave us without moral guidance on this; you cannot turn your back on this issue and leave us with the responsibility . . . the medical profession is not the guardian of public morals'."

The problem is that, under the conclusions of the report that there should be a licensing authority, the advice upon which it would proceed—even with the recommended substantial lay representation—would turn on that of the medical experts, as is already the case under the Medical Acts and the Medicines Act 1968. The lay representatives would be at a hopeless disadvantage, quite apart from other pressures to extend the area of research, and despite the Nuremberg code of 1947, following the Nazi atrocities and subsequent declarations on the subject.

As for the role of Parliament, I would prefer a criminal law solution to the open door of a licensing authority. Legislation is required, but how that may be drafted and devised has yet to be settled, although the sooner that is achieved the better; the fewer anomalies there are, the easier it will be. If Parliament decided to go down the criminal law route, which I would prefer, irrespective of the international dimensions of the problem, it would terminate the violations of humanity as a matter of criminal law.

How will the House arrive at a measured and responsible decision? Will it be by White Paper and Bill in the immediate future? The responsibility lies with Parliament, not with the medical profession, but Parliament must be properly informed. That could be achieved by a Select Committee with full opportunity to hear evidence from experts on both sides of the subject, and I believe that that is necessary.

The Warnock report is an inadequate basis on which to proceed, even after consultations upon it have been concluded by the end of December. We owe it to future generations to have a proper debate in Parliament. If a private Member's Bill were introduced this Session to cover the ground, and if it resolved the matter in terms of criminal law, which I would prefer—such a Bill need not be lengthy—that would dispose of the matter in relation to urgent public policy. In such circumstances I would advocate a Special Standing Committee instead of a Select Committee to ensure that we consider the Bill properly and consider the legal and moral imperatives implicit in it with the care that the subject deserves.

In conclusion, I quote the words of the great judge, Lord Radcliffe:

"The civilisation of which the English law is one form of expression has been built with labour and sacrifice beyond record upon the structure of certain beliefs as to the nature of man and his purpose in society."

However we proceed, the eyes of the world will be upon us. Therefore, let us ensure that, for the sake of our national integrity, we act upon those beliefs and do the right thing, in this case, for the right reason.

1.26 pm

Mrs. Ann Winterton (Congleton): I have listened to the debate carefully and with great interest, and I am grateful for the opportunity of contributing to it, albeit briefly. Those hon. Members in the Chamber today who, like me, are fortunate to be blessed with happy home lives and children will be just as concerned as I am about the problems of married couples who are unable to conceive for one reason or another. However, as many hon. Members have said, no one has an absolute right to have a child, whether she is fertile or not. The condition of childlessness is not an illness in the accepted sense of the word.

The publication of the Warnock report has paved the way for full discussion of the many complex issues raised by the accelerating developments in human reproduction. The conclusions of the committee pose legal, moral, psychological and social questions about surrogacy, artificial insemination and the storage, use and disposal of human semen, ova and embryos.

The technique of in vitro fertilisation started simply as a means of circumventing incurably blocked fallopian tubes in women faced with the tragedy of infertility. It has been estimated that as many as one in five couples may be infertile or sterile; therefore, one would have expected the Warnock committee to have made some recommendations on how to tackle the root causes of the problem. The committee admits that there is a need for research, but misses a golden opportunity to give guidance on how to overcome what could be called the "sterility crisis".

In vitro fertilisation as a means of treating infertility has many grave moral implications and is also an extremely expensive treatment. Many hon. Members have stressed the need for such treatment to be available to all who need it, not just to those who can afford it, but we must also pick our priorities in the NHS. We shall never have enough resources to provide for everyone all that they believe they should have.

Nowadays great emphasis is placed on preventive medicine, and it would have made much more sense for the Government to conduct investigations into the causes of the increasing numbers of infertile and sterile couples, and then to prevent the problem before it occurs.

In recent years there has been an increase in the number and variety of sexually transmitted diseases. Many of them can leave women, particularly young women, infertile.

Chlamydia, which is now one of the most common and serious of the sexually transmitted diseases, can lead to infection of the fallopian tubes, requiring their removal. Others can lead to pelvic inflammatory disease, which may leave young women sterile or infertile. Much of the sex education material that goes to schools minimises the risks to young people who engage in early and promiscuous sexual relations. In one such book, they are told:

"catching VD is just rotten luck."

How misleading and irresponsible such literature is, especially when young people are told at the same time to have sexual intercourse as long as they practise contraception.

All this ignores the fact that most forms of contraception such as the pill do not prevent the spread of sexually transmitted diseases. For example, the use of the coil—the intra-uterine device—can itself lead to pelvic inflammatory diseases and to ectopic pregnancies. These,

together with abortion, can pose a serious threat to a young woman's ability to have a baby later on when she wishes to do so.

The Government should ensure that the consequences attached to promiscuous sexual intercourse should be made clear to young people in any sex education that they may receive in schools. This would be a constructive, major contribution to curbing some of the causes of infertility. I was horrified to find that 90 per cent. of cases of infertility are due to preventable causes. That is a statistic of which the House should take notice in the context of this debate and the issues revolving around in vitro fertilisation.

It also amazes me that there was no mention in the Warnock report of the advisability of launching a campaign warning of the real and dreadful dangers of sexually transmitted diseases to the young. The Health Education Council, which is so voluble on the dangers of smoking, for example, is deafeningly silent on the subject. The widespread use of contraceptive drugs and devices by young women that can have serious long-term effects on their fertility, the spread of sexually transmitted diseases and the consequences of abortion will continue to grow as long as sexuality and conception are removed from their true context of love, marriage and family life.

One of the most disturbing aspects of the Warnock report is that nowhere in it is marriage mentioned—it speaks only of couples. I take up the point made by the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen), who mentioned couples. He spoke of heterosexual couples, but there is also the problem whether, in the future, lesbian and homosexual couples can acquire a baby by surrogacy or other means. This is deplored by most hon. Members.

Acting according to the best interests of the child is the first priority. Most can accept in vitro fertilisation and artificial insemination by a husband as methods of overcoming infertility. Those methods can be justified, and will not upset the natural order of things, because they do not threaten the bonds of the conventional family unit. However, the practices of the artificial insemination by donor and egg donation adds a new dimension that is unacceptable, bringing, as both do, the intrusion of a third party to distort family life.

Many hon. Members will no doubt be interested in an article that I saw only today, which talks of the establishment of sperm banks elsewhere in the world, and what might happen if AID were available to all and sundry, as has already happened in the United States, the article says:

"A sperm bank superbaby was born in 1982 to Dr. Alton Blake, aged 40, who was impregnated with an embryo fertilised with sperm from a Swiss sperm bank where the donors are said to be intellectual geniuses. Baby Doron"—

would hon. Members believe—an anagram of donor—

"has an IQ twice normal. At four months he was found conducting records of Mozart and Chopin and was able to drink from a glass when most babies are only able to do this from about a year onwards."

Do we really want to set up that sort of organisation? What kind of sick society do we live in when such things happen?

For example, how could Warnock recommend that children born as a result of artificial insemination by donor, egg or embryo donation should be registered as if the couple were in every way the legitimate father and mother, when they most certainly are not? What about the implications for inheritance? We have already heard that the whole law of our country would have to be changed. Every adopted child has the right to know about his natural parents, but not the AID child. His origins are cloaked in secrecy and even deception.

The most worrying aspect of the report is the recommendation concerning experimentation on the human embryo. Indeed, that has been reflected in the contributions of many hon. Members who have spoken most eloquently on the subject. I believe that human life begins at conception, and a law should be introduced to protect the embryo, just as it does the child. The embryo could not then be bought or sold, and it could not be destroyed or experimented with. Many people feel a deep concern that we are tampering with the most fundamental principles and nature of life.

It is interesting to note the differences of opinion within the medical profession as to when experimentation should be allowed. All of us might reflect on the fact that the profession has been proved wrong in the past on many major matters. Scientists do not necessarily know what is best for us. Many people feel genuine unease and concern because they do not want such matters decided by so-called experts.

We are here not to take the narrow view but to look at the problem from everyone's point of view and to reflect the fears and concerns of the people of this country. Like many others, I hope that the Government will act quickly, because we need curbs, not tomorrow or next year, but now. I hope that the Government will legislate now, positively, to protect innocent and totally defenceless human life.

1.37 pm

Mr. John Ward (Poole): Those who have sat through the debate will agree that the application of the 10-minute rule has been more than amply justified. I found the short, sensitive and relevant contributions of my hon. Friends, the Members for Reading, East (Sir G. Vaughan) and for Hornsey and Wood Green (Sir H. Rossi) of more use in clarifying my mind over the issues than some of the longer contributions made before 11.30 am.

When listening to my hon. Friend the Member for Reading, East, I have heard not only the voice of the expert but the voice of a man sensitive to the problems facing humanity. We are trying to grapple with a problem facing humanity as a whole, and with the difficulties involved in genetic engineering. But I join my colleagues in hoping that, however agonising a decision we may ultimately have to make, there will be speedy legislation. Everyone knows that the scientist is a curious man and his curiosity is not always related to the good of the human being or race.

I believe that even the medical profession is sometimes guilty of trying to shock for reasons of self-publicity. In this field where human emotions are so much involved, we must consider carefully, and act directly in the interests of our constituents and humanity as a whole.

This is an international problem, and I hope that we shall hear more about international co-operation. It would be of little use for us to pass legislation affecting this country if the whole system could be side-stepped by some whizz kid on another continent.

I have not yet heard what I consider to be a reasonable defence of surrogate motherhood for commercial gain. It may have been practised for years for other reasons. Those involved have usually been closely related, and I make no

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comment on such cases. However, where personal gain and vast sums of money are involved, we are trafficking in human lives. We should consider the problems that could arise. A handicapped child could be produced. There might be problems connected with inheritance. Such problems would far outweight the good of enabling an infertile couple to have a child. I realise that I am rushing in and making moral judgments, but I believe that that is what we are here for. Ultimately, the good of the child—at whatever stage of its development—must be put above all other considerations.

I should also like to refer to the proposals on the use of embryos in experiments. Somewhat to my surprise, I have received more letters, round robins and petitions on this subject than on any other subject that has aroused concern since I became a Member. Many caring people agree with many of the sentiments expressed by my colleagues today. They, too, feel that we stand at the door, with a slippery slope before us, when we experiment on humans but not for the benefit of the human on whom the experiment is conducted.

On the radio this morning I heard a discussion with a Scottish doctor who has apparently—I am delighted to hear it—been successful in rebuilding the heart of a very young child. He said that it was the first success after seven failures. When challenged on the ethics of his action, he said that it was his duty to give viable life to that child and that that was his sole purpose in carrying out that treatment. I can accept that, but I cannot accept the conducting of experiments on human beings in the full glare of television and radio publicity—experiments in which the media seem almost to take a ghoulish delight. I suppose that the media are entitled to report what is happening, but I believe that sensitivity has been completely lacking in reports of such experiments, one of which has been referred to today. If, despite an attempt to save his life, it becomes clear that a person is not going to live, he should at least be allowed to die with dignity, even if he is a very young child.

I know that some of my colleagues wish to take part in the debate, and I hope that my brevity will not be taken as a sign that my feelings are less deep than those of some other hon. Members. I appeal to the Government to take on board the fact that there is great concern about the matters that I have mentioned, and especially about the fact that surrogate motherhood could become a booming business before action was taken. Even if it is only a holding operation, we should legislate on the matter in the near future. I appeal again for a free vote in the House on what is an important matter of personal conscience.

1.45 pm

Mr. John Watts (Slough): Today's debate is possibly one of the most important that we shall have this Session. It concerns our attitude to human life. I have no doubt that members of the Warnock committee worked long and hard, but I regret that in many respects the report reveals an attitude to human life which can be described only as casual and which I find deeply offensive.

The language in the report illustrates my meaning. It contains references to a "storage authority" and the phrase "spare embryos" is used. They are spare only in the sense that human life has been created but is not needed in the quantity in which it has been created. At a time convenient to the earthly deities who created it, it can be disposed of or put into storage for up to 10 years until someone finds a use for it.

The report strives to find a justification for experiments on embryos. The distinction made between so-called "spares" and the creation of embryos for the specific purpose of experimentation is bogus, as is the notion that there is some magic about the 14-day limit. Other hon. Members have dealt with that and I shall not repeat their arguments, with which I agree.

I see no moral distinction between the use of a so-called spare and the creation of an embryo specifically for experimentation. I see no moral distinction between allowing experiments up to 14 days and not thereafter, whether it is up to 40 days or two months. Like many other hon. Members, I believe that the only starting point for human life is the point of conception. I am not a scientist and I do not pretend to have a deep understanding of the technicalities, but as a layman I have heard no argument that convinces me that any other starting point or unique point exists in the creation and development of the human being other than the point of conception. One's views follow logically from that.

The reaction of the House and the Government to the report is clear. As my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton) said, there is urgent need for legislation to outlaw any experimentation on human embryos and to provide full protection for all human embryos.

1.48 pm

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): The common thread of the debate concerns morality. We cannot say that it is not up to us to pass judgments on morality, because that is exactly why we are here. Whether the condition of the people is best elevated by Socialism or Conservatism is a matter for infinite debate, but the fact that the elevation of the people is a noble end in itself is beyond debate.

The hon. Member for Torfaen (Mr. Abse) described eloquently the misery caused by childlessness. He asked by what moral right we should deny the technology that would relieve that condition. We all want that condition to be relieved, but if it is relieved by killing human life at whatever stage in its development it cannot be correct.

I concede that to create a being in vitro and to place it back in the womb of a woman who wishes to conceive it through her husband in wedlock is permissible. However, when a string of embryos is produced with the hope of producing the same result and, as the hon. Member for Torfaen said, the best one is chosen and the rest are disposed of—presumably they go down the plughole—that seems to be the language of the master race. I do not wish to cause offence by saying that I was surprised to hear that language from that source.

We must address ourselves straightforwardly to the question of when human life begins. It says something about the Warnock committee that every time it comes up against a hard problem it tries to split the difference. It is a classical and elegant example of squaring a circle every time one is found. The best example is to be found in paragraph 11.19, which states:

"there is no particular part of the developmental process that is more important than another . . . Thus biologically there is no one single identifiable stage in the development of the embryo beyond which the in vitro embryo should not be kept alive."

That is true enough as far as it goes, but there is a stage which precedes the developmental process, which

positively initiates it, which is fertilisation. Fertilisation as an exercise in science, logic and morality is obviously a unique event. If that is the point at which human life starts, I cannot understand how we can justify experimenting on embryos, whether they are byproducts or whether they are created for that purpose.

The impression is gained from reading the Warnock report that if a woman wants to conceive she should be allowed to do so, that that is fine and that we should produce spare embryos. Again, it is suggested, in effect, that if it is a good idea to investigate genetic disorders, we should start experimenting on spares. When we finish with them, presumably they can be flushed down the lavatory or put down the plughole, it matters not. In short, every time we conceive of an idea which is good in itself, we can forget completely about morality. I find that approach repugnant and I hope that it will not form the basis of any legislation.

There are two other examples that I can give to the House where the Warnock committee has decided to split the difference. First, there is the example of the child who was born by AID. Such a child is not to be entitled to know his ancestry but an adopted child is so entitled. What is the reason for that in logic and morality? Perhaps it is a matter for the AID child that flowers in the refrigerator on father's day will have to be consolation enough.

It is beyond belief that I can pick up the Warnock report and find that the committee disapproves of the process whereby the semen of a dying or dead husband, who might have given a donation of his own semen before he underwent radiation treatment for a cancer from which he subsequently died, is disapproved of, yet the possibility cannot be ruled out that a lesbian couple might decide to go in for parenthood and receive the anonymous donation of someone who, for all we know, might have fallen down the steps and broken his neck on the way out of the hospital after giving the donation.

The trouble with the Warnock report is that it has so frantically tried to find consensus that in the end it has compromised on principle. I like to think that the House will have no part in that.

1.54 pm

Mr. W. Benyon (Milton Keynes): In spite of the stature of its members and the clarity and brevity of its prose, the Warnock committee seems not to have addressed itself to the central question, which is the nature and status of the human foetus. Paragraph 11.9 of the report states:

> "Instead of trying to answer these questions directly we have therefore gone straight to the question of how it is right to treat the human embryo."

The committee dodged the moral issue because of the difficulties. However, Parliament cannot dodge that issue. We are at a watershed and I agree with the hon. Member who said that the three most recent cataclysmic events have been nuclear fission, landing a man on the moon and the subject of this debate. So great has been the advance in recent years and so rapidly is the research programme moving that the law must come into play quickly. That was the point behind my intervention in the speech of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. Speed is of the essence and action must be taken by the Government. It cannot be left to private Members' legislation.

The key question in this incredibly difficult matter is when life begins. No amount of jargon and no number of legal treatises can save each one of us from having to make our own judgment. The hon. Member for Torfaen (Mr. Abse) has made his judgment; we must all make our own judgments. Nobody can get out of it.

The legal aspect was dealt with in another place by Lord Denning, who said:

> "I would suggest that the only logical point at which the law could start is that the child, the human being, starts at the moment of conception and fertilisation."

He added:

> "I would hope the judges would hold that from that moment there is a living, human being which is entitled to protection just as much as the law protects a child." — [*Official Report, House of Lords*, 31 October 1984; Vol. 456, c. 542.]

Leaving aside religious teaching — although that is important for me — the position outlined by Lord Denning is the only logical position. That has been accepted in recent decisions, including the decision in the thalidomide case. The abortion legislation, which many of us think is imperfect, has also made the point that the child is worthy of protection at all stages.

I do not see how anyone can maintain that somewhere between conception and birth, the embryo — that is a horrid term — becomes a human being. I take the unequivocal view that human life begins at conception. I thought that that was also the Christian view, but it seems that the ecclesiastical trumpet is giving forth a somewhat uncertain sound.

The Warnock report concentrates on the problems of infertility. Everyone sympathises with couples who wish to have children but cannot. This is an emotive subject, but it is dangerous to allow our desire to help such people to further processes that are morally and socially wrong. I have no hesitation in accepting IVF when only a husband and wife are involved and when the fertilised egg will be implanted in the mother. However, I cannot go beyond that; surrogacy, AID, freezing and the rest are repugnant. Research is especially repugnant, because so much of it is irreversible. Once experiments get into what is technically known as the gene pool, there is no way of drawing back.

I greatly admire the medical profession, but it loves to play God while not wanting the responsibilities of being God. It is significant that we are discussing this matter in 1984. I read the report with a growing sense of dread which culminated when I read the appalling term "storage authority". Really! This is indeed the brave new world.

We have reached a watershed and Parliament has a heavy responsibility. We must act quickly and decisively before terrible changes overtake us.

1.59 pm

Mr. Peter Bruinvels (Leicester, East): The report is tailor-made for anyone who wants the embryo as a guinea pig. I recently presented a petition to the House on behalf of 2,200 of my constituents who were unanimous in their condemnation of experiments with human embryos. They considered that there was no respect for the humanity of the embryo.

We know from the Warnock report that there is no definition of the status of an embryo. For the first 14 days, a scientist might consider it to be an interesting cluster of cells, ready to be viewed under a microscope, to satisfy the whims of scientists. Yet on the 15th day, it becomes a legal entity. That is entirely wrong. As Lord Denning said in another place, the legal rights of the unborn should begin from conception. He hoped that judges would consider that, from then onwards, the embryo would be

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entitled to protection by the law just as much as the law protects a child. Indeed, there should be no difference because an embryo is a living being.

The whole report appears to be void of sound legal advice. Many people are listed as taking part in the committee, but there are no legal definitions in the report. It simply suggests that an embryo is not the same as a human being—and I cannot agree with that. There should be protection from the time of conception because a living being is being created. It should be protected through birth and into adult life. The attitude towards human life shown in the report is ethically unsound. No one should be allowed to tamper at any time with a human being.

Other countries researching into genetic disorders do not carry out research on human embryos, so why should Britain? We have heard about Down's syndrome, but know very well that experiments abroad do not use embryos—so why should we? Doctors will be given the right to use in vitro fertilisation to create and select more embryos. That right will allow them to play around with more eggs than are necessary for the mother's womb. Such experimentation is disconcerting. When any poor or abnormal developments are found in an embryo, it will be chucked out. That is sick. I do not see why anyone should have the right to do that. I recognise that they want the perfect embryo, but what gives them the right to judge?

The Church's view is clear that the destruction of any human embryo is the killing of a human life. Some human embryos may be frozen for 10 years. We do not know the effects of 10 years in a deep freeze—will the embryos be good or bad? They could be storing a disease or deformity for future generations that may corrupt the world.

Louise Brown was a success as a test tube baby, but we must remember that she will always be an experiment. Mixing the inter-species fertilisation with humans and animals is disgusting. A human mixed with a hamster seems ridiculous. As we see in paragraph 12(3), human sperm may fertilise hamsters' eggs, but I do not think that that is right. It cannot further research. The committee did not address itself properly to research. We do not need such research. The only people interested in that sort of creation are those who satisfy themselves by going to a fairground stall to see such creations. It is not right and should not be allowed.

I ask my right hon. Friend to define legally the entity of the human embryo. It could be sold, frozen and experimented upon. What chance has it—and it is a living body of a human being—if it is damaged because it is frozen? In 10 years a child might be born in a terrible state. Is that really fair?

Infertility is obviously of great concern to many of us. I am one of the young Members of Parliament, and I do not yet have children. I appreciate that some people will have trouble in trying to have children. I am not heartless—I think that they should have fertility treatment. But I would advocate artificial insemination only by the husband, not by anyone else. If we go the other way we go down a dangerous road and give preferential rights to what I would call illegitimate embryos. They become real children, muck up the law of inheritance and disrupt the whole position even over ethnic strains. There are problems because clones could be created, as we saw in the film "The Boys from Brazil". Do we want that to happen here?

Surrogate motherhood—womb leasing—is not on. It should be outlawed, and most hon. Members appear to agree. Any contract that is made between the surrogate mother and the husband of the childless couple could turn out to be very difficult in practice. I cannot see how it could be enforced: for example, I ask for a white baby but instead I receive a black one. Is that a breach of contract?

Who wants multiple fertilisation? With 75 per cent. of the public opposed to the production of human embryos for research and experimentation we parliamentarians have a responsibility for future generations. Experimentation on embryos is unnecessary and presents a serious threat to mankind. I urge my right hon. Friend to consider this very carefully.

2.5 pm

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): We face some very difficult choices, and some hon. Members have displayed a remarkable confidence in their command of ethics and morality to which I and many other hon. Members could not aspire. We more humble souls, confronted with these dilemmas, must wrestle with the conflicting arguments and our consciences as honestly and humbly as we can.

To this task I bring no special skills. All I can do is to draw on my own limited experience, illuminated, or possibly blurred, by my own ethical and political convictions. I have also consulted as widely as I have been able over the past few months and, because I am a man, I have tried particularly to seek the views of women.

My principal relevant human experience of what we are discussing is that I am married. My wife and I chose to have children and, fortunately for us, no powers beyond control—God, nature or providence—stood in our way. We now have three healthy children. Whatever may happen in the future to us or to them, their births were a source of the most profound joy, fulfilment and wonder to their mother and to me. Trying to bring them up is a more mixed blessing, but so far the joys and rewards outweigh the worries and difficulties.

It is part of my political creed that I want for everyone the opportunity to share in the privileges, pleasures and satisfactions which have been made available to me. But at present infertility denies the joy of childbirth to as many as one in 10 couples who wish to have children. This denial is no petty irritation. It can cause great suffering, sour the most loving relationships, embitter the happiest of people and make others vulnerable to the quacks who batten on human misery. We owe it to our fellow citizens, both men and women, to do all that we can to help those who wish to have children.

At present we do little. We do not know how many people are getting advice or treatment for infertility. We do not even have a firm national figure of how many people are infertile. We know that infertility has a low priority in our medical affairs. Family planning clinics are often most vulnerable to cuts when health authorities are looking for economies. Hospital waiting lists for gynaecological treatment at present total nearly 100,000 women.

Infertility of both women and men can be affected by poor general health, bad living conditions and poor diet. We know—or we ought to know—that much infertility

results from hazards encountered at work, yet no systematic national campaign has been mounted to identify and eliminate such hazards to reproductive health. This has been left to the valiant efforts of campaigning groups, predominantly women's groups, and also to the TUC and individual trade unions.

The General, Municipal, Boilermakers and Allied Trades Union produced an excellent document for its members, listing the processes and substances that may be hazardous to the reproductive health of either sex. That one leaflet puts to shame the efforts, or lack of effort, of successive Governments in this sphere.

I believe that whatever happens with Warnock today, or in the future, we should decide now that our national duty is to mount a campaign to ensure that we have a healthier society generally and, as part of that healthier society, that avoidable infertility is ended. It is in that context that we should look at the high technology end of the spectrum dealing with human infertility on which the Warnock report concentrated.

We are provided with opportunities for alleviating the miseries and problems that infertility inflicts on individuals and society and, at the same time, letting loose upon society the forces that could do more harm than good. I cannot help feeling that Mary Shelley's spectre of Dr. Frankenstein's monster impinges heavily on our subconscious when we address ourselves to the problem of embryology, causing a fear of and revulsion against the possible products of the ruthless pursuit of knowledge for its own sake or the application of medical techniques to create monsters or superhumans. We should rightly be on our guard, and, as lay people, state that we have a right to a say in these matters; that they should not be left to a self-selected, scientific, predominantly male, elite.

That said, I must say that I support the use of in vitro fertilisation for people to whom it can give the chance to have children. Having accepted that, we face practical dilemmas. Everyone who says that he accepts IVF faces those same practical dilemmas. Medical techniques at present produce more eggs and embryos than are needed for implantation in the mother. To use the material not needed for implantation to seek to improve the success rate of IVF and the prospects of combating infertility and genetic malformations is acceptable, subject to certain safeguards. They include the consent of the women concerned and the most rigorous outside scrutiny and regulation. Logically, I must accept experiments on eggs freely donated by women who have them removed during sterilisation or other medical treatment. Therefore, I broadly support the Warnock report's proposals for controlling experimentation. However, I have considerable reservations about the extension of those controls to cover artificial insemination by husband or by donor.

Surrogate motherhood is another point that arises from the advance of fertilisation techniques. I feel that Warnock goes too far in seeking to outlaw it altogether. In certain circumstances, it seems to me that surrogacy for love can offer help to people who might not otherwise obtain it. As the hon. Member for Poole (Mr. Ward) pointed out, surrogacy has gone on for centuries and is going on now. That is surrogacy for love. Surrogacy for money is a different matter. I, and I think every hon. Member, utterly reject the alien concept of womb leasing — the exploitation of human misery for gain — which has developed in the United States. I cannot understand why some people are so surprised by its development in the United States, because a society where human blood and human tissue are bought and sold every day is not likely to jib at womb leasing. These ethically unacceptable practices inevitably arise from having a commercial system of medicine. Unlike Warnock, I believe, for those reasons, that we should outlaw the purchase or sale of sperm, eggs or embryos.

That brings me to another aspect touched upon in this debate by my hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen (Mr. Abse). Our infertility services should be supplied by and within the National Health Service to everyone who needs them. That is the only way they will be available to everyone, regardless of wealth. The way in which some of the pioneers of in vitro fertilisation made their reputation in the National Health Service, at the Oldham general hospital and the Royal Free hospital, and then did a bunk into the private sector to the Bourne Hall clinic and the Cromwell hospital disturbed me greatly. It must be recognised that their actions contributed to the doubt that many people have about the capacity of doctors to reach ethical decisions in this particularly difficult sphere.

Hon. Members have mentioned many issues today, and I do not have much time left to comment upon them. My view is that to some extent the proposals in the Warnock report would give too much power to doctors to make decisions when many of those decisions could be left to women. Doctors should not be able to determine which women will have fertilisation techniques made available to them. Therefore, we must all carefully consider every aspect of the report.

One aspect that does not appeal to me is the prospect of sex selection. To permit or encourage sex selection solely because people would prefer a boy or a girl is something that we should resist as strongly as we can.

I welcome the opportunity given by the report and the debate to discuss the matter. I feel, however, that some hon. Members have come to the debate with strongly formed ideas. I suppose that I have contributed one or two myself, but on the problem of working out and wrangling our way through to a morally satisfactory solution to these dilemmas, we shall have to continue to listen to one another and be prepared to modify our views. If we study the evidence given to the Warnock committee, we will observe that some of the organisations that gave evidence have, since the committee reported, changed their views. That is to be welcomed in this difficult sphere.

We are all seeking a way through. I am a fan of one of the most well-known people to have ever occupied the House of Commons—Oliver Cromwell—who, in one of his less acerbic moods, said:

> "To be a seeker is to be of the best sect after that of a finder —and so shall all humble seekers be in the end."

I hope that we shall find our way through to a satisfactory solution. We shall only do so if we genuinely seek it and do not thrust our preconceived opinions down people's throats.

2.17 pm

The Minister for Health (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): This is the first time that I can recall in many years of debating against the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) when I have risen to my feet to find that I agree entirely with his peroration, but indeed I do today. That rather sums up the mood of the debate.

In a week during which people have been debating the status and standing of Parliament, today the general public

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have been looking to us to give some leadership and guidance through a moral maze that faces us as we realise that scientific and medical advances have thrown up new problems for our law and the whole system of ethics, with which we must grapple urgently and reach a decision.

It is already clear that there will be a wide range of opinion across the Floor of the House, as there is outside, regardless of the ordinary party affiliations. There will be some strange alliances and strange disagreements before the many debates are over.

The role of Front Benchers, as has been said on both sides of the House, is sometimes to express personal opinions, but if I express personal opinions they will be almost by accident because it seems to me that the Government's role is to assist Parliament and the public in to reaching conclusions on these issues as quickly as possible and then to facilitate them. The Government's main contribution so far has been the report and this debate.

It was in July 1982—somewhat later than the hon. Member for Torfaen (Mr. Abse) would have wished, but ahead of most of the public controversy and concern—that my right hon. Friend set up the committee. The report has been produced remarkably quickly, given the task that we set Dame Mary Warnock and her colleagues. Today's debate is an important step in the consultation and consideration of action that has to follow upon the publication of the report.

I should like to defend Dame Mary Warnock and her colleagues against some of the criticisms which have been made of them. I do not think that any hon. Members intended to attack them but at times moral fervour carried one or two of my hon. Friends into an apparent dismissal of the report.

I do not think that we should assume that the members of the committee had preconceived opinions or came from the same background or that they found their task an easy one. In the foreword the committee pointed out that the reality of its position was that the personal feelings and reactions of its members were as diverse as those presented in the evidence to them. The membership of the committee comprised every range of opinion, and it is remarkable that the committee came so near to unanimity on so many difficult issues. As paragraph 3 of the foreword states:

> "Whatever our original feelings and reactions, we have all found that our feelings changed and were modified as work progressed and as we examined the evidence in more detail."

My right hon. Friend and I have been immersed in the subject for longer than some hon. Members but not as long as others who have spoken today. I share the feelings of the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen). Like anyone else in politics, I long ago had to clarify my thoughts on issues such as abortion, and I thought that I would be able to clarify rapidly where I stood on all the issues in the report, but that has not been the case. My views are not only becoming modified; I am finding greater difficulty in arriving at certainty on some of the issues than I at first expected. Probably most other hon. Members have had the same experience. That leads to the consideration of how far we have to strive to reach the maximum agreement that will enable us to carry with us as many right-thinking members of society of all views as we can in putting together legislation or any other guidance.

The achievement of the Warnock committee was that it was able, even with its diverse views, to put together laboriously a report which could be put to the public. Inevitably, this House has gone in the opposite direction. In the debate, most hon. Members have shown strong feelings of considerable depth and tended to advocate their own feelings. In a sense, they have taken apart the agreement reached in the report. Indeed, many hon. Members have denounced the conclusions of the report. As we take the matter further, we shall have to strive to get nearer to some consensus, so that we can establish guidance and protection for members of the public.

Sir John Biggs-Davison *rose——*

Mr. Clarke: I apologise to my hon. Friend for not giving way, but I have very little time.

We live in a pluralist society. Therefore, no individual ever finds that all the laws and professional rules entirely coincide with his own opinions. What is needed here is a set of laws and rules which the right-minded majority of society will accept, given that we approach the problem with tolerance of the range of views and life styles in a country such as our own.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde (Mrs. McCurley), I envy those who have come to the debate with firm religious or other opinions. I also understand that for them it is difficult to accept other points of view. I am sure that there are laws in this country that they would rather not have, but that they realise they must accept them in a society such as ours.

It was the problems of infertile mothers or the infertility of some women that led doctors and scientists into the area initially. A range of views were expressed. I listened to the vehement campaigning of the hon. Member for Torfaen and to the almost equally strong support of the rights of parents put forward by the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, North-East (Mrs. Short) and, again, the hon. Member for Leyton.

No one can take too simple a view about the problems of infertility, and no hon. Member did. It is no good saying that childless couples can adopt children, because that ignores the profound emotional problems of those who suffer from infertility. However, with respect to the hon. Member for Torfaen, it is not enough to say that the European Convention on Human Rights says that one has a right to found a family. He did not say it, but it could be deduced from his statement that almost any means of achieving that end would be tolerable. I prefer the compassion expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde and by the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) to the crusading verve of the hon. Member for Torfaen.

To take the simplest case, there are couples who are biologically capable of reproducing themselves and their genes, but who need some medical assistance or intervention to enable them to do so. Few would say that any medical intervention to produce a child is unnatural or wrong, although the Warnock committee discovered one or two who did. But once we accept that there is a facility to help someone to have a child with whom she has a genetic connection, the next question to ask is, within what bounds should that person and those who assist her be kept? That must be decided by society, and I agree with my hon. Friends who said that the child's interests must

also be considered. Indeed, it could be argued, as the Warnock report did, that the child's interests should be paramount.

I hoped that there would be at least one simple issue in the debate, and the general view seemed to emerge that commercial surrogacy is an unattractive possibility looming on the horizon. If it is decided that legislation on that subject is required, I am not sure whether the drafting of the legislation would be as simple as some might imagine. It may be difficult to decide who has committed what offence in what circumstances. Many hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Barking (Ms. Richardson) and the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), had reservations about unpaid surrogacy in the exceptional circumstances where a couple are capable of having a child, but the wife cannot bear one, and a sister or another surrogate offers to bear the child for her. I have no clear views on that matter, but I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde that it would be useful to keep in mind the primacy of the interests of children, bearing in mind everything that might go wrong in the process, even if it is carried out among three people who know each other and who have the best intentions.

I have left to the last three minutes, probably fortunately for me, the most controversial issue, which is the use of human embryos not only to help fertilisation techniques and to assist infertile couples, but for the purpose of research. As the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras said, if we allow in vitro fertilisation, present techniques will automatically produce surplus embryos. Therefore, doctors must decide what to do with those embryos, which poses many dilemmas.

I hope that I do not run the risk of sounding patronising if I say that, as someone who has listened to the entire debate, I thought there was a tendency for those on each side to parody the views of those with whom they disagreed. No one said that the end justifies the means or that the demands of medical research and science are paramount. As my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Mrs. Knight) said, no one is entitled to end human life in the interests of medical research, and that has not been contemplated.

However, it is impossible to sweep aside the anxieties expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham), who said that research on spare embryos could be extremely significant in treating handicapped children, such as those with Down's syndrome. A problem with science is that one can never be certain. A scientist can never tell what he will discover. Partly, he is going in to areas that he does not know, and we have to have rules.

On the other hand, nobody is saying that a human embryo is just another example of human tissue. Whether we all agree with the view of the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) that it is a human being, and that is the end of it, and whether we give it all the rights that my right hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Sir H. Rossi) so passionately set out, with what he regards as full protection, or whether we do not find it so easy to agree with them, we all agree that we should treat it with respect and that it is not just another sample. Therefore, one has to decide to what extent it is legitimate to carry out research upon it while treating it with respect, and whether bounds can be set within which research can properly be tolerated. Those bounds cannot just be left to the medical and scientific establishment, and that was the view of every hon. Member who spoke.

It being half past Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Monday 26th November, notwithstanding the provisions of paragraph (1)(b) of Standing Order No. 3 (Exempted business) the Motions in the name of Mr. Secretary Walker relating to the Coal Industry may be proceeded with, though opposed for three hours after the first Motion has been entered upon, and Mr. Speaker shall then put any Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on those Motions, if not previously concluded.

That, at the sitting on Monday 26th November, proceedings on the business selected in pursuance of paragraph (2) of Standing Order No. 6 (Arrangement of public business) shall, if not previously concluded, lapse at Seven o'clock and shall be counted as a half day as provided by that Order.—*[Mr. Peter Lloyd.]*

Lambeth (Unemployment)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Peter Lloyd.]*

2.30 pm

Mr. John Fraser (Norwood): I wish to raise the issue of the most deplorable figures for unemployment that Lambeth has known, and to condemn the Government, who are the author of that catastrophe.

If anybody wishes to study the consequences of free market economics, monetarism and what I am sure that the Minister would be proud to call the capitalist system, he needs only to walk about 100 m from the mother of Parliaments to begin his course in the London borough of Lambeth. Lambeth stands on the doorstep of one of the richest capital cities in the world, yet it has been reduced to a wretched state of poverty and despair. From time to time that has led to individual and sometimes collective violence. Everybody knows that we had an outbreak of riots in Brixton in 1981. We all know that Lord Scarman found that one of the contributory causes to and one of the background reasons for that mass and expensive outbreak of violence was the social conditions of Lambeth. However, since the Brixton riots in 1981, unemployment has gone up by 50 per cent. The position is deplorable.

Numerically, Lambeth has the greatest male unemployment, the greatest single female unemployment, the highest total of all-round female unemployment and the greatest single total unemployment in London. If we look at the categories in terms of percentages, we have the third highest level of unemployment of males, of single females and of totals throughout the Greater London region. In October, the official figure for the number of unemployed in Lambeth was 24,847 people, on Manpower Services Commission statistics. That is an increase of approaching 400 per cent. since the Government took office in 1979. It means that of the population, from babies to pensioners who are wondering whether their local post office will be closed, only one in 10 works as a percentage of those who are what is called economically active.

That figure of 24,847 unemployed is only the official statistic which has come about after the Government changed the method of collecting unemployment statistics about a year ago. The unofficial figure is higher and more likely to be accurate, and is calculated by the employment division of the town planning department of Lambeth borough council. It is more accurate because the statistics take into account those who fail to appear on the official statistics because they do not claim unemployment benefit. Those figures, taking into account those who are in reality unemployed but who are not registering for benefit, give an unemployment total of 27,583 people—8 per cent. up on unemployment in October 1983.

These figures are unofficial, but they do not lack credibility. If one translates them into levels of unemployment for men and women, they give us a rate of unemployment for males in Lambeth of 25·4 per cent. That means that more than one man in four is out of a job in my borough. For women, the figure is 15 per cent. That percentage rate of unemployment in Lambeth is almost exactly twice as high as the overall rate of unemployment throughout London, and 50 per cent. higher than the national rate of unemployment.

Lambeth is especially raw and vulnerable. Yet what contribution do we get from the Government? Yesterday they proposed to abolish one of our biggest employers, the GLC, which is one of the greatest providers of employment in its own right as a county authority as well as being responsible for the provision of leisure facilities on the South Bank, which is part of my borough, although not part of my constituency.

The memorandum to the Bill introduced by the Government proposes that one effect of abolition would be 8,000 redundancies. I accept that they will not all occur in Greater London or in my borough, but under the Bill a substantial part of the Government's programme for London involves the creation of redundancies.

The overall figures that I have given are bad enough —they are appalling—but the figures for the young unemployed in Lambeth are catastrophic. I would not have believed the figures and would have thought that they were someone's black propaganda if I had not seen them for myself in the publication of the MSC.

The number of full-time education school leavers now unemployed in Lambeth is 3,562. At least, that is the number of those claiming benefit. I shall put that into context.

Recently my local education office, told me that in Lambeth about 2,000 children a year left our schools to seek employment on the labour market. But the figure for unemployed full-time school leavers is 3,562. In other words, it is almost twice as high as the yearly total of people leaving school to seek employment, despite the fact that 926 school leavers in the constituency are on the youth training scheme. The figures would amount to about two and a half years supply of school leavers in the borough if it were not for the youth training scheme.

The figures are a catastrophe and even underestimate the dimensions of unemployment. A good many people, even young people, do not register for benefits and so do not appear in the figures. Those catastrophic—it is not too strong a word—figures also disguise the fact that about two out of three black school leavers in my borough are likely to be unemployed. I cannot be sure of the exact figures, because for the past two years the Government have ceased to collect them on ethnic unemployment, but going back to the position in about 1982 I should say that it is likely that about one in two white school leavers and two out of three black school leavers are unemployed.

The Government's response is only 583 vacancies for about 27,000 people looking for jobs. Between March 1983 and March 1984 there was a 50 per cent. rise in the number of those aged 20 years or under who are unemployed. During that time young male unemployment rose by 84 per cent. But there is yet another facet of the despair, disillusion, poverty and deep sense of grievance that the situation creates. I refer to the duration of unemployment. The unemployed of Lambeth are not browsing round the labour market deciding whether they want jobs and changing from one job to another, but are in a sort of economic detention camp.

In July 1984, 9,500 of Lambeth's unemployed, or 41 per cent. of the total number unemployed, had been out of a job for 12 months or more. Another 4,500, or 20 per cent. of the total, of those officially unemployed, had been out of a job for more than six months. From my experience as a Minister in the Department of Employment I know, as the Minister will know, that the longer someone is unemployed the more chance they have of remaining unemployed. That has two further effects. It adds to the sense of grievance, rejection and hopelessness among

young people and most certainly adds to the anger of the older unemployed who find that when their unemployment benefit runs out after 312 days their life savings — particularly if those people are in their fifties and sixties and have been thrifty enough to save some money—will begin to run out. They are denied unemployment benefit and are subject simply to the social security payment rule. Thus the life savings that they have put away for their retirement begin to run out because they have to support themselves in that atrocious situation. I blame the Government. One could not say that the people of Lambeth have priced themselves out of the labour market. There are 95,000 households in my borough and 51,000 of them receive rate rebates. Many of the householders who receive rate rebates are working people. One cannot say, therefore, that wages are too high.

One could not say that there are too many strikes in Lambeth. I do not think that anyone in Lambeth has heard of a strike, except perhaps a one-day strike. One cannot say that the problem is caused by inflation, because it is true that the rate of inflation has fallen from about 10 per cent. to about 5 per cent. over the past three years. One cannot say that the state of the pound is to blame— that our goods are overpriced in overseas markets or our services overpriced for foreign visitors. On the contrary, the pound has fallen in value. One cannot say that there is a shortage of capital. From Lambeth one can see the City of London, where billions of pounds are pumped not into our inner city areas but into foreign investment.

One cannot, therefore, blame the people of Lambeth for creating the unemployment. One cannot accuse them either of not making a contribution. The Government have doubled their rates. They are paying much more money in that way. The Government have also doubled VAT. The people of Lambeth are not failing to contribute by way of taxes. The Government have taken away the earnings-related supplement for unemployment benefit and cut the rate support grant by £140 million over the past five years. The Government have cut housing benefit, so the people of Lambeth are contributing more in that way, too. The Government have closed some of their hospitals, brought about compulsory sackings at St. Thomas's and King's College hospitals, and cut services at those hospitals. One cannot accuse the people of Lambeth of not contributing to the general good through additional burdens of taxation in its various forms.

There should be no lack of demand for labour. There are over 25,000 people on the housing waiting list in Lambeth. In London as a whole there are 235,000 people on housing waiting lists, and nearly 40,000 a year are described as homeless. Houses in London, as in the rest of the United Kingdom, are deteriorating faster than they are being repaired or replaced. Private tenants, local authority tenants and owner-occupiers share the same problems of deteriorating premises and inadequate grants. The Government cannot say that there is no demand for the labour of the people in my borough.

One body has made a positive and specific contribution towards dealing with unemployment in my borough— the GLC's Greater London Enterprise Board. The Government's response to that contribution is to abolish the GLC. I have here a list of the schemes which GLEB currently has in hand. They are for the most part ethnically led. That means that they are to deal with some of te worst areas of unemployment in the borough. Ten small business schemes will create about 55 jobs. In the middle of my constituency, in Milkwood road, GLEB is developing five acres of land for industrial purposes. One hundred and thirty four jobs will be created and the construction work will occupy 65 job years.

Throughout the borough of Lambeth the Greater London training board, again assisted by the GLC and the London borough of Lambeth, is providing various forms of training in order to give people access to jobs. Neither the GLC nor the borough is in any way unwilling to try to stem the appalling tide of unemployment, hopelessness and despair, and the consequent social instability.

Unemployment is not an issue for the unemployed alone; it affects the whole community. I can see what is happening around me. the community is falling apart as a result of the scandalous effects of Government economic policy in a borough which is not distant and which is not suffering from the structural decline of traditional industries. The borough is on the doorstep of Parliament, but it is subjected to massive unemployment, massive poverty and deprivation.

I do not know what the Minister can say which will bring us any hope, but I make no apology for raising the subject, which is in the forefront of the mind of anybody who is interested in society, the community or politics in Lambeth.

2.47 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Alan Clark): I fully accept the seriousness of the unemployment problem in Lambeth, just as I accept the sincerity of the hon. Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser) in raising the matter. Some of his language was intemperate and some of his accusations were unwarranted, but that does not diminish the concern which he obviously feels about the subject. The hon. Gentleman described in graphic detail the frustration and hardship suffered by many of his constituents. I shall try to answer as many of his comments as possible. I shall refer to my colleagues in other Departments the issues that fall outside my responsibility, such as his curious accusation that the Government have caused the compulsory sacking of 30 people at St. Thomas's hospital. A reply to that charge will be sent by my colleagues at the DHSS.

I shall preface my answer with some general remarks about unemployment because these truths are, alas, universal and affect Lambeth as much as any other part of the kingdom.

Unemployment is the most serious problem facing not only this Government but Governments throughout the industrialised world—although we have suffered more than most. Unemployment in the United Kingdom has been rising for the last 20 years. It was rising sharply in Lambeth — and everywhere else — when the hon. Member was a Minister in the Department of Employment nearly nine years ago.

The root causes of unemployment are obvious. Our industries were overmanned, our workforce was undertrained, we were slow to change and slow to adapt to new technology, we paid ourselves more than we should have done and we became steadily less competitive. As a result, firms in Lambeth and elsewhere could not sell their goods. They closed down and shed jobs. People in Lambeth with jobs outside the borough were thrown out of work for the same reason.

[Mr. Alan Clark]

In addition, Lambeth has its own special problems, as the hon. Member explained. He said that unemployment had risen by 50 per cent. since the riots of 1981. It is not inconceivable that those two facts are related. The reluctance of industry and commerce to go to an area which has been so grievously afflicted by riots is understandable and creates a vicious circle. The hon. Gentleman and his colleagues would do well to consider that.

This year I have taken over from my hon. Friend the Minister of State as my Department's representative on the Lambeth inner city partnership. I look forward to the next meeting on 19 December when I shall hear a great deal more about the problems.

In common with many other inner city areas, Lambeth has additional severe economic, environmental and social problems. It suffers from bad physical conditions, lack of suitable sites for large firms and an inability to attract new jobs.

The hon. Gentleman said that the Government had offered only 600 vacancies. The Government do not offer any vacancies. Vacancies are offered by private firms and establishments. They create permanent jobs and their expansion, if conditions are right, will continue to generate new jobs. It is not appropriate for the hon. Gentleman to blame only the Government for the special problems that affect Lambeth or to look only to the Government to remedy them. None the less, because of the special problems we are providing substantial urban programme resources to the area through the inner city partnership. This year £13·5 million has been allocated, and a substantial proportion of this will be spent on schemes to stimulate the local economy and provide employment.

A wide range of schemes is being supported to promote the construction of new industrial units and the provision of refurbished workshop units. Units covering about 165,000 sq ft have been given the go ahead this year, using £3 million of urban programme money.

One example with which I am sure the hon. Gentleman is familiar is the development of five acres of former railway sidings at Milkwood road where infrastructure work is being carried out to encourage private sector investment, and industrial units are being constructed.

Another example is the conversion of the former Bon Marché department store into the Brixton enterprise centre, with over 130 workshops, offices and shops. It was £800,000 of urban programme money that allowed this £3 million development by BAT Industries to become established, and it will soon be providing up to 500 jobs. The centre opened last month. Most of the retail units have already been let and 80 new small firms have rented offices or workshops.

It is particularly encouraging, bearing in mind what the hon. Gentleman said about the high proportion of ethnic unemployment, that over half these firms are owned by young black people. I noticed that the success of the operation was highlighted in *The Standard* earlier this week.

The inner city partnership has, in addition, allocated £900,000 for loans and grants to businesses. In the first six months of 1984-85, 73 firms have been assisted, 55 of which were new businesses. As a result, 235 new jobs are likely to be created and 152 existing jobs preserved.

Lambeth Council's business advisory service has been funded in large part through urban programme funds. It currently has 300 clients and deals with 1,500 queries a year. This is another example of the Government providing the support when it is needed and where it is needed, in order to help businesses that will provide the jobs of the future. On top of this, another £1·2 million of urban programme money is being spent on evironmental works—a large proportion in industrial and commercial improvement areas—to make Lambeth a more attractive place for investors and shoppers. We have to remember, too, that with nearly £7 million of the inner city partnership allocation being capital resources, many jobs are created on building work during the implementation of the programme.

The Government's urban programme aid to Lambeth —I hope that the hon. Gentleman will give credit where it is due—is an example of the Government's concern and their commitment to regenerating the local economy. Lambeth is deriving particular benefit from my Department's special employment measures because of its high level of unemployment. Many of the measures are designed to protect the more vulnerable groups such as the young and the long-term unemployed. Over 500 people in the Lambeth area are benefiting from the community programme and nearly 600 from the job release scheme.

The main thing that the Government can do to help industry is to put the economy on a sound footing, and we have made considerable progress in doing that. The hon. Gentleman must allow me to put to him some figures that highlight that progress in a national perspective.

Before the miners' strike began to affect the figures, output was at its highest ever level—up 3 per cent. between 1982 and 1983. Growth in the United Kingdom in 1983 was the highest of all the European Community countries. The combination of that level of growth and inflation at 5 per cent. is the best since the 1960s.

Manufacturing investment is estimated to have risen by about 15 per cent. in the first half of this year.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Where from?

Mr. Clark: I am glad to see the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) in the Chamber.

Manufacturing investment is directed to places where investors believe that they will get the best return. That is why it is in the interests of the whole community that places to which it is desired to attract investment should present as attractive an appearance as possible.

Mr. Tony Banks *rose*——

Mr. Clark: I do not know whether it is in order for me to give way to the hon. Gentleman

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. With the consent of the Minister and of the hon. Member who initiated the debate, the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) may intervene.

Mr. Tony Banks: When I asked "where from?", I was asking from what base the percentage increase was calculated. I believe that manufacturing investment is 20 per cent. down on 1979 levels.

Mr. Clark: I will not intrude at short notice into the arcane subject of collecting statistics, but I will try to make sure that the hon. Member is appraised of the dates from which the figure was drawn.

The hon. Member for Norwood mentioned vacancies. Over the country as a whole, we have seen a steady rise in vacancies, to their highest level for four and a half years. The hon. Gentleman said that the number of unfilled vacancies in Lambeth was disappointingly low, but in October it was up by more than 40 per cent. on a year ago. Between April and October, the employment service placed more than 8,000 people in employment in the Lambeth area—20 per cent. more than in the same period last year—and many more will have found jobs by other means.

We have stopped the haemorrhage of job losses throughout the country. Whereas 1·5 million jobs were lost between June 1979 and June 1983, 250,000 jobs have been created in the past year. However, there remains the burden of our existing level of unemployment. That is inevitably aggravated by the steady increase in the labour force, which has grown by 400,000 since 1979 and is still growing. That gives some idea of the scale of the problem. We have to run even to stand still.

I gather that Lambeth borough council has estimated that 60 per cent. of Lambeth firms employ fewer than five people. Against that background, I should mention the enterprise allowance scheme which, as the hon. Member for Norwood knows, is an incentive to unemployed people who are deterred from starting their own business by the potential loss of benefit. So far, 55,000 unemployed people throughout the country have been helped to set up in business.

The response to the scheme in south London has been encouraging. Since its introduction, about 550 unemployed people have taken advantage of this opportunity, and nearly 400 people are currently receiving the allowance. As my hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced recently, the numbers taken into the scheme have recently been increased and will be increased again in the spring of next year. I hope that the hon. Member for Norwood will suggest the scheme to those of his unemployed constituents who might feel able to consider it.

The small businesses in Lambeth have a tremendous employment potential. They are an essential part of the economy and an important source of new jobs. We aim to remove any unnecessary restraints on their growth.

We are improving access to funding through, for example, the business expansion scheme, which is increasing the flow of venture capital, and the loan guarantee scheme which helps those who are unable to secure backing from traditional sources. I hope that the hon. Member for Norwood will draw the attention of local business men to those schemes when he talks to them about their problems.

We are helping to increase the stock of suitable premises, including small factories and workshops, such as those in the Brixton enterprise centre, and we are extending the enterprise training capacity of the MSC.

No survey of our measures would be complete without mention of the youth training scheme. I was disappointed that the hon. Member for Norwood appeared to suggest that his constituents on YTS were in the same position as the unemployed. There is a great distinction. Those on a training scheme are adapting and making themselves more easily employable when they emerge from the training. More than 900 people in the Lambeth area are receiving training under the YTS and more than 1,500 places have been made available since April. The hon. Member mentioned the large number of school leavers in his area who do not have jobs. The whole House will find that figure shocking, but I wonder how many of those school leavers rejected of their own volition the idea of joining the YTS.

Almost half of those on youth training schemes are of ethnic minority origin. A large proportion have no qualifications and many have learning difficulties with English as a second language. Yet a recent survey of schemes——

The Question having been proposed at half-past Two o'clock and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at Three o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 26 November 1984

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

ENERGY

Electricity Supply

1. **Mr. Allen McKay** asked the Secretary of State for Energy when he last met the chairman of the Central Electricity Generating Board to discuss electricity supply.

The Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. Peter Walker): I have regular meetings with the chairman of the Central Electricity Generating Board at which we discuss issues of common interest.

Mr. McKay: Has the Secretary of State discussed with the chairman the medium and long-term method of producing energy, bearing in mind that when gas runs out an additional 100 million tonnes of coal per year will be needed to meet our current gas needs? As the Secretary of State says that only 100 million tonnes will be produced, what will happen to the electricity industry? Where will it obtain its fuel and what type of supply is intended?

Mr. Walker: In any discussions about the long-term demands of the CEGB the chairman and I agree that coal has an important role to play and that coal produced efficiently at low cost will be an important factor.

Mr. Mason: Did the chairman assure the right hon. Gentleman that there would be no power cuts throughout the winter if the strike maintains its present momentum? What did he reveal to the Secretary of State about the increase of coal imports, new contracts which have been made and countries which are now supplying the CEGB?

Mr. Walker: The CEGB is receiving virtually no supplies from imports. Yes, I have had an assurance from the chairman that there will be no fuel cuts this winter if present coal supplies continue.

Mr. Orme: Has the Secretary of State seen the two recent independent reports on coal stocks? If those reports are correct, when will coal have to be removed from the pitheads to certain power stations, and how will the Government seek to do that?

Mr. Walker: Coal is being moved from pitheads to power stations at present because many pitheads are working. I shall deal with present stocks later but, in order to give the right hon. Gentleman a preview, he will be pleased to know that present coal stocks are about exactly the same as they were on 26 August.

Coal Industry Dispute

2. **Mr. Madel** asked the Secretary of State for Energy what estimates he has received from the National Coal Board as to the value of the equipment in the mines damaged beyond repair due to the coal dispute; and if he will make a statement.

6. **Sir William van Straubenzee** asked the Secretary of State for Energy whether he will make a statement on the current industrial dispute in the coal industry.

9. **Mrs. Clwyd** asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the coal strike.

10. **Mr. Jessel** asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the mining strike.

14. **Mr. Tim Smith** asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the coalmining dispute.

15. **Mr. Lofthouse** asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he has any plans to discuss the pit closure programme with the chairman of the National Coal Board.

Mr. Peter Walker: With permission, I shall answer questions Nos. 2, 6, 9, 10, 14 and 15.

Since I answered questions in the House on 29 October there has been a substantial improvement in the number of miners returning to work. The number of men not on strike in the industry as a whole is now 99,000, approximately 44 per cent. of those employed in the industry.

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton: Wrong question.

Mr. Walker: There are substantial stocks of coal at power stations. I am pleased to inform the House that stocks of coal at power stations are similar to what they were on 26 August.

Mr. Merlyn Rees: Answer question No. 2.

Mr. Walker: The Government regret that considerable damage continues to be done——

Mr. Orme: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I think that the Secretary of State is just coming to the question on the mines damaged beyond repair.

Mr. Walker: The Government regret that considerable damage continues to be done to the industry by the continuation of the strike. The compromise proposal put forward by the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service and the detailed agreement reached with the National Association of Colliery Overmen, Deputies and Shotfirers provide proposals which should be acceptable to all those employed in the industry.

The Government deplore the continuing violence which is taking place and the injuries which have been sustained by a number of those miners who have returned to work. The Government regret that members of the NUM continue to be deprived of the opportunity to express their views through a national ballot.

Mr. Orme: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Does the linkage of questions proposed by the Secretary of State still stand?

Mr. Speaker: It is not for the Chair to link questions. That is done by the Secretary of State. With this question, which deals with mines damaged beyond repair, are linked other questions dealing with the coal strike generally.

Mr. Madel: As it is vital to increase the number of jobs in our manufacturing industry, will my right hon. Friend assure the House that the NCB will make every effort to place orders with British firms to replace damaged equipment when the dispute ends?

Mr. Walker: Yes. Most of the mining machinery firms which have supplied the NCB in the past are British and I am sorry that they are suffering now. There is no doubt that when the dispute is over there will be a continuation of the major investment programme, and it will be the objective of the NCB and certainly of the Government that British firms benefit primarily from that programme.

Sir William van Straubenzee: Are not the figures which my right hon. Friend——

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. It is important to state at this point that the questions now being asked have nothing to do with the original question.

Mr. Speaker: I have already said that it is not for me to link questions. That has already been done. However, I will take into account the fact that there are other questions on the Order Paper on this subject.

Sir William van Straubenzee: Are not the figures given by my right hon. Friend about the abandonment of the strike enormously encouraging? He has made immense and successful efforts to publicise the terms that lie on the table, but will he also use this psychological moment to emphasise that the terms available for those returning to work are better than any that would be available in a comparable industry?

Mr. Walker: There is a series of guarantees on pay, lack of compulsory redundancies and the future investment programme which make the offer unique, not only compared with other industries, but since nationalisation. That is why I deeply regret that the NUM continues to refuse to allow its members to be balloted. I have no doubt what the result would be if they were balloted.

Mrs. Clwyd: First, I must object to the linking of questions proposed by the Secretary of State. Some of them are on specific matters and should not have been linked with question No. 2.

Given that 75 million to 80 million tonnes of coal will have been lost by the end of the current financial year and that the NCB's proposal in "Plan for coal" was to cut 4 million tonnes from the overall capacity, what is the point of going ahead with pit closures, and where will the Government get the coal?

Mr. Walker: Even after the length of this dispute, we still have the most massive coal mountain. About 37 million tonnes of stocks still remain. Therefore, the importance of future production is that it should be at a cost that enables it to compete with new markets and to expand the markets for coal instead of having them contract.

Mr. Jessel: Is not the fact that one miner has been beaten up and badly hurt, that the house of another has been burnt down and that nine have been charged with serious criminal assault a direct effect of the inflammatory and provocative rabble-rousing of Mr. Scargill?

Mr. Walker: The TUC said some months ago how much it deplored the methods of picketing that were bringing violence to mining communities. The horrific cases that we have seen over the past few days illustrate that it is time that the NUM complied with either the TUC guidelines on picketing or with its own union guidelines on picketing and prevented this type of mob activity and violence from taking place.

Mr. Lofthouse: The Secretary of State failed to answer my question No. 15, which he said that he was linking with question No. 2. Has he any plans to meet the chairman of the NCB to discuss the pit closure programme? If so, will he inform the chairman that the situation in some mining communities, and certainly in my community, is like living on a powder keg? Does he realise that matters have got so serious that we have miner fighting miner, with problems spilling over into school playgrounds? Does the right hon. Gentleman realise that the Government's policy and the pit closure programme are leading to the development of a Northern Ireland situation in our communities? Bearing that in mind, does the right hon. Gentleman not think that it is his duty, as Secretary of State, to instruct the chairman of the NCB to reopen negotiations for an honourable settlement?

Mr. Walker: I understand the hon. Gentleman's deep concern about what is happening in his community, but he knows better than anyone that if at the beginning of the dispute the NUM had complied with normal procedures and held a ballot and members had voted to strike not one miner would have crossed a picket line. No picketing would have been required. The NUM executive can hold a ballot at any time that it wishes. Its decision to use the mob picket rather than the ballot box caused the trouble.

Mr. Benn: Does the Secretary of State recall that in June the Prime Minister said that 50,000 miners were at work, in July 60,000 and on 25 October 70,000? Is he aware that the Coal Board claims that only 62,000 are back at work? Have not the Government been feeding fraudulent figures to wage psychological warfare against the NUM, and are they not wholly unsuccessful?

Mr. Walker: That illustrates the right hon. Gentleman's failure even to understand what the figures are about. The figures that he mentions were used in relation to NUM membership. The figure that I gave this afternoon concerns those employed in the industry as a whole, including NACODS and the British Association of Colliery Managers. A total of 99,000 are at work.

Mr. Mark Carlisle: In relation to the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Bedfordshire, South-West (Mr. Madel), is not the damage to equipment and the potential damage to coal faces a greater threat to future job opportunities in the mining industry than any of the NCB's proposals?

Mr. Walker: Yes, Sir. Coal faces have been damaged and destroyed in economic pits which had a good future for those working in them. Machinery has been damaged and markets lost. Without a dispute this year 1,000 firms would have converted to coal. Now, alas, many firms which have converted are considering converting back to other fuels.

Mr. Hardy: In view of the damage caused, the bitterness bred and the hardship generated, will the Secretary of State reconsider his policy of non-intervention, which has gone on for far too long? If he will not take an initiative, will he at least ensure that the

chairman of the NCB complies thoroughly with the NACODS agreement about which he boasts? Will he bear in mind that I have received a letter from the chairman of the NCB which suggests that the pledge of no redundancies will last only to the end of March 1985?

Mr. Walker: The answer about talks is best illustrated by the actions of the hon. Gentleman's own union, which talked in detail and came to an agreement. That agreement will be complied with by both sides. Mr. MacGregor has rightly said that if the strike continues in its present form and the coal faces of economic pits with a good future are destroyed, a considerable threat to the industry as a whole will be created.

Mr. Andy Stewart: Since the dispute is continuing and the damage now amounts to millions of pounds, will my right hon. Friend assure me that the investment earmarked for Nottinghamshire will not be diverted elsewhere?

Mr. Walker: Important developments and investments are to be made in Nottinghamshire and they will certainly be made. The Nottinghamshire miners have done a great deal to safeguard the future of the industry in markets, production and reputation.

Mr. Barron: Will the Minister answer the question by my hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy)? Last week there was some doubt about whether the Coal Board would make people compulsorily redundant. Is the Secretary of State aware that, according to any objective opinion, the only way that the NCB has moved in the last nine months has been on the question of compulsory redundancy? Is that pledge guaranteed to last only until the end of the current financial year, or does it run into the year 1985-86 and beyond?

Mr. Walker: The National Coal Board's plans for improving productivity and getting rid of the most uneconomic pits mean that we can guarantee miners that none of them will face compulsory redundancy. The only threat of compulsory redundancies for miners is posed by the destruction of good economic pits by the strike.

Mr. Skeet: Will my right hon. Friend answer a question which was put to me today? As valuable machinery is being destroyed, as men are being brutally intimidated, as the courts are being flouted and as money is being taken around the country in bags, will my right hon. Friend consider the possibility of prosecutions being brought against those who have masterminded the strike and the NUM executive?

Mr. Walker: Powers of prosecution are matters for police authorities. The decisions are not for politicians to take. Immense damage has been done by the criminal acts that have taken place and the unbelievable violence that has been used to try to prevent miners returning to work.

Mr. Foot: Given the great importance of the subject, does the right hon. Gentleman say that there is no difference between what he says about compulsory redundancies and that which Mr. MacGregor has to say on the subject? Are we still to believe what Mr. MacGregor said on 6 March?

Mr. Walker: The position is clear. On all the plans for the future of the industry, there will be no compulsory redundancies. The only factor that could interfere with the plans is irresponsible strike action which destroys good, economic pits.

Mr. Rost: Has my right hon. Friend noticed that after the rally in Derby, which was organised by Mr. Arthur Scargill and supported by the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), a record number of Derbyshire miners have today voted with their feet and returned to work?

Mr. Walker: I am pleased to inform the House that on 1 November there were slightly more than 1,180 miners working in north Derby and now there are 4,500 working in that area. When the Leader of the Opposition addresses the miners in Stoke on Friday, I hope that he will realise that he is speaking for the 20 per cent. of miners who are on strike and not the 80 per cent. of miners in that area who are at work.

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton: As the new regional aid policy to be announced this week will certainly worsen unemployment in coal mining areas, will the right hon. Gentleman direct his attention to the provision of far more finance and alternative jobs in coal industry areas than the Government have provided so far?

Mr. Walker: Yes, Sir. As the hon. Gentleman knows, the new company has been created. I am pleased to say that it has already received 150 inquiries about new businesses. I give the hon. Gentleman the assurance that original financing has been provided to get the company at work. I assure him also that the position will be reviewed and that more money will be provided as is necessary to help this important work.

Mr. Maples: Does my right hon. Friend agree that many more miners would return to work if they did not feel threatened by the violence that is organised and inspired by their union? Given the appalling acts of premeditated violence to which he has referred which took place last week, will he assure the House that adequate protection will be given to those wishing to return to work?

Mr. Walker: Yes. Every protection possible will be given, but it is not possible to provide the type of protection that will stop a mob breaking into someone's house in the early hours of the morning and beating him up. That is the type of intimidation that has been introduced and we cannot give protection to every house. The Labour party recognises that there would have been no intimidation and no crossing of picket lines if there had been a ballot. Intimidation has been the only method of keeping miners out of work.

Mr. Redmond: Will the Minister set the record straight? Is he aware that I am fed up with hearing about ballots? The strike started—*[Interruption.]* Conservative Members should listen. Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that the strike started because the Coal Board and the Government failed to honour the procedures laid down on pit closures? Will he now get shot of the amateurs on the Coal Board and the Government side and bring in professionals who will seriously negotiate with the NUM to achieve a settlement of the strike?

Mr. Walker: Serious negotiations have taken place about various aspects, including a compromise solution suggested by ACAS and a detailed agreement accepted by NACODS. The one person who has always refused serious negotiation is Mr. Scargill.

Sir Anthony Meyer: In any correspondence that my right hon. Friend has with the bishops, will he suggest to

them that there is a role for the Church in this matter, and that is to urge reconciliation between those who have been on strike and those who are at work? That is the bishops' task. It is not their task to intervene in the detailed conduct of the negotiations.

Mr. Walker: I very much share my hon. Friend's view that the churches have a considerable role to play in endeavouring to return a sense of unity as quickly as possible to the mining communities.

Mr. Orme: Despite all the special offers and inducements, it is obvious that the mining strike is no nearer a solution. Therefore, will the Secretary of State take the initiative in getting talks resumed? The right hon. Gentleman must be aware that proposals are still on the table at ACAS and that the NUM is prepared to negotiate on them. Will the Secretary of State now play his part by bringing the NCB back to the negotiating table?

Mr. Walker: The position of the talks is best described by the president of the NUM, who categorically says that he has not moved an inch since 6 March. The whole nation knows that that is the position, in spite of all the efforts made by the right hon. Member for Salford, East (Mr. Orme). There could be no better pressure to reach a sensible agreement than for the Labour party and the TUC to tell the NUM that until it abides by proper principles of picketing, instead of violence, they will have nothing to do with it.

Mrs. Clwyd: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I shall take it after questions.

Domestic Gas Supplies

3. **Mr. Wallace** asked the Secretary of State for Energy by how much he expects demand for gas in the domestic sector to increase by the year 2000.

The Minister of State, Department of Energy (Mr. Alick Buchanan-Smith): The British Gas Corporation estimates that domestic gas demand will rise from 9·1 billion therms in 1983-84 to about 10·8 billion therms in the year 2000. However, such estimates are subject to considerable uncertainty.

Mr. Wallace: How does that increase in demand of 12 or 13 per cent. compare with the stated belief of the Secretary of State that he wishes energy conservation to contribute to a reduction of 20 per cent.? Will that be done by substituting solid fuels or electricity for gas—there is no sign of the other nationalised bodies taking that lying down—or is it the case that the British Gas Corporation and the Energy Efficiency Office have not got their act together?

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman takes this interest in conservation. I hope he is reassured by the fact that in those estimates the British Gas Corporation has taken account of conservation measures which it believes can be achieved. The Government and the British Gas Corporation are wholly at one in their drive for further conservation, which is already proving extremely successful.

Sir Dudley Smith: Does my right hon. Friend believe that the strong minority demand for gas in rural areas and villages will still be unsatisfied by the year 2000? Is he aware that the gas corporation's charges for connection are wholly unrealistic and well beyond the means of most people who would like to be connected to the system?

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: My hon. Friend knows that that matter is raised with me from time to time. The British Gas Corporation is bound by the statutory position decided by the House. I think that knowledge of the position in the year 2000 will be surrounded by even more uncertainty than the figures I cited earlier.

Mr. Rowlands: Do the Government accept the recent forecasts for supply and demand made by the British Gas Corporation, which clearly showed that the corporation needs Sleipner gas? Where do the Government stand with regard to Sleipner?

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: Negotiations on Sleipner gas are still proceeding, and we shall have to wait to see how they get on.

British National Oil Corporation

4. **Mr. Rowlands** asked the Secretary of State for Energy whether he will make a statement on the financial situation of the British National Oil Corporation.

Mr. Alick Buchanan-Smith: I refer the hon. Member to the minute which my Department laid before the House on 23 October.

Mr. Rowlands: Is it not sad that the Government have managed to turn what was once, in 1981-82, an extremely profitable and vibrant British National Oil Corporation into a £45 million lame duck? Does the £45 million, which has been cited recently as the cost of covering BNOC's losses, cover the losses in the past few days, or will we have a further Supplementary Estimate? Will the right hon. Gentleman at least confirm what he said on 22 October, that he still sees BNOC as having a vital role in the supply of oil?

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: I am amazed that the hon. Gentleman shows so little understanding of the position. The losses would have been the same whether or not Britoil had been split from BNOC. Had they remained together, the loss would have been masked by an upstream profit. Where BNOC has the responsibility for purchasing participation oil supplies, it is better that the nation should know the cost.

Sizewell Inquiry

5. **Mr. Sean Hughes** asked the Secretary of State for Energy what percentage of the costs appertaining to the Sizewell B public inquiry will be or are being met by public funds.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. Alastair Goodlad): Costs up to 31 October 1984 falling to my Department were some £396,000. Other costs incurred to the same date in running the inquiry and recoverable from the Central Electricity Generating Board, by agreement with the board, total approximately £1,567,000.

Mr. Hughes: In view of the Secretary of State's anxiety, expressed last week, about the plight of the unemployed, will the Minister ask his right hon. Friend to reconsider passing on so much of that charge to the consumer who, in areas of high unemployment, can ill

afford fuel at the present prices? For example, Merseyside has seen fuel disconnections increased by 10 per cent. during the past 12 months.

Mr. Goodlad: My right hon. Friend has the statutory power to determine who shall meet the costs of inquiries for consents under the Electricity Acts. It is a long accepted practice that the electricity board making the application meets such costs.

Mr. Chapman: Given the length and cost of the Sizewell B inquiry, may I have my right hon. Friend's assurance that any future inquiry relating to another nuclear power station will concentrate on the specific merits of the site and the need for the additonal power station? The Sizewell B inquiry has been concerned also with the general merits of nuclear power as an alternative form of energy, and that should not be repeated.

Mr. Goodlad: I note what my hon. Friend says. Decisions on applications for future planning consents will be taken in the light of the circumstances from time to time prevailing.

Mr. Eadie: Has the Minister any new information as to when the inquiry is likely to end?

Mr. Goodlad: I regret that I have no firm information on that point.

Fuel Prices

7. **Mr. Winnick** asked the Secretary of State for Energy what discussions he has had with the chairmen of the gas and electricity boards over increases in fuel prices.

19. **Mr. Ray Powell** asked the Secretary of State for Energy when he last met the chairman of the British Gas Corporation to discuss gas prices.

Mr. Peter Walker: Prices are a matter for the industries within the framework of their agreed external financing limits and financial targets.

Mr. Winnick: Is it not clear that the increases which are to take place this year are a form of fuel tax and hidden taxation? If it is a matter for the fuel and power industries, why has the Cabinet decided on the increases? Is this not another case where the Secretary of State disagrees strongly with Government policy, but lost out in the Cabinet to the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer?

Mr. Walker: In fact, the Government have not agreed any specific price increases. They will be a matter for the industries. All that the Government know is that, unlike during the period of the previous Labour Government, the increases will be below the rate of inflation.

Mr. Powell: Will the Secretary of State be honest with the House and admit that the primary object of the exercise is to increase prices yet again to consumers and industrialists?

Mr. Walker: The enormous increases that took place about every six weeks under the previous Labour Government now, on average, take place every two years under a Conservative Government. The hon. Gentleman should rejoice at the fact that there has been such an improvement during this Government's lifetime.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: Does my right hon. Friend agree that if the Government keep changing the external financing limits, as they have for gas, electricity and water, although it may not be called a tax, if the Government keep making the industries raise money which they say they do not need it will amount to the same thing—a tax upon the consumer?

Mr. Walker: Yes, Sir. That is why I am pleased that on this occasion I reached agreement with the gas and electricity boards as to what should be done.

Coal Industry Dispute

8. **Mr. Michael Morris** asked the Secretary of State for Energy what is the number of miners that have returned to work since the current dispute in the mining industry began.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. David Hunt): In the eight months from the beginning of the strike to 1 November around 6,000 former strikers returned to work. In the 17 working days since then, over 14,000 more have gone back.

There have been considerable increases in the number of men at work in Scotland, the north-east, south Yorkshire, north Derbyshire, Lancashire and north Wales.

Mr. Morris: If my hon. Friend will give the House a categorical assurance that the 20,000-plus men exist, and that they are being paid, that would be some evidence. How does the answer square with Mr. Scargill's assertion at the weekend that there were 144,000 men on strike—4,000 more than a month ago, according to his figures?

Mr. Hunt: Yes, the figures that I have given are correct, and they are the figures for those being paid. The NCB's external auditors, Thomson McLintock and Company, have been to north Derbyshire and tested and confirmed the reliability of the board's systems for reporting the number of men returning to work. I, too, heard Mr. Arthur Scargill yesterday mention the figure of 144,275. The actual figure is 123,000. That shows the level of distortion that Mr. Scargill uses.

Mr. Welsh: It would appear that the auditors agree only the north Derbyshire figures. According to *The Observer* yesterday, the auditors could not agree any other figures which the NCB put forward. Does the Minister agree with the report in *The Observer?*

Mr. Hunt: No. The board's external auditors were asked to go into the north Derbyshire area only. They visited all collieries and other units there and verified the reporting systems. Similar reporting systems operate in all the 12 NCB areas.

Mr. Dykes: Does my hon. Friend think that it is because the return to work figures are so good and encouraging that Mr. Scargill keeps going on secret trips to Paris, or is it that Mr. Scargill is beginning to get nervous about his own hit-men, as he has now grudgingly and slowly begun to half-condemn violence?

Mr. Hunt: I cannot be held answerable to this House for the travel activities of the president of the National Union of Mineworkers. Today over 66,000 members of the NUM are no longer on strike. Today 99,000 people are at work in the coal industry.

Mr. Rowlands: Do the Minister's figures include the Merthyr Vale pit at Aberfan, where two miners went to work last week and this morning? *[Interruption.]* They went in at 7 o'clock and left at quarter to 11. Is that what

constitutes two working miners? Instead of quoting figures, will the Secretary of State come down and see for himself what the argument is about? He has never been anywhere near the coalfields.

Mr. Hunt: The House must understand that to be among the first to return to work at a pit demands great courage. *[Interruption.]* It demands the sort of courage that was shown by the first six miners to enter the Bilston Glen colliery on 5 June. I am happy to report that nearly 900 men are at work there today.

Coal Board Enterprise Company

17. **Dr. Mawhinney** asked the Secretary of State for Energy how much of the initial finance of the Coal Board's enterprise company has so far been allocated.

Mr. David Hunt: The board of NCB (Enterprise) Ltd. held its first meeting on 30 October. The company has received over 150 inquiries so far, and these will be dealt with as quickly as possible.

Dr. Mawhinney: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. Will he give the House a categorical assurance that when the first £5 million made available to the enterprise company has been used, more money will be made available if there are worthwhile projects?

Mr. Hunt: The Government attach great importance to the work of this very important enterprise company. I assure my hon. Friend that the resources available to the new company will be kept under very careful review.

Mr. Douglas: Will the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State concede that there must be a relationship between giving finance where pit closures have taken place and are likely to take place and general regional policy? What discussions has he had with his right hon. Friends in the Department of Trade and Industry about keeping mining areas, such as Fife, at assisted area status?

Mr. Hunt: That is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. All I can say is that it is vital that that company succeeds. I hope that in doing so it will have the support of the whole House.

Mr. Wrigglesworth: The Minister's comments are welcome to the House, but will he explain why the Government and the NCB took so long to establish that organisation, in view of the undoubted success of British Steel Corporation (Industry) Ltd., particularly when they were asked to do so shortly after the beginning of the dispute by my right hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen)?

Mr. Hunt: Inevitably it takes time for a new company of that nature to be brought up to strength and for the right executive director to be found. However, every possible effort is being made to bring the company into activity as quickly as possible to meet the challenge that is necessary in these crucial areas.

Sir Kenneth Lewis: Is my hon. Friend aware—I am sure he is — that many businesses depend upon a prosperous coal industry, which is in trouble at the moment in the strike areas? When the company comes into operation, will he try to arrange for the NCB to give support to industries or businesses which employ people and which, if they are not helped, will contribute towards a rise in the unemployment figures, as they will go bankrupt?

Mr. Hunt: I assure my hon. Friend that we are watching carefully and with great concern the condition and strength of certain companies in mining areas. Inevitably, one is forced to the conclusion that the sooner this unnecessary and damaging dispute is over, the better the health of those companies will be.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Visitors (Tours)

50. **Dr. Mawhinney** asked the Lord Privy Seal if he is satisfied with the facilities for permitting hon. Members' parties to tour Parliament when they have to enter through St. Stephens entrance.

The Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Biffen): St. Stephen's entrance is used for the entry of Members' parties when the line of Route through the House of Lords is closed; I am aware that under such circumstances space for visitors at the point of entry is restricted.

Dr. Mawhinney: Is my right hon. Friend aware that since the beginning of this Session of Parliament over 2,000 people a day have been touring the House, going through inadequate security arrangements at both St. Stephen's entrance and the Norman Porch entrance, outside which there is no protection against the weather? At the very least, will my right hon. Friend ensure that manual security arrangements are made available to supplement the existing arrangements, to try to reduce the backlog of people and the delay which they experience in trying to tour the House?

Mr. Biffen: My hon. Friend is perfectly correct in drawing attention to the growing numbers of people now visiting the House. The figures show that the total is about 50 per cent. above that for last year. I shall bear in mind my hon. Friend's points about security.

Mr. Adley: Is my right hon. Friend aware that there is quite a good market in Prayer Cards among parties which come round this House and that as a result a member of the House of Commons staff has to be permanently on duty at the door to see that they are not pinched? Would it not be in the interests of all of us, in order to reduce the costs of running this place, if those cards could be left at the Vote Office, when it is open, from where hon. Members could go and take a card? It could have a double benefit.

Mr. Biffen: Ambitious as I am to extend my responsibilities, I would rather not answer that question, but I shall direct it to those who are possibly more competent.

Mr. Williams: Will the Leader of the House bear in mind that a week ago the Norman Porch was closed, and one of the scanner channels at St. Stephen's entrance was closed? The hon. Member for Peterborough (Dr. Mawhinney), who asked the original question, will bear witness to that as we were both there. It was an absolute shambles outside St. Stephen's entrance a week ago. Security became impossible, which was no fault of either the police or the attendants, who were coping with a difficult situation. Could not the repair work have been carried out over the weekend?

Mr. Biffen: I think that the matter raised by the right hon. Gentleman has security implications. I shall look into it.

Official Paid Envelopes

51. **Mr. John Hunt** asked the Lord Privy Seal what representations have been made to him regarding the use of official paid House of Commons envelopes for the purposes of a survey, regarding members of health authorities, conducted by an hon. Member of this House; and what inquiries he has made.

Mr. Biffen: I understand that this matter is at present being considered by the Accommodation and Administration Sub-Committee.

Mr. Hunt: Does my right hon. Friend agree that while any kind of witch hunt against the health authorities is bad enough, it is outrageous that such an operation, mounted from the Labour Front Bench, should be financed by the taxpayer through the unauthorised use of official paid House of Commons envelopes? When is the Sub-Committee likely to reach a conclusion on the matter?

Mr. Biffen: My hon. Friend makes a formidable case, but the matter is now before the Accommodation and Administration Sub-Committee and I have no wish to anticipate the findings of the Committee. I shall see what I can do to expedite the submission of the report.

Mr. Shore: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that it is outrageous for the hon. Member for Ravensbourne (Mr. Hunt) to make those remarks, knowing perfectly well that the matter has been referred to a Committee of the House which is considering all its aspects and will duly report? Will the right hon. Gentleman call upon his hon. Friend to contain himself?

Mr. Biffen: That message might well be applied to us all. I do not seek to anticipate the findings of the Sub-Committee, but I am sure that the whole House will be concerned that it should report as soon as possible.

Facilities (Members' Spouses)

52. **Mr. Nicholas Baker** asked the Lord Privy Seal if he has any plans to improve facilities in the Palace of Westminster for the spouses of hon. Members.

Mr. Biffen: No, Sir.

Mr. Baker: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the husbands and wives of hon. Members work very much as the partners of their spouses and that access to the House for them is very poor? Will my right hon. Friend, as a matter of urgency, investigate ways of improving access to the Galleries and the building for husbands and wives of hon. Members? In particular, will he consider whether part of the Strangers Gallery should be set aside for them? If my right hon. Friend is in any doubt about the matter, will he please consult his wife?

Mr. Biffen: My wife has certainly never complained about that. Being aware of the important role played by spouses, the Accommodation and Administration Sub-Committee undertook an investigation of what facilities could reasonably be provided, and those facilities are detailed in "Facilities for Members' Spouses", which was printed as recently as 1982. The authorities have received no complaints about problems of access to the Galleries.

[HON. MEMBERS: "Wait and see."] My shoulders are hunched and braced. If my hon. Friend is concerned about this matter, it is open to him to complain to me.

Mr. Wrigglesworth: If there is a problem, could it not be overcome if the House kept more sensible hours? Hon. Members, like other working people, could then go home to their spouses.

Mr. Biffen: I hope that the Social Democratic party has something more to offer than a programme of nine to five.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels: In view of the unfortunately high divorce rate among hon. Members on both sides of the House, perhaps my right hon. Friend should consider carefully what other facilities should be made available to the wives of hon. Members. Does he agree that wives should have access to the side Galleries so that they can hear debates and see their husbands?

Mr. Biffen: Such matters were carefully considered by the Accommodation and Administration Sub-Committee before it published its list of facilities available for Members' spouses. However, the Committee is open to receive further advice on the matter.

Televised Proceedings

53. **Mr. Willie W. Hamilton** asked the Lord Privy Seal if he will initiate an experiment in closed televising of the proceedings of the House using Westminster Hall as a viewing venue.

Mr. Biffen: I have no such proposals. Any such experiment would be a matter for decision by the House as a whole.

Mr. Hamilton: I accept that, but does the right hon. Gentleman agree that, sooner or later, the introduction of television cameras into the House is inevitable? If so, will he use his good offices to ensure that the underused facilities provided by Westminster Hall are used for this type of experiment?

Mr. Biffen: It would be an affront to the House if I endorsed the doctrine of inevitability in the matter of television broadcasting. In sheer terms of practicality, I think that the House would be well advised to see what is determined in another place tomorrow.

Mr. Stokes : Is my right hon. Friend aware that many hon. Members on both sides of the House would deplore the entry of the television camera into this Chamber? It would alter the character of this place and give it more of a showbiz atmosphere than it has now.

Mr. Biffen: I am aware of my hon. Friend's views, which he advances in a most engaging fashion. This is a topic on which the House has made periodic judgments, and I have no doubt that it will wish to do so again in future.

Mr. Bidwell: If cameras are admitted to the House, will the right hon. Gentleman ensure that they can record hon. Members coming out of the Division Lobbies? For example, cameras might have witnessed the events of last Thursday when the right hon. Gentleman was with the Tellers, presumably to see who was coming out of the No Lobby? Was his presence the result of pure curiosity, or was it a means of intimidation?

Mr. Biffen: I have never before had the compliment of intimidation levelled against me. The hon. Gentlman"s

question ranges wide of the original one. However, my loitering arose out of pure curiosity, so that I could anticipate by five minutes information that could be secured from the Clerks' Department.

CIVIL SERVICE

Recruitment

54. **Mr. Chapman** asked the Minister for the Civil Service what is the latest annual rate of recruitment into the Civil Service.

The Minister of State, Treasury (Mr. Barney Hayhoe): 30,844 people were recruited into the non-industrial grades of the Home Civil Service during the year ended 30 June 1984. This figure is provisional and may be subject to minor correction. Figures for industrial recruitment are not held centrally.

Mr. Chapman: I thank my hon. Friend for that information. Is he satisfied with the number of scientists and engineers who are being recruited into the Civil Service? Is he also satisfied that there is every encouragement for civil servants to be seconded to industry for short periods of time and for industrialists to be seconded to the Civil Service? Does he agree that such an arrangement benefits everyone?

Mr. Hayhoe: I agree that such mutual interchange is beneficial to industrial and commercial firms and to the Civil Service and that it should be encouraged. The numbers now taking part in such exchanges are higher than a few years ago. I should like more applications from scientists and engineers, especially for the administrative Civil Service, as it ought to show a better balance between generalists and scientists, engineers and technologists. Similar proportions of applicants from each discipline are successful.

Mr. Winnick: Should it not be part of a democratic society that anyone who enters the Civil Service has the right to belong to a trade union? What pressures are now being applied at GCHQ to ensure that people who, on a point of principle, refuse to give up their trade union membership are forced out? Is the Minister aware that, in view of what is now going on at Cheltenham, we shall require a statement from him as soon as possible?

Mr. Hayhoe: The matter is primarily one for my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary, but I imagine that the House realises that the recent judgment of the House of Lords—the highest court in the land—confirmed that given by the Court of Appeal to the effect that the revised terms and conditions of service introduced at GCHQ on 25 January are valid. With regard to employees at GCHQ who have decided not to opt for those conditions, every effort will now be made to find alternative posts for those who do not wish to remain at GCHQ under the revised conditions and terms of service.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels: Does my hon. Friend agree that too many people are being taken on and that it is important to reduce the numbers being admitted to the Civil Service? That is our priority.

Mr. Hayhoe: My hon. Friend is less than fair to the great progress which has been made. Since 1979 the Civil Service has been reduced from 732,000 to under 620,000 at present. This is the smallest Civil Service that we have had since the war. The numbers now being recruited are well under half those which were recruited in 1978.

Dr. McDonald: Will the Minister bear in mind that a proper level of recruitment to the Civil Service depends on how the Government treat their own employees? Will he now give an assurance, or seek one from his right hon. and learned Friend, that those working at GCHQ who wish neither to be transferred nor to give up their trade union rights will not be dismissed until such time as the case is further heard at the European Court of Human Rights?

Mr. Hayhoe: As I said earlier, these are really matters for my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary. However, the House of Lords judgment completed the domestic legal process. GCHQ will endeavour to find alternative posts within the Civil Service for those who do not wish to remain at GCHQ under the new conditions. There may be some for whom suitable positions cannot be found, and they will be offered premature retirement on redundancy terms. All this will take some time. Therefore, the question of dismissals does not arise at this stage.

Ethnic Monitoring

56. **Mr Janner** asked the Minister for the Civil Service whether he has now completed the evaluation of the surveys of the ethnic origins of non-industrial civil servants in the north-west and county of Avon; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hayhoe: No; but, as I said on 29 October, a decision on future surveys will be taken as soon as possible.

Mr. Janner: Does the Minister accept that "as soon as possible" may mean a very long time indeed? The code of the Commission for Racial Equality has been in force since 1 April, and the Government should be giving a lead rather than hanging behind. This matter should not be allowed to hang fire any longer.

Mr. Hayhoe: On this, as on earlier questions, the hon. and learned Gentleman has got it wrong. The code has been circulated to all Departments and their attention has been drawn to the fact that it is now in operation. The Government have made themselves an equal opportunities employer, and they make that clear in all staff advertisements. I should have thought that the hon. and learned Gentleman would have wanted to wait for the survey of applicants in the north-west and Avon to be published—at the end of the year—before arriving at premature judgments about the present state of affairs within the Civil Service. We are still waiting for clarification of the union position, which I regard as of some importance. On reflection, the hon. and learned Gentleman may think that it is right that we should do so.

Mr. Forth: Will my hon. Friend reaffirm that the overriding principle in recruitment and promotion is merit? If so, is he not now beginning to wonder about the efficacy of these surveys and what they are all about?

Mr. Hayhoe: I give my hon. Friend the absolute assurance that I gave him at our last Civil Service Question Time. I hope that his memory is not defective, but I repeat that the long-standing traditions and practice of the Civil

Service—that recruitment and promotion should be on the merits of the individual — should and will be maintained.

Cabinet Office (Efficiency Unit)

57. **Mr. Eggar** asked the Minister for the Civil Service how many individuals are currently working in the efficiency unit of the Cabinet Office.

Mr. Hayhoe: The efficiency unit works under the direction of Sir Robin Ibbs, the Prime Minister's adviser on efficiency. It has eight staff, including two secretaries and a clerical officer.

Mr. Eggar: Is it not surprising that there are so few staff in this unit? Does it mean that the Government are now relying more on Departments internally to improve their own efficiency?

Mr. Hayhoe: The efficiency unit is deliberately small. Indeed, Lord Rayner recently said that Goliath should be matched with David, not with a smaller version of Goliath. I hope that my hon. Friend will say "Hear, hear" to that. Improvements on the scale we seek can come only when public servants at every level and in every Department are concerned to see that we get better value for money. The efficiency unit is a useful spur and incentive to achieve just that.

Mr. Soley: What guarantee can the Minister give to those people that the principle of national security will not be invoked to prevent them or any other group of civil servants from joining trade unions?

Mr. Hayhoe: I readily repeat the guarantees that were given time and again from this Dispatch Box by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and by my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary when the affairs of GCHQ were rather more prominent in the public mind.

Mr. Wrigglesworth: Will the Minister reconsider that answer? Is he aware that, in view of the House of Lords decision on GCHQ, many civil servants employed in offices such as the Home Office, the Cabinet Office and the Ministry of Defence worry that the pretext of national security may be used to ban trade union membership?

Mr. Hayhoe: No representations of such anxiety have arrived on my desk. It is difficult to see how that question can be linked to the work of the efficiency unit of the Cabinet Office, but one is always amazed by the ingenuity of Opposition Members.

Mr. Cormack: What are the two most notable achievements of the unit?

Mr. Hayhoe: The unit has contributed to the saving of about £330 million a year on current expenditure in the Civil Service and to the saving of as many as 24,000 Civil Service jobs, which are considerable achievements for such a small unit.

Ministerial Statement

3.33 pm

Mrs. Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): On a point of roder, Mr. Speaker. Is it in order for the Secretary of State for Energy, as he did during Question Time, continually to denounce the violence of pickets without at the same time denouncing the violence of other people who take part in pickets——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady is a relatively new Member of the House, and I must tell her that it is not appropriate to try to continue, through points of order, matters which could be raised at Question Time. I called the hon. Lady to ask a question. What a Minister or anyone else says in the House is a matter for him, as long as it is in order. I cannot be responsible for his answers.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Ordered,

That the draft Pneumoconiosis etc. (Workers' Compensation) (Payment of Claims) (Amendment) Regulations 1984 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Lang.]*

Opposition Day

[3RD ALLOTTED DAY] [FIRST PART]

Miners' Families (Benefits)

Mr. Speaker: I must tell the House that many right hon. and hon. Members have said that they wish to take part in this important debate. I remind the House that the debate will end at 7 o'clock and, as I have no power under the Standing Order recently agreed by the House to limit speeches to 10 minutes, I appeal to hon. Members to speak briefly.

I have selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

3.34 pm

Mr. Michael Meacher (Oldham, West): I beg to move,

That this House, noting that the Government postponed revealing its provocative decision to make a further £1 deduction in social security benefits for the families of striking miners until the last possible moment in order to stifle debate, noting too that this increase of £1 was neither automatic nor necessary but gratuitously vindictive when it has been introduced after eight months of a bitter strike, believing also that this increased disqualification of benefit will sharply inflame the bitterness of this dispute because it will be seen as the use of yet another weapon by the Government to starve the miners back to work through intensified financial hardship, calls upon the Government to withdraw this Order and to use negotiation, not the deprivation of families, wives and children as the means to resolve this dispute.

The Opposition have demanded this debate because we believe that the deductions of supplementary benefit penalise the wives and children of workers on strike and are fundamentally unjust. In particular, we believe that this extra deduction of £1, eight months into a bitter strike, is exceedingly provocative, and gratuitously provocative, because it was neither automatic nor necessary and will greatly inflame and worsen the bitterness which already exists in the coalfields and elsewhere.

A man who is not on strike but who is in receipt of supplementary benefit for other reasons, who is married and has a child of, say, 10 years old, receives as from today's uprating, £55.15 a week, plus rent. This supplementary benefit level is conventionally regarded as the state poverty line, as the minimum on which a family can get by. If any Tory Member of Parliament thinks that it is other than the barest minimum for survival he should have a word with the hon. Member for Derbyshire, West (Mr. Parris), who, in a famous televised episode, found himself unable to get by on that amount of money for even a week.

For a striking miner with a wife and a 10-year-old child, that minimum survival payment, on which a Tory Member of Parliament could not subsist, has today been cut back, by the order about which we are concerned, to precisely £16.05 a week, plus rent. That is a huge drop of more than two thirds below the state poverty line. I wonder how many Tory Members of Parliament, in all humanity, have any inkling of what it is like to be condemned to live on such a level.

The miner, as a worker on strike, does not receive supplementary benefit for his own needs. However, the deduction of an additional £16 a week means that the

miner, his children and his wife are systematically pushed down, not only to the point where they cannot get by but to the point of extreme personal hardship and growing destitution. The Opposition reject and condemn such a policy because it means victimising families and starving children in order to weaken trade unions and force their members back to work by sheer privation.

We also reject this policy because it breaches the fundamental principle of the supplementary benefit scheme, which is to provide sufficient for the basic necessities of life—food, fuel and housing. We reject it because it means treating the families of strikers worse than all other families on supplementary benefit, including the families of convicted criminals. We reject it as well because this reduction is made irrespective of the circumstances and the causes of the dispute, even where, as in this case, it was the employer who provoked the dispute in the first place by the provocative proposal to close Cortonwood only weeks after the miners there had been told that their jobs were safe for years.

By making this deduction the Tory Government are saying that workers are always in the wrong when they become involved in an industrial dispute and that they must be punished for exercising a right which separates democracy from dictatorship. That points to the central issue in contention here. Does today's Thatcherite Tory party—previous Tory parties have not had the attitude of this one—uphold the right to strike, or not? Their words proclaim that Tory Members do, and they are murmuring yes today, but they shamelessly resort to every economic and other device to make such a right unworkable in practice. That includes deliberate manipulation of the social security system to cut back the workers' entitlement so as to weaken their resolve. We have seen this done repeatedly during the dispute.

We have, for example, the continuous denial of family income supplement to miners' wives on the grotesque pretence that the families' incomes are not what they were in the last five weeks, which is the normal assessment period, but what they were 12 months ago before the overtime ban began. Now that that shameless pretence has been exposed and overturned by an industrial tribunal the Government are still preventing the wives of striking miners from getting their proper entitlement by stalling their appeal indefinitely.

Mr. Eric Forth (Mid-Worcestershire): The hon. Gentleman is trying yet again to link the freedom to strike with the implication that it is society's duty to support strikers. Many right hon. and hon. Members on the Government Benches maintain that although they support totally the right of individuals to withdraw their labour, which is an absolute freedom, that does not necessarily imply that taxpayers should be obliged to support them when they do it.

Mr. Meacher: The hon. Gentleman has hit on exactly the point to which I am about to come. By far the worst form of deliberate twisting of the social security system is this infamous £16 deduction. In addition to the denial of benefit to the striker himself, it is a double deduction which clearly is meant not in any way to be fair but to cripple the ability to strike at all.

The Tories say that the unions should pay the amount deducted. During questions last Thursday the Prime Minister said:

"If the NUM carried out its obligations, those strikers would be receiving £16 next week."—[*Official Report*, 22 November 1984; Vol. 68, c. 400.]

If the NUM had done exactly that, total NUM funds would have been exhausted within precisely four weeks. In other words, all the Tory platitudes about trade unions taking on their responsibility are a camouflage for bankrupting the unions, for making lengthy strikes unviable and for starving strikers into submission.

There is another reason why the Prime Minister's demand that the NUM pays this £16 is so wrong-headed and unjust. This deduction is being increased to £16 a week at the same time as the NUM, as every hon. Member knows, is no longer able to pay it because all its funds have either been sequestrated as a result of court action or, as a result of attempted sequestration, been otherwise immobilised.

I want to put a question to the Prime Minister or to her proxy, the Secretary of State for Social Services. I hope that the Secretary of State will answer it. If the only justification for this deduction is that the NUM should pay it instead, how can it possibly be right to make this deduction today when it is known that the NUM cannot pay? We want an answer to that question, and I shall give way happily to the Secretary of State if he will answer it now. The right hon. Gentleman declines to answer it. There is no satisfactory answer to the question, of course, and that is one central reason why we strongly oppose this contemptible order.

There is another reason. It is that the deduction did not have to be increased by £1 a week. To make it, unnecessarily, eight months into a bitter strike can only be seen as exceedingly provocative and vindictive.

Last Thursday the Prime Minister talked of the deduction being increased by "automatic" formula. It is not automatic. The order has been made under section 6(2) of the Social Security (No. 2) Act 1980, but under section 6(3) the Secretary of State has an option, if he so wishes to bring in alternative regulations to effect an increase in the specified sum deducted which is lower than the rate of inflation, or no increase at all. Therefore, we condemn the Government, not because it is automatic, but because as a matter of policy they rejected that option.

We condemn, too, the pusillanimous manner in which the Government, from the Prime Minister downwards, have tried to hide behind the pretence of automaticity in the formula in order to avoid taking direct responsibility for a highly partisan and callous decision.

The Secretary of State for Social Services (Mr. Norman Fowler): Will the hon. Gentleman accept that unless I introduce secondary legislation to the House there is no way in which these increases will not go ahead?

Mr. Meacher: The Secretary of State is obliged by section 6 to bring in an order. However, that order gives him the option, subject to an affirmative resolution of the House, to bring in an increase of any size that he wishes and not in accordance with the formula that he has chosen. That is the key point.

Mr. Fowler: No, the hon. Gentleman is wrong. He does not understand the law. Even if I had not set down the declaratory order last week, the changes would have taken place automatically. The only way in which they could have been avoided was by my introducing affirmative orders in both Houses of Parliament.

Mr. Meacher: The Secretary of State is simply confirming the point that I have already made. He could perfectly well have brought in altermative orders secondary legislation — to have effected a different result. If the Secretary of State and his colleagues had any humanity, that is exactly what would have been done.

We condemn, too, the hole-in-the-corner evasiveness with which this episode has been handled. Had I not tabled a parliamentary question a week ago which forced an answer from the Government last Wednesday, I have good reason to believe that no mention of the increased disqualification of benefit would have been made before today. If the Secretary of State denies that, I shall be interested to know when, alternatively, it would have been made.

Mr. Fowler: As the hon. Gentleman asks, it was going to be announced on the Wednesday when it was announced.

Mr. Meacher: If the Secretary of State expects us to believe that, he must be extremely gullible. I am sure, from conversations that I have had with the Minister for Social Security, that there was no intention to announce this before today, the very day on which the order——

The Minister for Social Security (Mr. Antony Newton): Without wishing to engage in some great personal wrangle with the hon. Gentleman, may I say for the record that I have no recollection of any conversation which could conceivably have given that impression? I wish to make it clear that there was no intention whatever to leave that matter until today.

Mr. Meacher: I did not particularly wish to bring this matter before the House, but, as the Minister has deliberately raised it, the conversation to which I am referring took place in the Norman Shaw North building after we had both taken part in a television interview. It was in the course of that conversation that the Minister clearly gave me that impression. If that was a false impression, or if I have misinterpreted it, I withdraw what I have said.

Mr. Newton: I do not want to hold the hon. Gentleman up, but he did misunderstand, and that should be clear.

Mr. Meacher: I accept that there may have been a misunderstanding, but, even if I accept the explanation which the Secretary of State and the Minister have given, it is extraordinary that the matter should be brought to the House only five days before implementation. Why was it only brought to the House at the last possible moment when, for example, last year the Government laid the corresponding order on 28 September, two months before implementation? Why was this the sole item that was omitted from the Secretary of State's uprating statement in the summer? Equally, why was that item not mentioned in the Chancellor of the Exchequer's autumn statement two weeks ago? Was it not because the Government hoped to short-circuit any reaction, to stifle debate, to prevent proper discussion in the House and, no doubt, to increase the pressure of hardship on miners' families while the Christmas bonus pay offer was being dangled before them?

Mr. Fowler: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Meacher: No.

Mr. Fowler *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have already mentioned that there is great pressure to speak in this debate.

Mr. Meacher: The Secretary of State will have an opportunity to speak immediately after me and he can make his points then.

Above all, we condemn this squalid little order because it is patently a strike-breaking instrument designed to secure victory in a bitter industrial dispute — not by negotiation, which is the proper way, but by intensifying and redoubling the hardship of women and children.

The Secretary of State admitted in a radio broadcast on Thursday morning that some families would "undeniably" be worse off. The fact is that all families subject to the deduction will be worse off. The full supplementary benefit uprating is needed simply to restore the purchasing power to last year's level, but all those families will be getting £1 a week less than is needed for that purpose.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): Will my hon. Friend accept that I endorse every single aspect of the arguments that he is making in his excellent speech? But will he endorse my view that this is the way to advance these arguments, and not by means of that damaging and ill-judged demonstration the other evening?

Mr. Meacher: As a result of that spontaneous demonstration there has undoubtedly been more attention given to this infamous deduction than would otherwise have been the case, and we also have this debate as a result of that demonstration.

It is ironic that on the day on which the Government are knocking £1 off miners' benefits they are also knocking £1 off the benefits of the poorest pensioners who get the heating allowance. Of course, £1 may not seem much to Cabinet Ministers on £41,000 a year—£800 a week—or to hon. Members on £16,000 a year, but to those on the poverty line or below it the loss of yet another £1 a week is heartbreaking.

If anyone needs a symbol of Thatcherite Britain 1984, it is those two deductions being made on the day of the so-called uprating.

Ministers rage at the intervention of the Churches in this deeply embittered industrial dispute. They do not realise that bishops enter industrial disputes not lightly, but only when they believe that deep moral issues are at stake. The provision of adequate food, fuel and housing for children and their mothers is one such issue. It is an imperative which should never be overridden in any civilised society.

Children have already died in this dispute, scraping for fuel in desperation. Before it is too late, the Government should reconsider what they are doing. For reasons of morality and humanity, we ask the Government to withdraw the order.

3.54 pm

The Secretary of State for Social Services (Mr. Norman Fowler): I beg to move, To leave out from "House" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof,

're-affirms the policy established by the Social Security (No. 2) Act 1980 that those on strike should be expected to contribute to the cost of maintaining their families; notes that, consequent on the general uprating on social security benefits, all but a tiny minority of strikers receiving supplementary benefit are being paid the same or more benefit, not less; acknowledges that the Government have as in previous years followed the requirements of the Act in uprating the "specified sum" to be deducted from benefit payable for strikers' dependants; acknowledges that the National Coal Board has negotiated constructively in reaching a

settlement with the National Assocation of Colliery Overmen, Deputies and Shotfirers on the central issues of the dispute; and condemns the failure of the National Union of Mineworkers either to meet its obligations to its members and their families or to move from its total unreasonable position in negotiations.'.

The House will have heard and noted what the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) said. His charge is that we have stifled debate, yet at no stage did he condemn, as his hon. Friend the Member for Warley, East (Mr. Faulds) condemned, the action that we saw on Wednesday night.

Mr. Faulds: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Fowler: In a minute. The hon. Member for Oldham, West talked about spontaneous debate. Frankly, that is the best and biggest commentary upon the leadership of the Opposition Front Bench that I can think of.

Mr. Faulds: The right hon. Gentleman will recall that I passed him a note after the demonstration the other evening. Will he publish it in the Library, because in it I clearly spelt out my opinion of the Government and of his judgment?

Mr. Fowler: I am not sure that the nature of the hon. Gentleman's note lends itself to easy printing in any form. I am sure that he has ways of making his views known.

The central charge by the hon. Member for Oldham, West basically is that the Government are pursuing a direct campaign against the families of those on strike. Let me put two facts to the House.

First, the latest figures show that so far in this dispute £23 million has been paid out to the families of striking miners. Benefit is being paid at the rate of almost £¾ million a week. In addition, every recipient of supplementary benefit has rent and rates paid in full, through housing benefit, and the financial total is added to by the payment of child benefit.

Against that background, I say that it is frankly ludicrous to charge that the Government are pursuing a vindictive campaign against strikers' families. One would be hard pressed to find another country in the world where in such circumstances more is done by the Government.

I would find all those words of the hon. Gentleman a deal more convincing if at any stage in the dispute the National Union of Mineworkers had paid anything to its members' families at all. It has paid for pickets, but not for families.

The second fact is that we are uprating the specified sum at the same time as we are uprating other social security benefits, including supplementary benefit. The result of that is not a loss of £1 for families. The result is that the vast majority of families—85 per cent.—receive more in benefit, not less.

The latest figures show that on 6 November 35,000 strikers' families were receiving supplementary benefit. That figure has almost certainly now been reduced as a result of the accelerating return to work. On the basis of those figures, 30,000 families will be receiving more benefit this week than they did last week. All but a handful of the remainder will receive exactly the same as last week. We estimate that perhaps 100 or 200 families will be subject to a maximum weekly loss of 55p. That means that 85 per cent. of families will gain cash, and that no families will lose £1. Again I say that it is frankly ludicrous to charge that we are attacking strikers' families when we are, in fact, in the vast majority of cases, paying them more this week than last week.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): Will the Secretary of State explain to the House and to those listening to the debate exactly who will be worse off? Is it not a fact that a striking miner who is a widower or divorced—in other words, who does not have a wife, but has one or two children to bring up on his own—is the person about whom the Secretary of State is talking? Is he not talking about those with the least amount of money, who are hit hardest by the cuts?

Mr. Fowler: About 85 per cent. of families will receive more cash, and the majority of the remainder will receive the same amount. The hon. Gentleman is talking about the man whose dependent wife has left home. To that extent the hon. Gentleman is correct, but he will concede that the only way in which such a family will be put in such a position is in relation to mortgage interest, which is already being paid, and about which there is controversy.

The heart of this debate is where responsibility lies for a striker and his family. The case of the hon. Member for Oldham, West is simple. He believes that responsibility rests with the public; in other words, that the public should bear the losses that are being made, should suffer any consequences of the strike and should bear the total cost of support during the strike. He says that he has the NUM's support for that view.

Millions throughout the country — many of them earning far less than the miners—do not see why the public should shoulder all the responsibilities. They do not understand the action of a union which calls its members out on strike without a ballot and in damaging month after damaging month makes no contribution to their support. The public reject the case that the union has no responsibility, but that is basically the case that has been put by the hon. Member for Oldham, West from the Opposition Front Bench.

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): Will the right hon. Gentleman withdraw that statement? The money that is deemed to be paid is taken from money that is paid to the wives and children of strikers. The state is not being asked to support the strikers. That has never been the position and it was not the position during the periods when I was on strike. I ask the right hon. Gentleman to withdraw his statement.

Mr. Fowler: There is no question of withdrawing my statement. I have stated accurately the precise position. The hon. Gentleman is wrong about deemed strike pay. If he reads the 1980 legislation he will learn that the deduction—it was originally £12 and there is now the uprating — is made from the supplementary benefit which is paid. There is nothing to withdraw. I have stated the position.

Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the ravings that we hear are sickening to those of us who read that £20,000 or more changes hands via suitcases and is used to finance thugs on the picket line, when that money could be used to help families which are suffering deprivation? Is it more important to finance those who are breaking the law or those for whom this fictitious debate has been initiated?

Mr. Fowler: I think that many will agree with the argument that my hon. Friend has advanced. He is right to say that there is a responsibility upon the union in these circumstances. There are many trade unionists who reject the case that has been made by the hon. Member for Oldham, West.

Let us go back to the time when the Bill which introduced the deduction was passing through Committee. The former Member for Wood Green, Mr. Reg Race, was a member of the Committee. If we agree on little else, I think it will be common ground that Mr. Race is not one of those members of the Labour party who is likely to slip away in the night to join the Social Democratic party. During the debates in Committee Mr. Race was asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Lincoln (Mr. Carlisle) whether he thought that the unions had no responsibility to their members during any strike. Mr. Race replied:

"Of course, I do . . . I shall tell the hon. Gentleman my experience of strike pay. My union—the National Union of Public Employees—pays £5 a week in strike pay. That is in the rule book. Everyone on official strike gets £5 a week from the union."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 12 May 1980; c. 1007-1008.]

Labour Members talk about their compassion and concern for the families of striking miners, but their remarks should have been addressed first to the NUM many months ago. Instead of trying to play conjuring tricks with foreign bank accounts, the union could have been using its funds to help its members and their families.

Mr. Joseph Ashton (Bassetlaw): Will the Secretary of State give some advice to the wives who are suffering? Is he aware that they do not have a vote within the National Union of Mineworkers? What advice will he give to a wife who begs her husband to go back to work and he refuses to take that advice? Why should she still suffer a loss of £16?

Mr. Fowler: The operation of the deduction has been clear from the beginning of the dispute. There has been no change in the rules and regulations governing it. Every member of the NUM knew what his position would be when he went into the dispute.

I deal now with the original issue which led to the debate, which is the uprating of the "specified sum" defined in the Social Security (No. 2) Act 1980. The "specified sum" is the amount that is deducted from supplementary benefit that is payable to strikers' dependants. The deduction was introduced in 1980 to fulfil a commitment in the manifesto on which the Government were elected in 1979. It was introduced to establish a fairer balance between the responsibilities of the state and the individual in caring for his dependants. We took the view that the responsibility should not simply pass to the state. The practice is set out in precise detail in the 1980 Act. The original "specified sum" of £12 was defined on the face of the Act, and the procedure by which that sum should be uprated is set out in explicit terms.

The Act requires that the "specified sum" should be uprated whenever there is a general uprating of social security benefits. It requires also that the "specified sum" should be uprated by the percentage that is used to uprate national insurance pensions and the resulting amount rounded to the nearest 50p. This year the relevant percentage is 5·1 per cent., and that produces a final figure of £16.

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): Is the Secretary of State aware that the relevant word is "strikers"? A group of workers who are not members of a trade union may feel strongly about an issue and go on strike. Other workers may be members of a trade union and notwithstanding an official recommendation not to go on strike may still decide to do so. Is it not clear that the Government's policy is to attack all strikers' families, whether they are official strikers, unofficial strikers, or even non-trade unionists? Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that that is precisely what the law says? Does he accept that the Government are against ordinary working people who go on strike because they cannot agree to accept what rotten employers are doing to them?

Mr. Fowler: With the exception of the last part of the hon. Gentleman's remarks, his intervention is based on total truth. The uprating concerns supplementary benefit and a deduction from supplementary benefit. I am glad that the hon. Gentleman acknowledges that. That is precisely what I have been trying to put to the House.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Fowler: No, I shall not give way again. The Government can vary the formula only by introducing orders which are subject to affirmative resolution by both Houses. I see no reason of principle or practice why this course should have been taken in this year. In 1982 there was an industrial dispute in the Health Service, which, like the miners' strike, lasted for many months. On that occasion the deduction was increased by £1·50 to £14·50 and there was no challenge to that policy from Labour Members. I cannot see what there is in the NUM's dispute which would lead to the Government's taking the quite exceptional step of changing the law to prevent the increase taking place.

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): In that case, I am slightly puzzled by the words in the Act. The Government put that power into the Act in order to vary the amount that they deduct. When did they write that in? Why will they not use that power now? If they will not use that power now, in what circumstances does the Secretary of State envisage using that power?

Mr. Fowler: Of course the Government have given themselves discretion in circumstances of this kind. I see absolutely no reason at this moment to change that position. Frankly, it is ridiculous to ask me to forecast the circumstances in which that would be done.

The procedure followed this year, as in previous years, is laid down in the statute. However much the hon. Member for Oldham, West seeks to deny it, the procedure takes place automatically, unless the law is changed. It takes place also whether or not I announce the change. All those points are well known to the hon. Gentleman

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr) *rose*——

Mr. Fowler: I shall not give way.

Under the Act, I am required to sign a declaratory order, which records what the "specified sum" defined by the Act is. The order is not a regulation and is not laid before the House. By convention a copy is placed in the Library of the House, and that was done last Wednesday. I make it clear to the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) that this order is not an Order in Council. It has nothing to do with the Privy Council and does not depend upon, and is not in any way an abuse of, the royal prerogative.

Then there comes the final and perhaps the strongest charge from the hon. Member for Oldham, West: that, in the words of the Opposition motion, the Government have sought to "stifle debate" on this issue. It almost beggars belief that, following the scenes on Wednesday night, the Opposition can solemnly table a motion accusing the Government of stifling debate. The fact is that, far from stifling debate, we gave, as the hon. Member for Oldham, West has conceded, more publicity to the announcement this year than on any previous occasion.

Mr. Heffer: Not the Government; we did.

Mr. Fowler: If the hon. Gentleman really believes—I put it in the classic phrase of the hon. Member for Oldham, West—that only a spontaneous demonstration can draw the public's attention to this matter, it says little for the hon. Member for Oldham, West, who is the Opposition spokesman on social security, and his powers.

We informed the House by answering a question asked by the principal Opposition spokesman on social services affairs, the hon. Member for Oldham West, and accompanied that answer with a notice to the press, which is the only time that has been done. That strikes me as a peculiar hole in a peculiar corner if one is seeking to smuggle out an announcement.

Surely the real question on stifling debate is for the Opposition Front Bench to answer. The House clearly recalls that on Wednesday night the Opposition asked specifically for a statement on this subject. I came to the House to make that statement, but I was prevented from giving any but a few words of it and the statement was torn in two.

Mr. Nellist: Does the Secretary of State agree that it was not my tearing up of one page of his statement but his actions during the past five days that will result in tearing up the lives of pensioners, the unemployed, single parents and especially the families of striking miners? The actions of his Government are much more vindictive and violent than the action which resulted in the right hon. Gentleman losing a bit of paper on Wednesday night.

Mr. Fowler: I shall leave the public to judge the case that I am putting and the case that the hon. Gentleman is putting.

Mr. Robin Cook (Livingston) *rose*——

Mr. Fowler: I shall not give way. I do not believe that there can have been a clearer or more blatant example of stifling debate than what we saw on Wednesday night, yet on this central issue the hon. Member for Oldham, West preferred to maintain a modest silence during his speech. Perhaps he did not notice his hon. Friends standing before the Table. Perhaps he did not notice the statement being torn up. Perhaps he simply preferred not to notice and that is what now passes for leadership on the Opposition Front Bench.

The statement has now been made. I shall leave the public to judge, and I am content to rest on the facts that I have set out. The supine indifference of the Opposition Front Bench to the tactics of Wednesday night exactly mirrors their disregard for the violence perpetrated outside the House. It demonstrates why the Labour party will never form a Government.

4.15 pm

Mr. Jack Ashley (Stoke-on-Trent, South): If the Government supporters believe the farrago of nonsense that we have just heard, they will believe anything. The Secretary of State has shown conclusively that he fails to understand some of the basic issues in this debate. I was amazed that the Secretary of State quoted what Reg Race said in Committee. I was amazed also that the right hon. Gentleman claimed that the Government are doing so much for strikers' families.

The Secretary of State said that he was content to allow the facts to speak for themselves. He omitted to mention one fact—that this debate and the cheating of miners' families is taking up time at exactly the time when the Government are giving millions of pounds to the people involved with floating British Telecom. The Government are giving no less than £67 million to encourage people to buy British Telecom shares. The income of directors is soaring. The Government are giving £4 million to stockbrokers. It is ludicrous to take these few pounds from miners' families when the Government are giving those sums.

When the Secretary of State says that the families are getting more he is insulting the intelligence of the House of Commons. We know that they are getting more in cash, but their real incomes are falling. That is why the Secretary of State is misleading the House. It is real incomes that matter and are relevant, and it is real incomes that are suffering. The Government are guilty of mauling the incomes of miners' families during this important strike.

The Government are dividing the nation with this measure. They are indulging in strike breaking. The Government had the foresight in 1980 to bring forward the Social Security (No. 2) Bill, and now they are smashing a union and bringing up the heavy artillery. The Government, in a most cowardly fashion, are trying to smash the NUM. They are not hitting the union or the miners, they are hitting the wives and children. Could anything be more cowardly than that?

The Secretary of State has put forward a number of absurd excuses. Previously, he has said that strikes are the first resort. The fact that the miners refused to strike on two occasions shows that that is not so.

The Secretary of State was saying that at the heart of the debate was the fact that trade unionists should accept responsibility for their strikes. That showed that he does not understand the position. When he quoted Reg Race saying that NUPE paid £5 to its members, the Secretary of State doubly misunderstood. When Reg Race spoke in Committee, he was speaking only of NUPE paying £5. When an industrial union such as the NUM calls a strike, nearly everyone goes on strike. If the NUM were to pay strike pay it would be quickly bankrupt. The Secretary of State shakes his head, but he knows that that is right.

The Government's aim is to bankrupt the NUM. The Secretary of State will not say that, because he speaks in coded language. He says that he is prepared to accept trade unionism, but instead of using coded language the Government should have the courage of their conviction and clearly explain that they are trying to smash the trade unions. This attempt to smash the NUM exposes the hollowness of the Government's stance. When they say that they support the right of people to withdraw their labour, they mean that they support that right provided that the strike is short and ineffective, and provided that the strikers lose. When there is a tough, difficult strike, such as the miners' strike, the Government are prepared to play dirty.

[Mr. Jack Ashley]

In totalitarian countries, Governments say that they are prepared to support the right of free speech, provided that people do not speak too freely. This Government are prepared to support trade unionism provided that the trade unions stay on their knees and are prepared to fight a battle and damage the economy.

I believe that two consequences will follow from this measure. The first is that by hitting miners' wives and children the Secretary of State will strengthen rather than weaken miners' resolve. Miners will not be blackmailed. Last week, Lord Stockton said that they were the men who defeated the Kaiser and Hitler. He was right. The miners are brave men and brave men cannot be blackmailed. Blackmail will fail. It will be counter-productive. The Secretary of State is making the dispute even worse.

The whole of the trade union movement is becoming deeply embittered by the Secretary of State's cowardly action; that corrosive bitterness will gradually seep into industrial relations, and when it does British industry and industrial relations will be damaged. The whole of Great Britain will be damaged by this mean and cowardly measure.

I believe that Ministers will rue the day that they decided to give millions to stockbrokers through British Telecom and snatch pennies from miners' wives and children. This measure is disgraceful, divisive and destructive.

4.24 pm

Mrs. Jill Knight (Birmingham, Edgbaston): There is an air of unreality and faked outrage about the debate. Listeners with no knowledge of the background — *[Interruption.]* Hon. Members can shout themselves hoarse, but I am going to be heard. Listeners to the debate might well go away believing that the Government had introduced a completely new and unexpected measure and one which would universally cut the amounts of money payable to striking miners for their children. All that is utter poppycock. There is nothing new about what has happened. Every year since 1980, as regular as clockwork, the "specified sum" — to use the jargon of the Social Security (No. 2) Act 1980— *[Interruption.]* I can shout louder than Opposition Members, I promise them that.

To put the matter into words which even the Opposition can understand, when benefits are uprated, which happens every year so that the poorest and most needy among us can be helped to meet the extra costs of inflation and improve their position, the "specified sum" is increased also.

It seems fair that if the unions call their members out on strike that they must pay for the privilege.

Mr. Nellist *rose*——

Mr. Stan Crowther (Rotherham) *rose*——

Mrs. Knight: I shall give way to the hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. Crowther).

Mr. Crowther: As the High Court, rightly or wrongly, has decided that the miners' strike is unofficial, it would clearly be unlawful for the union to pay strike pay. It would clearly be in contempt of court. Is the hon. lady asking the NUM to break the law by paying strike pay to its members when the strike has been said to be unofficial?

Mrs. Knight: It is remarkable that the hon. Gentleman can speak so clearly with his tongue so firmly in his cheek. As the NUM has been breaking the law since day one of the strike, we can dismiss that point.

It seems fair to me that every year when benefits are uprated, the "specified sum" should be increased. It cannot be fair that taxpayers should pay more when men are called out on strike by their union. Every year, as benefits go up in line with inflation, the sum deemed to be contributed by the unions goes up also.

To regard this measure, as apparently some hon. Members do, as something entirely new shows that Opposition Members have never considered what happened formerly. That justifies the suspicion that they do not keep abreast of legislation, have forgotten it, or do not bother to check their facts before coming to the House.

As for being a completely unexpected move, I suggest that Opposition Members study what has happened each year since 1980. In 1980 the disregard was £12; in 1981 it was £13; and in 1982 it was £14·50. It is funny, but we do not remember any violent demonstrations, tearing up of statements or seizing of the Mace when the disregard went up by £1·50. *[Interruption.]* Opposition Members are on thin ground. They say that this measure is an exception, but there is nothing new about it. The House was not even sitting when the disregard was increased by £1·50. We could not have had a debate on it in any case.

I shall return to the record, but it is not surprising that hon. Members do not like to listen to these figures. In 1983 the figure was £15, and in 1984 it is £16. There is no surprise there and nothing unexpected to anyone who has looked at the record. What has happened this year is exactly in accordance with the formula set out in the legislation, but apparently Opposition Members have not understood it.

Mr. Rooker: I do not think that what the hon. Lady has just said is true. Can she tell us why the specified sum is based on an increase of 5·1 per cent., which is the increase in long-term benefit, whereas the benefit concerned is supplementary benefit, which today is going up by only 4·7 per cent.? The difference between 4·7 and 5·1 per cent. may not seem a large amount. Why have the Government chosen 5·1 per cent., which basically is the national insurance increase, instead of 4·7 per cent.? If they had taken the latter figure it would not, even with rounding up, have come to £16.

Mrs. Knight: I am afraid that the hon. Member is wrong. It has always been exactly the same.

Mr. Rooker: No.

Mrs. Knight: There is no change whatever here.

Mr. Rooker: Yes, there is.

Mrs. Knight: I am bound to say, in as polite a way as I can, that I resent the hon. Member suggesting that the figures are incorrect. He can check them in the Library or anywhere else. He will find that they are accurate and that what is happening now is precisely in accordance with the formula in the legislation.

The next possible reason for the simulated red rage might have been that miners' benefits are being cut. I listened to the speech of the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher). He amazed me with his inability to notice that 85 per cent. of miners are getting more. He concentrated only on the 100

or 200 who are getting less. I did not hear one syllable from the hon. Member about the overwhelming majority of miners who are receiving an increase as a result of the Government's action. For almost all the rest of the miners there is no change. Only a tiny minority—between 100 and 200—are getting less.

If the Opposition's rage is well founded, why do hon. Members not divert to that tiny minority some of the money that is being collected in tin boxes for the NUM? Those collections are being made, much to the rage of many decent citizens throughout the country. [HON. MEMBERS: "Shame."] Hon. Members may say that it is a shame——

Mr. Mark Hughes (City of Durham): When the hon. Lady says that it is wrong for citizens to give money to impoverished women and children, she should be ashamed of herself.

Mrs. Knight: May I inform the hon. Gentleman that I have had complaints from various charities, which are allowed to collect on only one day in the year, because their collections have been severely reduced. In areas where there are Left-wing councils, the miners' representatives are allowed to collect every week. If Labour Members are really concerned about the needs of 100 or 200 people who will be receiving 55p a week less as a result of the order, they have plenty of money available from the collections to divert to people in need.

The Opposition have found an extraordinary reason for seeking to destroy parliamentary democracy. NUM money is being used to pay people to beat up miners and to threaten working miners and their families. The union is paying people to man the picket lines and to attack people's homes. They are being paid to hurl missiles at the police. If the NUM can pay people to do all those things, why can it not pay something to the 100 or 200 people who will receive 55p a week less?

The right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley) said that the Government are trying to smash the unions. The NUM is effectively smashing itself. Nothing could be more effective in smashing the union than the actions of Arthur Scargill. Indeed, I think that he is now becoming well aware of it. I am very sorry for the ordinary, decent miners who are being terrorised into a strike which they do not want. They have had no ballot on the issue.

The Opposition motion speaks of "stifling debate". I do not think that to quote an hon. Member's words from the *Official Report* can be said to be an attack on that hon. Member. Indeed, if I had regarded it as an attack on him I would have written to him prior to the debate. But the demonstration last Wednesday was led by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer). When my right hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) took it into his head to wave the Mace about, he apologised the next day, at the first possible opportunity. On that very occasion the hon. Member for Walton, who led the riot last Wednesday, said:

> "It does no good to parliamentary democracy or to the future of parliamentary institutions in this country if scenes such as those which occurred last night are repeated in the future."

Who is repeating those scenes now?

Mr. Heffer: Nobody was waving the Mace about.

Mrs. Knight: The hon. Gentleman continued:

> "I trust that a firm decision will be taken to ensure that in future we do not have scenes of that kind as a result of the behaviour of right hon. and hon. Members on either side of the House."—[*Official Report*, 28 May 1976; Vol. 912, c. 770.]

The hon. Gentleman says one thing when his party is in power and another thing when it is not. If any party is stifling debate, it is not the party to which I have the honour to belong.

4.36 pm

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): I shall try to be as dispassionate as possible. I understand the feelings of right hon. and hon. Members who represent mining constituencies, but I should like to be as objective as I can and to put the alliance point of view. We have an amendment on the Order Paper and I shall refer to it during my brief speech.

The Government have right on their side when they say that the legislation has not changed since 1980. I do not think that anyone would argue about that. But I put it to the Secretary of State that the circumstances have changed in several respects.

The mining communities have been denied the right of a national ballot. I regret that, and it may put me in a different position from that of other Opposition Members. There have been scenes of violence, which again I regret. That may distance me from other Opposition Members. On the other hand, the Government imposed on the mining industry Mr. MacGregor, fresh from the steel industry where 88,000 jobs were lost. The Government gave signals to the trade union movement that they were antagonistic to the whole ethic of trade unionism. The Government also deliberately asserted, as part of their policy, that there should be high unemployment. Those actions by the Government have brought about a highly charged situation. It is against that background that we have to consider the Secretary of State's written answer.

I do not think that the provisions in section 6(2) of the Social Security (No. 2) Act 1980 are right, and the Government should look at them again. Since then the Government have introduced legislation that will lead to more sequestrations of trade union funds. The hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) referred to that aspect. The Government are blind if they do not understand that the situation has changed dramatically since 1980.

Mr. Rooker: I suggest to the hon. Gentleman that there is another reason why the Government should allow debate. No one has reminded the House that the Government stifled debate on clause 6 of the Social Security (No. 2) Bill in 1980. They guillotined the Bill half way through clause 1.

Mr. Kirkwood: I am grateful for that intervention, and the House is better informed for it. I was not a Member of the House at the time, but I know that the hon. Gentleman has a distinguished record in the House. That is an important point, which has not yet been made.

The Secretary of State is right that, if there had been a national ballot, today we would not have been discussing the whole issue of deemed strike pay and clawback. Large bodies of miners are on strike, but they desperately want to go back to work. They are looking to the Government for succour and support. The way that the Government introduced the order through a written answer on Wednesday was wrong.

[Mr. Kirkwood]

If the Secretary of State plays it by the book, he is right to say that a regulation under section 6(3) would need to be introduced. However, Governments with the majority enjoyed by this Government have discretion at just about any stage in the game. The right hon. Gentleman should have recognised that we are in a unique position. This is a unique dispute and we are at a unique time within it. It was wrong for the Secretary of State to come along with the order on Thursday, three or four days before the upratings were due. Whether it was calculated or not, he appeared to be maliciously and gratuitously disregarding the feelings of miners' families. Thus, he deserves the criticism that he is getting today. There is all the difference in the world between the three other annual upratings in September and this uprating, when the announcement was made only four days before the uprating was due.

The Secretary of State could have been doing two things. First, he could have been hiding. He could have been frit to come to the House, so he waited until the last moment. I do not believe that. I have given him the benefit of the doubt. The alternative is that he was considering not doing it. The House deserves an answer as to why this year, compared with the three previous years, there was a two months' difference, which is a significant difference. I hope that the Minister will address his mind to that and give us an answer when he winds up.

I was considerably heartened by the way in which the Minister of State handled the earlier incident of the withdrawal of some benefits to miners who had difficulty getting death grants. He skilfully managed to defuse that difficult and emotional situation just after he had assumed office. I took great heart from that. However, why was such an approach not extended to the order?

With regard to costs, as far as I can make out, only about 36,000 families are involved. Even if they all get £1, that is a very small sum of money in regard to the costs of the strike as a whole. I should like to question the formula in section 6(2) of the 1980 Act. The Minister will know, because he has done the sums, that 5·1 per cent. triggers the extra 50 per cent. and takes the figure up to £1. If the figure had been 4·99 per cent., the increase would have been 50p. There is a substantial difference because of the change. It means that there is now a cut of about 6·7 per cent. in miners' benefits. We can all argue about whether it is more money in real terms, but the figure of 6·7 per cent., which the change from £15 to £16 involves, is unfair and arbitrary. We have said in our reasoned amendment that we think that an element of compromise should have been involved.

Mr. Newton: I should like to make the position absolutely clear. It is in no sense an arbitrary figure. This is also in answer to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker). It is defined as the general uprating percentage—the percentage that operates for retirement pensions. That is what is written into the law, and that is why the figure was 5·1 per cent.

Mr. Kirkwood: I accept what the Minister says, but I am arguing that he had the discretion and should have been big enough and dispassionate enough to look at the matter and give us a compromise that at least would have let the Government come to the House and say, "We understand that there are problems. The law has been in effect since 1980, but we are prepared to make concessions." The effect is that the Government are playing straight into the hands of the hard-line members of the NUM executive.

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe): Will the hon. Gentleman enlighten the House as to the precise meaning of the phrase "Standard Sum Deduction" in the alliance amendment?

Mr. Kirkwood: I do not want to go into the detail of that. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] The purpose of the amendment is clear. We are trying to get a compromise. I am happy to face the fact that it is a compromise. The mechanics of working out the compromise are less important than the principle involved.

The effect of everything that the Government have done is simply to play into the hands of the hard-line members of the NUM executive, and is against the interests of miners on strike who find it impossible to put behind them the traditions in the mining communities, which have been going on for years, and cross the picket lines. They find it almost impossible to be seen to support a Government with whom they have no connection or sympathies. They also find it difficult because of the equivocal position taken by the official Opposition in the dispute. More than anything else, it is impossible for them to face the Government's actions when they take such decisions in the way that they have.

The change is unnecessary, unfair, ill-timed and naive. I hope that the Government will consider changing their mind.

4.46 pm

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe): When this matter first came to the attention of the House on Wednesday last week, the declaratory order that gave rise to this debate was described by the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) and the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) as almost without precedent. Of course, they got that completely wrong, as we now know, although the hon. Member for Oldham, West has yet to withdraw what he said last Wednesday. There is nothing especially unusual about the fact that they got it completely wrong, nor, normally, would it be of any significance, but it is significant in this instance. It is significant for this reason. As my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Mrs. Knight) said, orders precisely similar to the order that is presently being discussed were made in each year since the 1980 Act was put on the statute book.

The hon. Member for Oldham, West pays close attention to these matters. If there had been anything objectionable about the uprating process, the hon. Gentleman would have been very familiar with the sort of order that is under discussion. He would have known precisely the form that it takes. Had there been any question of it being objectionable, he and his colleagues would have raised objections to it. Perhaps the most telling sign that the indignation on Opposition Benches is bogus and synthetic is the fact that in none of those previous years did the uprating process evoke the slightest protest from the Opposition.

It is suggested that the position is somehow different this year because we are in the middle of a strike. Is it suggested by Opposition Members that whenever a strike is in progress at the time when the uprating takes effect,

the uprating should be suspended? That is demonstrably absurd. The purpose of section 6 of the 1980 Act is to make deductions from the supplementary benefit that would otherwise be payable to strikers' dependants. The whole purpose is that the burden of supporting those dependants should be shared between the trade union concerned and the taxpayer. It is ridiculous to suggest that whenever a strike is in progress, the uprating should be cancelled in some way.

Is it suggested by Opposition Members that the cancellation or suspension should not take place during every strike, but should take place this year because there is something about this strike that is particularly meritorious? If that is their view, it behoves them to tell us wherein they see the special merit of the strike. Is it especially meritorious because it is taking place without a ballot, in breach of the union rule book? Is it especially meritorious because, wherever a ballot has taken place, those balloted have voted in favour of continuing to work? Does its special merit lie in the fact that violence has attended it from the outset? Or do they simply think it meritorious because of their special affection for Mr. Scargill and Mr. McGahey, who have led it? It would be interesting to know the views of the Leader of the Opposition on that question.

We must not lose sight of the realities of the matter. We are discussing the extent to which the taxpayer should contribute to the support of the dependants of those on strike. We are discussing the amount which people — and many of my constituents earn a good deal less than the wage available to every coal miner—should contribute to the dependants of the strikers. We are discussing the extent to which those miners who are currently working should contribute to the dependants of those who hurl abuse at them on the picket line and threaten them with violence. Perhaps we are even discussing the extent to which Mr. Michael Fletcher should contribute to the dependants of those who attacked him or Mr. Stuart Spencer to the dependants of those who burnt his house. That is what we are really discussing today, and the House should keep such matters in the forefront of its mind.

Thus far, I have addressed my remarks to the official Opposition. I shall now consider the views of the alliance, whose spokesman is unable to explain the very term in the alliance amendment. Last Thursday the House was treated to a characteristic exhibition on the part of the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen). I am sorry that the right hon. Gentleman is not here. I informed him that I intended to make some observations about his remarks. The House has become accustomed to the fact that the right hon. Gentleman characteristically makes feverish attempts to strike out a position which is different from that of the Government and that of the official Opposition. The House has seen his kind before. George Canning once said of Lord Brougham:

> "The hon. and learned Gentleman having in the course of his parliamentary life supported or proposed almost every species of innovation which could be practised on the constitution it was not very easy for ministers to do anything without seeming to borrow from him. Breakaway in what direction they would, whether to the right or to the left, it was all alike. 'Oh', said the hon. gentleman, 'I was there before you: you would not have thought of that if I had not given you a hint' . . . There was no noise astir for the good of mankind, in any part of the world, but he instantly claimed it for his thunder."

Lord Brougham was described elsewhere as "Mr. Facing-two-ways". We were given a demonstration of such behaviour on Thursday which was more vivid than we have seen for some while, when the right hon. Gentleman asked a question during Prime Minister's Question Time.

We know that the alliance Members are anxious to attack the Government and to distance themselves from the Opposition. They therefore do not say that the Government should continue with the automatic process of uprating, or on the other hand that the regulation should be used so that there would be no uprating. They recommend halving the difference. That is the characteristic alliance approach to such matters. They suggest that the figure should be not £1, but 50p. That suggestion illustrates particularly aptly the absurdities into which the alliance is led by the desire to strike a posture for the sake of striking a posture which is different from the attitude of the Government and that of the official Opposition.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Cromarty and Skye): This afternoon the Secretary of State said that he could see no argument in terms of either principle or practice for behaving in any other way. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that as such a bitter and damaging dispute is going on, there is at least an argument in terms of political pragmatism for taking action which will not drive people into the hands of the extremists within the NUM? Will not this action only add to the suspicion that that is what will happen?

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman believes that his 50p will achieve that objective. I suggest that the way in which that objective should be achieved is by the holding of a ballot by the NUM. The members of the NUM could then express their views on their future, and those who are at present having to share the burden of supporting the dependants of strikers — even after the Government's measures — would no longer have to shoulder that burden because, after the ballot, everyone would return to work.

4.55 pm

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): The people to whom the order applies know what is going on. The Government may try to mislead the House or themselves, but everyone who is on strike in the coalfields knows what the Government are doing. They are taking money from the families of striking miners to force them back to work.

People in the coalfields also know that the Government tried to do it without telling the House. *[Interruption.]* A written answer was put out in a press release last week, and everyone knows that if a number of hon. Members, including myself, had not stood before the Table there would have been no debate today. Everyone knows that perfectly well, because the Secretary of State said that he had no option, whereas section 6(3) of the 1980 Act, as my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) has mentioned, gives him the option of preparing and presenting regulations which would allow a variation.

No one who is on strike—and three-quarters of the miners in north Derbyshire are on strike—has any doubt that this is part of a long process of fraudulent attacks upon the striking miners.

Mr. Forth: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Benn: No, I am developing my argument.

[Mr. Benn]

One immediate example of the fraud is that on 6 November Mr. Justice Vinelott gave an order in court that would make it illegal for north Derbyshire NUM to pay any strike pay. The judge says to the union, "If you pay strike pay, we will jail your leaders." The Minister then produces an order which is based on a pretence that the union is paying strike pay. There is only one word for that: it is a fraud, perpetrated by the Government in combination with the court.

Mr. Forth: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Benn: No. The hon. Gentleman must listen to what is being said by the people on strike. The people on strike know very well that the argument about the closure of the pits on economic grounds is another fraud. Nuclear power has never received a penny of private investment. Nuclear power has never been profitable. No one has invested in it. Why? The answer is that it is subsidised to the hilt by the Government, to produce nuclear weapons. The argument about the pits being uneconomic is wholly false.

People in the coalfields know well that we get oil out of the North sea at $7 or $8 a barrel and sell it to the generating board at $28 a barrel. Every unit of electricity generated by North sea oil is 40 per cent. more expensive than that generated by coal. The argument that pits are uneconomic is fraudulent, and people know it.

In the past few days they have also learnt that the Secretary of State for Energy, who made a speech about Mr. Harold Macmillan's compassion, is also a fraud, because while he was drafting and preparing that speech he was party to an order which would take another £1 off striking miners' families. There is no doubt that they expected that because, from the beginning, the Government's case against the NUM has been fraudulent. There have been fraudulent arguments about the economics of the pits; there has been fraudulent presentation of the argument about Cortonwood, when the Government broke their word; there have been fraudulent promises about there being no compulsory redundancies, which even Mr. MacGregor has to renege on because that might bring him into trouble with NACODS all over again; there have been fraudulent bribes to go back when the money with which the Government are bribing miners to return to work before Christmas belongs to the striking miners—it is holiday pay which was earned last year and which has been witheld by the NCB.

There has also been intimidation of the miners by the police, under the instructions of the Home Secretary. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] Conservative Members who are laughing should go and see what is happening on the picket line. Labour Members who go out, as I do, on the picket lines every week see hundreds of police who are snatching people without any grounds for doing so. They are arresting women. I know of one woman who was arrested because she was alleged to have shouted something. She was released the next day, but when she was arrested the police left her three-month-old baby in a pram in a park. They did not notice that the baby had been left, despite her protestations. *[Interruption.]* I am not trying to persuade anyone. The Government's weakness and our great strength is that, even now, the Government have not the slightest idea what they have taken on. They have taken on a large number of very decent people who will not agree to see their fellow miners being destroyed by the MacGregor policy—as happened in the case of steel.

We also have the fraud of the magistrates' bail conditions under which peple are having their civil liberties taken away without any trial, by the use of bail conditions which have allegedly been approved by a judge. The result is that, I think, 6,000 pending trials have been deferred, and deferred for month after month.

Mr. Forth *rose*——

Mr. Benn: I shall not give way. I shall leave my comments about the disgraceful way in which Parliament has avoided discussing the miners' strike to the end of my speech. There has been fraudulent use of bail conditions by magistrates, and then the Home Secretary said that striking miners might face life sentences for picketing offences. Everyone in the north Derbyshire coalfield knows——

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North) *rose*——

Mr. Benn: I shall not give way. The hon. Gentleman can try to catch the Chair's eye later.

Mr. Marlow: Disgraceful.

Mr. Benn: Everybody knows that judges are appointed by the Lord Chancellor, who is a Cabinet colleague of the Home Secretary, and that when the Home Secretary makes a statement about his expecting life sentences for picketing offences that is as clear, as has ever happened in my life, as an instruction from the Executive to the judiciary.

We also have the fraudulent figures that are published. We had another set today from the Secretary of State for Energy. I shall go over what I was able to mention only briefly in my supplementary question. In June the Prime Minister said that 50,000 miners were working. On 3 July she said that 60,000 were working, and on 25 October she said that 70,000 were working. Even the NCB claims that only 62,000 members of the NUM are working. We are witnessing a fraudulent presentation of figures by Ministers, which are taken up by the BBC and ITN—the strike-breakers' bulletin—trying to get miners to go back to work.

Throughout the whole of the dispute there have been only two debates on the miners' strike until today, which is only a half-day debate. One, in June, was on policing, and the other was at the end of July. I have tried several times to get an emergency debate. Mr. Speaker is bound by the Standing Orders and has never been able to find that the miners' strike merited interference with the normal course of business.

I am not here to criticise Mr. Speaker's judgment. I am here to criticise Parliament for failing to give due regard to the terrible hardship and anxiety of those who have devoted their lives to the mining industry, upon whom the future of that industry depends, and against whom the Government have launched a "civil war". Mr. Brian Walden, a former hon. Member, said so in *The Standard* last Tuesday. What we are witnessing on the picket lines is a war by the Government against the miners, the NUM, the trade union movement, civil liberties and the elementary decencies of civilised life. Parliament has hardly found time to discuss it apart from at Question Time.

I want to be brief and should like to finish with a warning to Ministers. They do not know what they are up

against. They believe, like Ian Smith in Rhodesia, that it is just a Mr. Mugabe and a few troublemakers. They have no idea that miners support Mr. Arthur Scargill because, for five years, Arthur Scargill has warned the miners that when the Government were ready they would try to close pits and destroy the NUM. Arthur Scargill is supported by the overwhelming majority of miners because he has proved to be right and what the Government have said from the beginning has been proved to be false, fraudulent and dishonest. That is why the Government will not succeed.

I do not know—how can one?—whether the violence that has been forced upon the miners by the circumstances, for so it has, will get worse. I am torn as to whether I should predict, as did one of my hon. Friends today, that this could become a Northern Ireland situation—if it has not already done so. However, responsibility rests entirely with the Cabinet, which appointed MacGregor and closed pits. Every single incident that has occurred in the coalfields since 6 March when the strike began is the responsibility of the Government.

I tell Conservative Members who came in on the great monetarist wave of enthusiasm that the Tory party has survived in the past by capitulating in time and by giving way to legitimate demands, perhaps later to regroup and try to recover the ground. We now have the first Prime Minister since a head of state known as Charles I who believes that there is some divine right in what he then did and she now does. I tell the House, to which I was elected 34 years ago on Friday, that unless Parliament gives justice to the British people there will be no peace in Britain. Even if the Prime Minister is right and with troops, the help of the BBC and fraudulent figures she can drive starving miners back to work—[HON MEMBERS: "Starving?"]—some have been driven back under those pressures—the Government's problems are only just beginning.

A higher level of political understanding has come in during the past nine months than at any time during my life, and I was born in the year before the general strike. People now understand the true nature of the Tory party—they sell off British Telecom to make quick profits for their friends who financed their victory and take money off the wives of striking miners. People understand the role of the police, the DHSS, magistrates, courts and the media in trying to drive the miners back to where they were years ago—on their knees—before what in time may again be private owners, for the Government will sell off the high productivity pits if they can get away with it.

I warn the House—I do so because I believe that to be one of the functions of an elected Member—that unless justice is given this battle will continue, with increasing bitterness and horror. The responsibility rests with those who began it with the pit closure programme. Today's mean and vicious little order, which we would not have debated without the action taken by some hon. Members, is only one of many attacks on the living standards of the finest group of workers in Britain—those who labour underground to give the country access to coal, our one natural resource in plenty, and upon which our future will be founded. The Government should be ashamed of themselves. If not, they will be defeated by the action which they have themselves provoked.

5.10 pm

Mr. Conal Gregory (York): I overwhelmingly reject the Socialist Opposition's motion. Like Conservative Members, I am sure that many thinking people in Britain today will reassert their faith in free and fair trade unions; that means one's freedom to join or not to join a trade union. All unions must be democratic, and that is patently and obviously not the case with the union now under discussion. Trade unions should lead their members democratically, and that means a secret and fair ballot, which has been denied to NUM members.

A trade union should primarily safeguard its members. Does the NUM look first and foremost after the welfare of its members? No; it is more interested in evading its legal and moral duties to its members and to the welfare of miners' families. It seeks aid from Moscow, whose satellite states deny free unions, and support from revolutionary Libya.

The NUM would rather purchase a number of prestige cars with personalised number plates than give welfare to its own members. Undoubtedly the care from the union to the mining community does not come from the NUM leadership. The extreme Left is keener on pursuing its political future than on a negotiated settlement. How can the NCB negotiate with an unrepresentative coterie which is constantly changing its ground on shifting sand?

Will the Opposition identify the financial source of violence—the violence that is seen so frequently on the picket line, the violence between miner and miner and the violence in the mining communities, all of which seeks to destroy the social fabric of mining societies?

On Saturday I met a number of families of striking Yorkshire miners, all of whom were sick and tired of this dispute. They want it to end. They are sure that the NUM leaders are motivated by political aims rather than by those of the industry. Those husbands and fathers are intimidated not to go back to work. One of the families to whom I spoke lives in the house nearest to a pit. I was asked why the NUM does not give support to its members through their subscriptions, which all NUM members have made over the years. The truth is that miners' leaders seek to subvert democracy, to undermine the police and the rule of law and to use the taxes taken from ordinary men and women in defence of an undemocratic strike. However, Comrade Scargill prefers to call it a dispute. He cannot use the word "strike"; otherwise he would have to call a ballot according to the NUM rule book.

As well as seeking to intimidate its own members, the NUM also intimidates other workers. The railmen in south Wales, Ravenscraig and north Nottinghamshire have been placed under severe pressure not to work, thereby contributing towards a £180 million loss on the freight side of BR. This nationalised industry has been drawn into a political strke against the wishes of that industry and the union's members and against the welfare of their families.

The role of the state is today multi-faceted. Part of its function is to ensure an adequate standard of living. That must go primarily to the unemployed. Those who are employed but seek to remove their labour in pursuit of a trade dispute must look to their own lobby, not to the general taxpayer.

This declaratory order will from today benefit 85 per cent. of families, including striking miners, through a supplementary benefit increase. Approximately 30,000 will gain, 6,000 will experience no change and a mere 100 to 200 will lose. Already, £23·3 million has been expended on supplementary benefit payments to striking miners' families. How do those who for years have contributed to taxes—those on old age pensions—feel about that?

[Mr. Conal Gregory]

The right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), who is more concerned with talking than about hearing the true arguments, referred to fraud. This fraud is with the NUM leadership. The essence of the NUM case is that, by adhering to the terms of one set of documents—"Plan for Coal", written more than a decade ago in circumstances very different from those of today—the present number of jobs can be secured indefinitely for all miners working in the industry and their children. The right hon. Gentleman misrepresents the plan in a number of respects, not least when he insists that it was substantially revised in 1977 to make jobs even more secure. No such revision took place. The plan was, and is, no simple charter of miners' rights.

Welfare must come first. This Government have shown that priority. The NUM refuses to accept its responsibility to its own members. I support the Prime Minister's amendment, and I hope that it receives overwhelming support in the Lobby.

Mr. Howard: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. During his speech the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) cast aspersions on the judges, who he said were appointed by the Lord Chancellor, a Cabinet colleague of the Home Secretary. In particular, he mentioned Mr. Justice Vinelott. First, as a matter of record, Mr. Justice Vinelott was appointed to the High Court bench in 1978 by Lord Elwyn-Jones, then a Cabinet colleague of the right hon. Member for Chesterfield. Secondly, is it not out of order for hon. Members to cast aspersions on the conduct of judges, and should not the right hon. Gentleman be asked to withdraw his observations?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Paul Dean): I listened carefully to what the right hon. Gentleman said. His language may well have been strong, but it was in order.

5.18 pm

Mr. Joseph Ashton (Bassetlaw): It seems that it is perfectly in order to cast aspersions on trade union leaders unless they are leaders of the union of the judges and those who specialise in the law.

The debate so far has not made it clear that this is a Government attack on women and children who are not among the 123,000 people still on strike. That is important, because without the support of wives, and the women's support groups in particular, for 38 long weeks, this strike would have collapsed many weeks ago.

As any hon. Member for a mining constituency knows, tremendous support has been given by wives who have chipped in money, run soup kitchens and held raffles, jumble sales and fund-raising events. There has been a tremendous community back-up for the striking miners, without which the strike would not have succeeded.

Mrs. Jill Knight *rose*——

Mr. Ashton: I shall not give way. The hon. Lady has had her turn, and many hon. Members still wish to speak.

Even if the miners' union had done what the Government said it should do and paid £15 a week strike pay, by now it would have had to pay about £18 million, and even the Government accept that it has only £7 million or £8 million in its coffers. It would have been impossible to pay strike pay, so how can it be deemed to be paying strike pay?

Many hon. Members have lived with the strike for the past 38 weeks—my telephone has been ringing from 8 am to about midnight seven days a week—and we know about the problems of hardship. The Government's attitude, through its civil servants in the DHSS, has been one of vicious vindictiveness, screwing down families by using every letter of the law to drive people back to work. When there is a dispute about a benefit claim, the answer from the local DHSS office is that the claimant should appeal, but appeals can take as long as 20 weeks to be heard. If the local office blatantly disregards the rules, and even if a Member of Parliament takes up the case, the answer is still to appeal.

Some of my constituents work in pits in Yorkshire, and some in Nottinghamshire. There have been great differences in adjudications in Yorkshire and in Nottinghamshire, although the cases are similar. In Nottinghamshire, apprentices have been classed as strikers, whereas the adjudicators in Yorkshire have said that apprentices were laid off through no fault of theirs and have granted them benefit. The same has happened with subcontractors whose pits have closed. The Yorkshire adjudicators said that they were not on strike, so they could receive unemployment benefit, but the Nottinghamshire adjudicators decided that they were on strike.

Mr. Michael Welsh (Doncaster, North): In Wales and the west the commissioner has ruled that subcontractors should receive benefits, yet other authorities will not accept the commissioner's ruling.

Mr. Ashton: My hon. Friend is right. There are hard-line adjudicators and soft-line adjudicators in different areas, and their decisions depend upon where the miners' families are unfortunate enough to live. In any dispute over claims, miners' families have been told to take their cases to the tribunal, but all the decisions have led to a toughening of the legislation. The Yorkshire adjudicator would not grant benefit to the subcontractors there, and eventually eight subcontractors at Maltby were forced back to work. There was picket line violence and riots because the Government forced them back to work.

A young couple came to see me recently. They have a 17-month-old baby who is brain damaged. The baby had to attend Great Ormond street hospital in London for tests, but the DHSS refused to pay the fares of the mother and father to London. The couple were told that they should appeal but, because the Government have removed the discretion of local DHSS offices in such cases, appeals take many weeks.

In the case of a family in my constituency who have a new-born baby, the toilet broke in half and the stench was coming up through the floor. They did not have the money to buy disinfectant. They had to tie a polythene bag round the hole in the toilet, and the DHSS would not give them a penny to get it repaired. We arranged for the local council—a Labour council—to do the repairs, but the family will have to pay for them when the husband returns to work.

The removal of £16 has been applied not only to wives but to girl friends. A young miner and his girl friend aged 18 were living together and the young woman became pregnant at the beginning of the strike. She is six months pregnant and has not put on an ounce of weight. She has bought no baby clothes. They are living on £6 a week in a flat next to a main road, they have no furniture and the

electricity has been disconnected. She is not even married to a miner, but because of the hard-hearted attitude of the DHSS, she will lose £16 a week. It was only after I intervened that she was classed as sick and received £25 sick pay.

Those who claim family income supplement have been asked to produce the pay slips of their husbands for the previous five weeks. They cannot do so, because the pit has been shut. There is no one at the pit to give them those pay slips, so their claims have been turned down. It is not the wife's fault that the pit is shut. She is not a member of the National Union of Mineworkers and does not have a vote in a ballot.

Mr. Forth: The hon. Gentleman cannot have it both ways. At the beginning of his speech he made great play with the support that wives have given to miners. He is now disclaiming that and trying to argue the opposite way. He will have to make up his mind.

Mr. Ashton: The Government's attitude is that the union should pay strike pay, but the decision on that rests, presumably, with the members of the union. The wives and kids are not members of the union, and they have no say in whether the union should pay strike pay. They are not allowed to go to the branch meetings and vote on it, yet the Government punish them. They have taken away £16 from wives who have no say in the running of the strike.

Two weeks ago, one of my constituents left hospital with a five-day-old baby. She went to the DHSS and asked for extra money to buy fuel. The DHSS refused her. The social services department of the county council—again Labour-controlled—gave the family £12 to buy coal. The pit manager, who for many weeks had turned a blind eye to families picking up cobbles from the pit yard, said to the family, "You will get no coal until you go back to work."

There has been tremendous hardship in my part of the country. Little kids have been digging coal out of embankments, not because they are part of the strike but because they want to get a few shillings for Christmas. There were riots in Grimethorpe, where 37 people were arrested for picking up worthless coal from the ground. It was worthless because the Coal Board decided that no one would buy such shale. For many years no one cared who took that coal from the tip, but as soon as the families of striking miners tried to take it, 37 of them were arrested.

The removal of the £16 is not an isolated occurrence. It is part of a systematic attempt by the Government to starve people back to work. There has also been much incompetence in the DHSS. It set up a strike centre in Chesterfield, but it has no proper facilities, computers or organisation. I have met people who received no benefit for as long as five or six weeks, and that includes families with as many as five children. They were desperate. The milkman would not leave them any milk, and there was no question but that the children were hungry. It was only when I kicked up a fuss that they found Mrs. Noy's file at the bottom of a pile. She received about £190 in benefit arrears.

In another case, I received a letter from the Minister asking what my constituent was complaining about because he had not even appealed. Of course he had appealed. The officials at the Chesterfield strike centre found his letter at the bottom of the pile.

Another constituent, Mr. Kelsey, became fed up with the strike and quit Harworth colliery after six weeks. It was a working pit, but he left and got a job as a plasterer in Peterborough. The plasterer's job fell through, so he returned home and claimed unemployment benefit. He claimed that his wife should not have £16 deducted because he had finished at the pit. He had received his holiday pay and his P45. The DHSS turned him down. They told him that he was on strike, so he said, "How come I'm on strike?" He was told that he could benefit from the strike because when it was over and the coal board gave back pay, he could receive some. It has never been known, in the history of mankind, for a boss to give back pay to someone who has left his employment. This hard-line attitude of the adjudicators, who said that the man had never appealed, and then found his file at the bottom of the pile, is very bad. The man is still appealing, and he lost his job in June.

This dispute has been one long round of harassment, and of a systematic, vindictive attitude of "starve them back to work". I am not attacking the local DHSS offices in our areas, who have been very good.

Mr. Barron: It is the adjudicators.

Mr. Ashton: My hon. Friend is right. The adjudicators have been acting under instructions to be as tough as possible.

Mr. Newton: First, the hon. Gentlman must know that Ministers are not in a position to issue instructions to the adjudication officers. Secondly, before he and his hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) get carried away too much further, I point out that the position on disqualification from unemployment benefit arises from the Labour Government's Social Security Act 1975. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."]

Mr. Ashton: Tory Members had better not shout too soon. That Act deals with people who stand to benefit out of a strike, and its provisions have been used in the past, but in this case the decision of the adjudicators was that a man who had quit his job could benefit because there was a pay claim involved in the strike. They claimed that when the man went back to work and the coal board handed out the 5 per cent., or whatever, pay increase, he might then receive backpay. However, the coal board itself said that there was no way that it would pay back-pay in his case. My constituent had received his cards, his holiday pay, his P45 and so on, but the adjudicators still ruled that he would benefit from the strike.

Attitudes such as this have ensured that 85 per cent. of those who came out on strike are still out on strike. Whatever the headlines in the papers, whatever Ministers say about 7,000 or 5,000 going back, in percentage terms, 85 per cent. of those who came out have not gone back. If anything has caused that, it is the hard-hearted attitude of those trying to force people back. The £16 change last week was a major error by the Government. People were beginning to go back to work, but their opinion was hardened by this change. They said that they would not have their noses rubbed in it and would not be forced out, and decided to stay out last week. The Government dropped a clanger with this £16, and I think that they are already regretting it.

Sir Kenneth Lewis (Stamford and Spalding): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it not extraordinary

[Sir Kenneth Lewis]

that we had a passionate demonstration late the other night, a passionate request for a statement and for this debate, passionate speeches from Labour Members about the subject, but after all that only 20 of them are here for the debate?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has made his point, but it is not a point of order for me.

5.32 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Mid-Worcestershire): I start by taking this opportunity to answer some of the points made by the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), who made a fraudulent speech—that is, one about fraud, as he said. He made several points upon which we could not question him because he felt unable to give way. First, he made the direct accusation that people who had been arrested were being held on bail for an unnaturally long time to keep them out of the action on the picket line. He and the House must know that the Government have provided more magistrates to expedite the hearing of cases of those arrested.

Another fraudulent point was the repeated accusation about the denial of freedom of speech. My hon. Friend the Member for Stamford and Spalding (Sir K. Lewis) has already made my point by saying that it was at the Opposition's request that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State was prepared to come to the House late at night to make a statement. The opportunity to make that statement was denied, and that outrageous behaviour not only denied my right hon. Friend freedom of speech, but denied right hon. and hon. Labour Members the freedom to question him.

Labour Members scored their usual own goal when they did that, because the publicity has not been for the merits or demerits of this case, but for their outrageous behaviour.

Mr. Heffer: The hon. Gentleman is wrong.

Mr. Forth: The next piece of fradulence perpetrated by the right hon. Member for Chesterfield was his ridiculous suggestion that the violence on the picket line is being caused by the police. I and my colleagues are still unsure why it is that when, in some places, there are several thousand pickets massing to persuade a handful of miners not to go to work, and thousands are armed, often with missiles and other implements, the police are expected not to intervene to protect the small minority of workers who want to go back to work.

Mrs. Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): I am interested in the hon. Gentleman's comments, particularly as a Labour councillor in my constituency, who was not even standing on the picket line, but was there as an observer of the pickets last Tuesday, was pulled off a wall by the police and dragged along the floor. His face was badly bruised, his nose was injured, and his wife, who went over to help him, was kicked in the stomach by the police. Will the hon. Gentleman condemn such behaviour equally? He is fond of condemning the pickets, but violence should be condemned wherever it arises.

Mr. Forth: Yes, I would unhesitatingly condemn any such incident as and when it occurred, but the hon. Lady must accept that that incident, if it happened, would not have occurred had there not been excessively large numbers of pickets which required a large police presence. This is the point which Conservative Members wish to emphasise over and over again. Nobody has any objection to the presence of six pickets seeking peacefully to persuade their colleagues not to go to work. That has always been accepted by Conservative Members. We defend the rights of individuals to withhold and withdraw their labour, and the right of other individuals peacefully to persuade others. However, we will always condemn activities such as those which we have had to witness, which have given rise to incidents such as that which the hon. Lady has described.

Mr. John Powley (Norwich, South): Does my hon. Friend agree that there is a laid down procedure for anybody who wishes to instigate complaints against the police force? That is laid down in statute and any member of the public can take advantage of it, and can even get legal aid to do so. Should there not also be a complaints procedure against the NUM and its intimidation, so that complaints about its members can be investigated as well?

Mr. Forth: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, because he is right. Whereas the public have the right to make complaints about the police, and have those complaints dealt with, I am not certain where those who have complaints against the activities that we have seen on the picket line can go to complain. There is not an appeals procedure within the NUM for its members to complain about their colleagues' activities, and I am sure that Labour Members will wish to put that right.

There is a problem behind this most interesting debate. Every Conservative Member defends the right of individuals to withhold their labour within the properly constituted context, and we have never sought to deny that. It is an absolute freedom which has always been guaranteed within our constitution and by this Government. However, we cannot support the concept of requiring the taxpayer to fund striking activity.

Many people would question why it is that they as taxpayers are being required to give support and succour to people who have withdrawn their labour. Many would ask what the role of trade unions is in this context. Trade unions can hold a ballot and decide to withhold labour, and trade unions are free, as they always have been, to raise and accumulate funds for the benefit of their members. If these funds are not to be used to help the legitimate ends of the strike, for what will they be used?

During today's debate we have heard repeated allegations from the Opposition that in no way could it be expected that the vast resources of the NUM should be used to help the NUM's own members who are in diffculty. Those allegations sit ill with the examples that we see of the NUM trawling the world for money wherever it can be found and of secret movements of funds through Irish banks to American banks in an attempt to avoid the law. How does the NUM see fit to take its members' money away from this country, where it could help its members who are in difficulty?

Mr. Nellist: Does the hon. Gentleman support his Government who, in easing exchange controls three or four years ago, allow £32 million—four times the total assets of the NUM—to leave the country every day and to trawl the world looking for higher profits on the basis of the super-exploitation of workers in Asia and Africa?

When the hon. Gentleman talks about money going round the world, why does he not also talk about the Prime Minister, her son, Oman and £300 million?

Mr. Forth: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, because I thought that he was amongst those who were constantly asking us to put our funds into under-developed countries. He cannot have it both ways. He cannot criticise Western capitalism for seeking to provide employment for people of the under-developed countries and then expect the contrary to apply. It is a perfect example of the doublethink and doublespeak that we have had to put up with throughout today's debate.

The hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) said that the Government were being provocative. He sought to imply that somehow the Government were taking a provocative and deliberate action at a particularly sensitive time. One of my colleagues asked whether this implied that what in any event had happened every year for the past four or five years and therefore was fully to have been anticipated should not have taken place this year simply because the miners were on strike. If that is the implication, it is an extremely dangerous precedent.

Bearing in mind that we are dealing not just with benefits for miners on strike, but with benefits for anyone who may withhold his labour, it is a dangerous and seductive argument to suggest that somehow the Government should not have taken this action, in deference to striking miners. That is a peculiar argument. It suggests that the Government should intervene in a process which has been followed for the past four or five years without argument and give special treatment to striking miners. That is an odd request for anyone to make in the current circumstances.

When we consider the hardship caused throughout society, not just to the strikers and their families, but to many other people who are in the process of losing their jobs because of the miners' strike, it sits ill with the Opposition to make accusations of the sort that they have attempted to make today and have failed to make stick with any credibility.

I should much prefer to see the Opposition coming forward with positive, credible and reasonable suggestions about how the Government should act in these cases, instead of making carping and stupid comments which will help no one and will be positively counter-productive. If they could move to a more positive and helpful attitude, the country would thank the Opposition for it.

5.45 pm

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): The hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Forth) talked about positive suggestions to resolve the current dispute in the coal mining industry. I am tempted to remind him that it is about jobs. To my certain knowledge the hon. Gentleman holds at least two jobs. Perhaps he should consider releasing one of them to someone who is without a job —[HON. MEMBERS: "Which two?"] I understand that the hon. Gentleman is also a Member of the European Assembly.

Mr. Forth: Wrong again.

Mr. Barron: Then perhaps we should have had this debate earlier in the year.

No matter what has been said by the Secretary of State and by many of his right hon. and hon. Friends today, no one can get away from the fact that because of the Government's decision the vast majority of miners' families receiving supplementary benefit will receive less in real terms this week than they did last week. Anyone who tries to hide from that is denying fact. The deemed payment rising from £15 to £16 cannot be seen as anything more than a callous attack on the wives and children of striking miners.

The increase is made under the Social Security (No. 2) Act 1980. That is one of the most despicable and pernicious pieces of legislation that even this Government have ever dared put through the House of Commons. It exists purposely to try to defeat strikes, but even more it is an attack on thousands of people. Government supporters echo their belief in the right of any worker to go on strike, and then they proceed to attack anyone daring to take strike action, and not just with this deemed payment provision.

Every week at my surgery I have bigger and bigger queues of people who are suffering under the supplementary benefits legislation and the other provisions of the 1980 Act. Only this week a constituent of mine with four very young children discovered that her washing machine had broken down. She applied for an urgent needs payment so that she could wash bedding and nappies for her family. She was told that as a consequence of the legislation passed in 1980 there was no urgent needs payment for the repair of a washing machine because her husband was on strike. If he had been in prison his wife would never have been at my surgery asking me to try to get her money from the DHSS.

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells): Did the hon. Gentleman ask his constituent whether her husband had inquired from the NUM if any of the money in the suitcases was available to repair the washing machine?

Mr. Barron: As I understand it, the suitcases are now in the hands of the judiciary, and I shall be dealing with that matter later.

This morning I received a letter from the local office of the DHSS. It is a great pity that the Secretary of State has left the Chamber, because I should like to have read it to him as well. It concerns a constituent of mine, a Mr. M., who works at Kiveton Park colliery. He is a diabetic. He has asked for nothing from the state for himself because up to 5 October 1984 he lived on his wife's earnings. He was then given £6 a week because his wife's earnings were not very big. He asked for some special dietary help to pay for the food that his diabetic condition made necessary. The letter reads:

"I am sorry that I am not able to be more helpful but I trust that this information will assist you in advising your constituent."

Dietary needs beyond a certain level are not met for people who are deemed to be on strike.

I repeat that I believe that the legislation passed by this House in 1980 is one of the most pernicious and filthy laws that could ever be passed by any Government.

Those are only two of dozens of people who are in need of help but cannot get it because they are involved or deemed to be involved in a trade union dispute.

Conservative Members say that this measure is economic and that the legislation has existed for four years. But let me go back to an article in *The Economist* in 1978 on a Conservative party policy group report on nationalised industries. Its author was the Secretary of

[Mr. Barron]

State for Transport—now a member of the Cabinet. The article talks of industrial disputes and how a Conservative Government would handle them and says:

"The group believes that the greatest deterrent to any strike would be 'to cut off the money supply to the strikers, and make the unions finance them'."

That Conservative party policy document was leaked to *The Economist* in 1978.

That is what the Government have been trying to do. They have been prepared to stop dietary allowances and unemployment benefits to retired miners who agreed before the strike to retire. They have been prepared to use it to take £15—now £16—a week off miners' wives and their families. They have also been prepared to stop the urgent needs allowance and many other things.

How can the NUM pay any money? Had it done so, the Minister knows that after a few weeks of the strike the union would have been bankrupt. But how can it pay that money now when its funds have been sequestrated by Britain's judges? How can the north Derbyshire area of the NUM pay any money after a judgment in the High Court on 6 November this year by Mr. Justice Vinelott that it cannot use its funds to finance the strike in any way? The Conservative party is baying about the need for the NUM to pay its members, and it smacks of a conspiracy.

The uprating will be seen by the nation as an attack on the wives and the families of miners who are on strike and on others whom the Conservative party says have a right to strike. Yet as soon as that right is asserted the Conservative party attacks them in one of the most terrible manners possible.

The Prime Minister's amendment says that the NCB has negotiated with NACODS and come to a good agreement. That was put in great doubt at Question Time today when compulsory redundancies became an area of disagreement. When compulsory redundancies were mentioned two months ago in the House there was no qualification as there was from the Secretary of State at the Dispatch Box today. It now looks as though part of the agreement with NACODS only a few weeks ago is dodgy.

The amendment condemns the NUM for its failure to meet its obligations to its members. If the union had met its obligations to its members it would have been bankrupt within two or three weeks. People who have lost limbs working for the NCB may be fighting in the High Court now. Money is needed for such people to fight for rightful compensation. To deny that would be irresponsible and the NUM must ensure that it has funds to fight on behalf of its members in such circumstances. If the NUM had become bankrupt after four weeks, would the Government be here today saying that the NUM should meet its obligations to miners' families?

The document leaked to *The Economist* in 1978 had other things to say about what the Conservative party proposed to do in government. The amendment talks about the intransigence of the NUM over the past nine months and the fact that it will not move on this strike. That is not true. The NUM has moved in relation to closures during the dispute. The Conservative party's policy group report on the nationalised industries, scribed by the Secretary of State for Transport, said:

"The group believes that the most likely battleground will be the coal industry."

The Labour party is often charged with using emotive language such as "battleground". The article continued

"They would like a Thatcher government to: *(a)* build up maximum coal stocks, particularly at the power stations; *(b)* make contingency plans for the import of coal; *(c)* encourage the recruitment of non-union lorry drivers by haulage companies to help move coal where necessary; *(d)* introduce dual coal/oil firing in all power stations as quickly as possible."

The last paragraph of the article says:

"There should be a large, mobile squad of police equipped and prepared to uphold the law against violent picketing. 'Good non-union drivers' should be recruited to cross picket lines with police protection."

What I have said today is the truth behind the miners' dispute. We have a chance to bring the matter up again later but it is important that the truth behind the dispute, behind the pernicious legislation put on the statute book by the Government in 1980, and behind the Government's action today in attacking the wives and children of miners, should be put firmly on record so that our children can say that they will never again have a Government in power who abuse their position as this Government are doing.

5.56 pm

Mr. Roger Sims (Chislehurst): It is sometimes assumed that my constituents are well-heeled citizens living in the leafy suburbs. Some of them are senior people in well-paid positions in commerce, industry and government, but a large number of them are perfectly normal, reasonable, moderate people, living on moderate salaries, with a range of jobs, and many of them are in receipt of small pensions. They are paying income tax, which is being spent by the Government in a wide variety of ways for which the House is responsible. Many millions of pounds are paid out to those who qualify for supplementary benefits. It is as well to remind ourselves that, since the miners' strike began, £23 million of taxpayers' money has been spent to pay supplementary benefit to strikers' families.

I and my constituents support the right of anybody to strike and to withdraw his labour, but I and my constituents think that it is entirely reasonable that when people do so the union should pay strike pay from its funds. My constituents support the law which assumes that when supplementary benefit is provided, an amount of strike pay has been paid. That applies in any industrial dispute, not simply the one that is the main topic of our discussion today.

In this dispute the NUM has chosen not to pay strike pay. We have not yet heard a word of justification as to why it has not spent a penny of its funds on strike pay. We know that the NUM has about £80 million in assets from which it could pay strike pay, but it did not pay right from the beginning. The court order has been mentioned, but if from the beginning the union had made it clear that it would pay strike pay and had put funds aside to meet those demands, the court would have acted differently in the circumstances, which in any case arose from the action of the miners' leaders. The court action was entirely avoidable.

I wonder why people at home and abroad are being gulled into sending food parcels to miners. Why are foreign Governments being invited to send money to so-called starving miners who have £80 million of assets available to them if they care to use them?

The NUM has been paying those who are willing to stand on the picket lines. We all know the result of that. We have seen nightly on television what has been happening on the picket lines. My understanding of a

picket is someone who is there peacefully to persuade others not to work. It does not need 6,000 pickets to prevent six people from going to work.

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that if there are only six pickets on a picket line they should be allowed to speak to the people who are going into work?

Mr. Sims: I certainly accept that if there are only six pickets it is reasonable that those seeking to go to work should be given the opportunity to hear what the pickets wish to say and to turn back or go in to work, as they wish. That is what pickets are supposed to do. It does not need 6,000 pickets to persuade half a dozen people not to go to work. The scenes that we have seen every day are not Tory scare stories. We have seen those scenes in the newspapers and on television every night. It is mob rule.

Perhaps the saddest feature of the past week is that the mob rule that we have seen on the picket lines has reached the Chamber. Perhaps the scenes that we saw here on Wednesday were not that surprising. After all, we know the attitude of the Militant Tendency to Parliament.

I note how few of those who sought to bring Parliament to a halt last week are present for the debate. A few of the same faces are here, but those who seem willing to pack the Floor to stop debate seem less willing to take part in a debate. Perhaps that demonstrates their contempt for Parliament.

I should like to have heard from the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) a denunciation of, or at least a dissociation from, the scenes in the Chamber on Wednesday. We have not heard that, so we must assume that, by acquiescence, the leadership of the official Opposition accepts what went on.

No doubt I shall be reminded of the so-called Mace incident. I was in the House at that time and I recall clearly that my right hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) took the earliest opportunity to apologise to Mr. Speaker and to the House for what he had done. I look forward to hearing a similar apology from the hon. Members who took part in Wednesday's demonstration, which did not merely interrupt Parliament, but brought our proceedings to a halt.

The pickets have been paid, but the union has not been paying its members who are on strike. References have been made to starving the miners back to work and to the wives and children of miners being deprived. Who is doing the starving? Who is doing the depriving? Is it the Department of Health and Social Security? [HON. MEMBERS: "Yes."] £23 million? Depriving?

Mr. Nellist: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Sims: No. The hon. Gentleman knows that it is the NUM which is doing the starving and the depriving.

Mr. Nellist: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Sims: No. I wish to draw my remarks to a close and to give my hon. Friends an opportunity to speak. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will have his opportunity. He does not usually miss it.

The Opposition motion asks, in effect, for £16 more to be paid to the family of every striker. No doubt we shall be told that politics is the language of priorities. I am a strong supporter of the Government, but I do not always see eye to eye with them. Indeed, I felt unable to support the Government on Thursday, when I abstained on the vote on cuts in the BBC external service, the British Council and overseas aid. Perhaps that shows where my priorities lie.

I will not be a party to asking my constituents to pay even more benefits to the families of striking miners. The strike is unnecessary and has been called by a union which has ample assets, but is unwilling to use them for its members.

6.5 pm

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): My hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) put the case exceedingly well and we are all glad that he had the opportunity to deploy that case.

When the Government introduced the 1980 Act, they were a mean and vicious Government and the longer that they have been in power, the more mean and vicious they have become. Ministers and their supporters are equally mean and vicious towards anyone who dares to go on strike.

I have heard Conservative Members say how much they favour the principle of working people withdrawing their labour, but they go on to say how much they also support money being taken from the wives and families of strikers, whether or not those workers are in a union—the Act says nothing about unions paying strike money.

Many workers who have never been members of a trade union have withdrawn their labour because they felt that there was nothing else that they could do. Under the Act, they are deemed to have paid £16 a week to their families, even though they may not have a penny. That means that wives and children are being acted against by this mean and vicious Government.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron), who was a miner before becoming an hon. Member, admirably put the case for the miners. When my right hon. Friend the Member for Salford, East (Mr. Orme), the Opposition spokesman on energy, and I were shop-floor workers, we were involved in many industrial disputes and we remember that under Labour Governments and even under the Macmillan Government it was recognised that although the striker never got a penny, his wife and family received the same benefits as anyone else in deprived circumstances. This vicious and mean Government brought in the legislation to deprive working people's families of those benefits. It is an absolute disgrace.

Conservative Members seem to be worried about the fact that I and some of my hon. Friends stood in front of the Mace last week. I make no apologies for that. It was not an act of violence. Conservative Members and newspapers which have dared to suggest that there was violence are lying. They are liars to suggest that there was violence. I remember violence in the House. I recall when a man who is now Secretary of State for Defence picked up the Mace, waved it round his head and began to charge at the Opposition Benches. That was a real act of violence. I am not surprised that he apologised the next day. So he should have done.

What we did was something that I saw Dame Irene Ward do. The hon. Lady walked from the Back Bench and stood in front of the Mace. She was thrown out of the House. She took that action because she felt so strongly about an issue.

What about the history of such action? F. E. Smith, —a predecessor of mine from Walton, where the people

[Mr. Eric S. Heffer]

have guts — and his Conservative opponents to the Government stopped Asquith from speaking for half an hour. We did nothing like that. It is a lie to suggest that we acted violently. What we did was to say to the Government that after their final act against the miners and their families, "enough is enough". For years we have had to tolerate this legislation. For years we have seen how it has operated against workers and their families. The time came when we decided that we had to make an extra demonstration. It was not just a question of discussion; we had to state where we stood and, if need be, accept the consequences of our action. None of us thought that the House would be suspended. We were prepared to be suspended ourselves. That is the truth and I put it on the record.

Mr. Fowler: Does the hon. Gentleman also defend his hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist) in tearing my statement from my hands and tearing it in half? Does he defend that?

Mr. Heffer: In the words of Barbara Castle on television the other day, I can say only, "Poor dear."

The truth is that the Government are determined to try to starve the miners back to work. They have intervened against the miners from the word go. My right hon. and hon. Friends have made valiant efforts to achieve a settlement round the table, but at each stage the Government have failed to support any attempt at a settlement. Instead, they have come out against any settlement and have done everything they can to stop it. That is the reality and the Government's last move is a deliberate attempt to drive the miners back to work.

I say to the right hon. Gentleman and his friends that the miners will not so easily go back to work. We should remember that Lord Stockton said in the House of Lords that we are talking about special people. These are working people who do a job that no Government Members, or most Opposition Members, would do. I should not want to go down into the bowels of the earth every day to earn a living. I have had to work on top of buildings, but that is a damned sight easier than working under the ground. Whatever the miners get they are entitled to it. Today they are being driven back, as they were in 1926 by a previous Tory Government who tried to break the power and influence of the miners because they are at the forefront of the working class. They are struggling for decent working conditions, decent wages and the maintenance of the trade union movement.

My hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) was 100 per cent. right when he said that the Government's strategy is to create a number of profitable areas in the minefields and to hand them over to private enterprise. That is the Government's strategy. That is what they are trying to do. They are doing that in other spheres.

We all deplore the fact that the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry is in hospital because of the IRA bombing, but he told us that once. He was told by his hon. Friends not to say it because it was not right, but the Government are endeavouring to do that.

The Government have waged the class war; our people have not. From the word go the Government, with their massive police presence, have waged the class war. What about the violence described by my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd)? I never hear people talking about the violence used by the police against ordinary people and against those who are not even involved in the dispute. Whether the Government like it or not, they will not be able to destroy the trade unions or the miners. They will not be able to destroy our working class solidarity because it is ours. We got it; we built all our achievements and advances on the basis of it. No matter how the Government try we shall win because history is on our side.

6.17 pm

Mr. John Powley (Norwich, South): Hon. Members may think that the fair green fields of Norwich and Norfolk are a long way from the minefields. So they are. However, my constituents have to accept the responsibilities for many of the actions in the mines and in the dispute, and they do not like the consequences.

I say this more in sorrow than with any other emotion, but the actions in the House last Wednesday will result in the Conservative party receiving public support. Those who are involved in the dispute will lose public support because the public does not like the type of action that we witnessed on Wednesday.

Whether it was right or wrong for the Secretary of State to come to the House to make a statement is not the concern of the majority. People are worried because Parliament was disrupted. People have an inherent dislike of such disruptive action. That is a fact of life, and the Opposition would do well to take note of it.

Much has been said about the rights of strikers. Something else goes with rights — responsibility. The two are synonymous. They always have been and always will be. We cannot get away from that. We all have rights, but we also have responsibilities. A miner has responsibilities to his family, and there is no doubt about that. He has to feed and clothe and also to provide accommodation for his family. Those are prime responsibilities. No miner worth his salt can absolve himself from those responsibilities. However, a miner has a right to strike. When a member of the National Union of Mineworkers exercises his right to go on strike, he must weigh his responsibilities and the consequences that will flow from his action of going on strike. No one should think that he can take that action and not have to accept the consequences and responsibilities that go with it. If a worker decides to go on strike——

Mrs. Clwyd *rose*——

Mr. Powley: No, I shall not give way. I tried to intervene during the speeches of a number of Labour Members and was denied the opportunity to do so. Time is limited and I shall not give way.

If a miner goes on strike, he must accept that he will receive a much lower income, if any income at all. He must know that his family will suffer and that it will not have the same standard of living that it enjoyed before he went on strike. If he chooses to go on strike, he cannot at the same time absolve himself from all his family responsibilities and expect someone else to pick up the tab.

Mr. Robert Litherland (Manchester, Central) *rose*——

Mr. Powley: No, I shall not give way.

Labour Members have talked about redundancies, but redundancy payments act as a cushion. That is a responsibility of the state, and one which it rightly accepts.

I am talking about someone who decides of his own free will to go on strike in furtherance of an industrial dispute, thereby denying himself the opportunities that would otherwise be his.

If a man decides to go on strike, that is his priority. In taking that decision, he decides that the income from his employment is not his priority. I do not accept that that is the right choice, but it is one that a striker makes. He is not coerced into making that decision. There has been intimidation, but generally no one will coerce a man into going on strike. That means that the decision is made of his own free will. He will have said to himself, "I prefer to go on strike than to maintain my family's standard of living. I prefer to go on strike than to feed and clothe my family and to continue to provide the members of my family with the benefits I have provided hitherto."

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North) *rose*——

Mr. Powley: I shall not give way.

A miner who decides to go on strike must not expect the state to prop up his family and provide all the benefits that he has provided for it. The provision of those benefits is the responsibility of the individual who chooses to take strike action and not that of the state. Some of my constituents have told me, "I choose to work and to devote my resources to providing for my family. I work hard and accept overtime when it is available. Why should I prop up those who, through their own choice, have decided to embark on an industrial dispute and, in consequence, not to support their families?" Many of my constituents find that action abhorrent to their way of thinking.

Mr. Cook *rose*——

Mr. Powley: No, I shall not give way. I explained that I would not give way, and I will not give way.

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman does not dare to give way.

Mr. Powley: It ill becomes anyone to say that I dare not do something. Those who know me know that I will do what I choose to do, irrespective of a dare. I shall not fall into the silly trap that Labour Members try to set.

Labour Members love to suggest that Conservative Members have not had the experience that they claim to have. They suggest that all Conservative Members attended public schools and were born with silver spoons in their mouths. I am sure that you know it all, Mr. Speaker. I have a little story to tell Labour Members. Some of us may have had rather more experience——

Mr. Nellist: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Surely the terms of the motion do not lend themselves to the telling of stories. Will you tell this person, the hon. Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Powley), to keep to the subject under discussion?

Mr. Speaker: I hope that the story of the hon. Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Powley) relates to the coal mining dispute.

Mr. Powley: It is related to the dispute, Mr. Speaker.

I was brought up in a working class family. My father was a shop steward for most of his life. It was his proud boast that he never needed to call his members out on strike in furtherance of an industrial dispute. That shows that the image that Labour Members present of Conservative Members is false.

I deplore the doublespeak that we have heard today and on so many other occasions. The cry goes up so often from Labour Members that they have sympathy for the striker, his family and his babies. However, they support industrial disputes that hit strikers' wives and their children and babies, the sick and the old. They do so time after time. Their actions and words amount to hypocrisy.

It is said that the Government have mounted a vicious attack on the miners. I was successful in the 1983 general election, and I admit that I was not successful in 1979. However, the Conservative party stated clearly during both elections—I supported it—that the unions should take an increasing share of responsibility for their actions. That was made abundantly clear during both elections. The Conservative party won the 1979 election and had a fairly comfortable majority in this place. It won the 1983 election and secured an overwhelming majority. It is clear that the Conservative party's policy is supported by the majority of the public. Indeed, some would say that the Government have not gone far enough. The general public support the policy that I outlined at the beginning of my speech. They believe that those who want to perpetrate certain actions should accept the consequences and responsibilities that go with them.

6.29 pm

Mr. Gordon Brown (Dunfermline, East): When the suffering of mothers and children is the issue, this debate has shown already that the order which has been produced before the House is not only unnecessary but vindictive, provocative and discriminatory. The disgrace and shame is obvious from the despicable manner of the order's presentation, only four days before its implementation. Under pressure, the Secretary of State has explained that the order is not automatic and was avoidable. The right hon. Gentleman has explained that although he issued an order, he could have issued regulations. If he felt that he would never issue regulations, why is the provision for regulations contained in the Social Security (No. 2) Act 1980? This Government have already done what no other Government have done in deducting money from the wives and children of miners. How much more hardship and suffering must they cause before they will even consider putting before the House regulations instead of an order?

Are the Government surprised at the frustration, anger and bitterness in mining communities, when they have published an order the effect of which is to deduct £1 from miners' families, and kept quiet, to the point of avoiding parliamentary answers, about the £750,000 they promised to pay Mr. Ian MacGregor's American firm as a bonus for his activities in Britain? When miners receive nothing from the Department of Health and Social Security, Ministers and other Conservative Members have argued that somehow the Government have the right to wash their hands of any responsibility for mothers and children and to pass the burden on to a trade union. The Government say that they should represent and cater for the needs of the nation, but that when it suits them, they should be able to take away the benefits that should be payable to some parts of the nation.

I remind Conservative Members that it was the Prime Minister who said that there was a safety net below which no one in this country should be allowed to fall. Indeed, the predecessor of the present Secretary of State for Social Services said:

[Mr. Gordon Brown]

"we will ensure that . . . the safety net below which none shall fall is maintained intact".—[*Official Report*, 15 April 1980; Vol. 982, c. 1033.]

The present Foreign Secretary, when Chancellor of the Exchequer, said:

"any civilised society should provide a safety net below which a poor person's standard of living should not fall."—[*Official Report*, 26 March 1980; Vol. 981, c. 1458.]

The present Chancellor of the Exchequer is reported as having said:

"We want a decent safety net of social security payments for the needy. We shall not change that."

What sort of safety net do we have when the Government have transferred the conduct of industrial relations from conciliation to the courts of law and the police cells and have transferred the responsibility for the relief of poverty from the social security office to the soup kitchen? What is the national minimum below which no one should fall? We know that the minimum daily allowance for one meal a day provided by the DHSS is £1.35. Yet a miner's wife is expected to live and meet all her household needs—food, heating and clothing—on only 92p a day, which is only two-thirds of that provision.

What is the poverty line above which all people are supposed to be? It is a measure of the Government's retribution against the strikers and their families that they do not just deduct £16 from the wives and children of miners, but give them £20 a week less than they pay to households of four where the father is in goal. The Government give miners' families £30 a week less than they give to a family where the father has walked out. The Government give a miner's family of four £40 a week less than if the breadwinner were unemployed instead of fighting for his job.

On top of that, during this strike, the Government have denied miners' families in my constituency and in other constituencies help with heating costs, the full rate of maternity allowance and even funeral costs, until the Minister was forced by public pressure to change his mind. Conservative Members should recall that even the Conservative Government of 1926 were so worried about the destitution that they had created in mining communities that they ordered the local authorities to break the law to alleviate at least some of the suffering that they had created. Now, in 1984, this Conservative Government are so concerned to create destitution and maximise suffering that, month by month—and almost week by week—new regulations, orders and instructions have been issued by the DHSS to make already impoverished families subject to even greater misery and destitution.

In March, when a child in a family of four from the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas) was run over and killed in a car accident, the Department of Health and Social Security denied help with the funeral costs and tried to force a pauper's funeral on that family. Only public pressure made the Minister change his mind and agree to do something he has not yet done—change the law.

In April, the Government tried, through the DHSS's adjudication officers, to prevent family income supplement being paid to the working wives of miners. Despite the fact that 16 tribunals have ruled against the Government, they are still opposing the case.

In May, the Government tried to rule against local authorities trying to relieve destitution in mining communities. Six months later, during which the Government have tried to prevent local authorities giving any help, they have had to admit that, in trying to delay the final appeal before the commissioner, they do not have sufficient legal evidence to back up their case.

In July, the Minister introduced new regulations to deduct from miners' social security benefits even the cost of soup or of logs paid for by charities and voluntary organisations.

Today, we have heard of the deduction of £1 from miners' families. What should have been a statement two months ago came as a written answer only last week.

At every point during this strike the Government have had a choice. When Ministers should have shown compassion to the wives and children of miners, they have chosen vindictive cuts. When they should have relieved suffering, they have increased it. When they should have prevented destitution, they have sought to worsen it. When they should have mitigated hardship, they have sought, for the narrowest of ideological reasons, to intensify it.

Mr. Patrick Thomson (Norwich, North): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Brown: I am just finishing.

The Government may win the vote tonight, but on this issue, as on many issues affecting the benefits and rights of ordinary people, they have lost all moral authority to govern.

6.37 pm

Mr. Roger King (Birmingham, Northfield): This dispute has now gone on for nearly eight months—eight months of lack of negotiation by the leader of the NUM. It is small wonder that after eight months of him and his gang not getting a successful outcome, the points made in this debate should be about the moral issue. This afternoon we have had paraded in front of us the moral issue of starving children, poor wives, lack of shoes, food and so on. Of course, after eight months of being on strike, miners are hardly likely to be at the height of affluence. This is a two-sided moral issue. The trade unions were set up to organise themselves to obtain better working conditions and wages and to take on recalcitrant employers who were determined to hold on to what they had. The trade unions rightly organised their finances so that they could support their members in all forms of industrial action. Eventually, over the decades, the country had had enough suffering.

In the 1970s there was the winter of discontent and all the industrial relations problems that were heaped upon us during the period of the previous Labour Government. The Comservative party platform was, "Yes, we want accountability for what people do and that accountability embraces the responsibility of trade unions when they take industrial action." We said that the trade unions should pay for or make a contribution to the issues on which they embarked. The Opposition have talked about the problems confronting 120,000 mineworkers, but what about our responsibilities towards the remaining 55 million people who have to pick up the bill for the NUM's bad judgment?

We have heard a lot about solidarity. What is meant by solidarity? What other support does the NUM have? Is it the solidarity of lorry drivers trundling coal to the power

stations? Is it the solidarity of the railwaymen who are continuing to deliver coal? Is it the solidarity of the power workers, when there has been not one power dispute since this action started and not one likely to happen? Is it like solidarity of the NUM, a growing number of whose members are going back to work day by day, and rightly so?

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): The Government have starved them back to work.

Mr. King: They may well have been starved back, but no one else has got them anything. Mr. Scargill has given them nothing but rhetoric, blunder and promises of money from Russia and Colonel Gaddafi, while he is bundling it out of the country to Ireland and America. The only money that Mr. Scargill promises is for those on the picket line. People can stand there and draw their picket money. What does Arthur Scargill say to those who are suffering genuine hardship? We have heard of a few of those. Nothing. He blames everything on the NCB and the Government.

Where has the money gone that has been collected in the streets? Who has audited it? Who has been accountable for it? We can hardly travel down a street without someone offering a bucket for us to drop our loose change into. What happens to that money? [AN HON. MEMBER: "The hon. Gentleman has not dropped his loose change in."] No. I shall not give money to that cause when other causes, such as Ethiopia and children in need, are being collected for in the same street. The money is being used to foment this industrial dispute. We have seen on television what that has led to.

The NUM executive has carried on this industrial dispute, and it does not give a damn for its union members. If it did, it would have held a ballot. The result of that ballot may well have been a complete stoppage and the dispute would have been over within a matter of weeks. The executive tried to get its own way without carrying out its democratic duties, according to its rule book, and that has led to the hardship that we now see.

As Christmas draws near there will be the problems of children not having food, presents, and so on. Our hearts will be twanged away at like mad by Opposition Members reminding us that for many people Christmas will not come this year. The answer to that is simple. The miners have only to accept the NCB's offer and take the money that is on the table. Any miner who returns to work now will receive £600 in his pocket before Christmas. That will provide shoes, clothes and Christmas presents that the children want and deserve.

Our appeal to the miners must be for them to return to work, to get the pits working again, and take up the excellent offer negotiated by ACAS. Some of us believe that that offer is rather too much—we are not pleased about that—and that the NCB would be giving too much away. If NACODS can accept the offer, why the NUM cannot remains a mystery.

What about the small business man? If the full entitlement had been paid without discounting £15 or £16, how much would it have cost the country? How many small businesses, which have a job to balance their books, would have gone to the wall as a result of no coal and no electricity and all the problems that would have ensued? Hundreds of thousands of other people would have been badly hurt. The miners should accept the offer that is on the table and return to work. They would then draw their money and that would solve many of their and their families' problems. Miners should remember that their responsibility is not to the union or to their colleagues, but, first and foremost, to their families.

6.43 pm

Mrs. Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): I must respond to one point made from the Conservative Benches in reply to my intervention earlier. It was on the subject of violence. The hon. Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Powley) suggested that the one person about whom I spoke could obtain some satisfaction by reporting the act of violence committed against him and his wife to the police.

I do not apologise for repeating this point. During the dispute we have not heard sufficient about the violence perpetuated against bystanders who are taking non-violent action on picket lines. We have tonight heard a great deal from the Conservative Benches about violence. My constituent, a Labour councillor, was a bystander on a picket line last Tuesday. He was standing on a wall watching what happened. He saw a group of police beat up a constituency lodge chairman. He called to the police to stop. He was pulled off the wall and dragged to the floor. His face was grazed and his knees were bruised. When his wife went over to intervene, she was hit in the stomach. When he told the senior policeman on duty that he was going to report the incident to the police, he was told that he was under arrest. That is what happens when someone wishes to report an incident to the police.

My constituent said that in that case he would drop his complaint, but he went to the police station and reported the incident. He returned to the picket line the next day and saw the same police officers on the same picket line. When he went to the senior police officer on duty he was told that they had not been removed from the picket line because they had been told what to do by the police commander.

Such incidents have rarely been talked about, but, make no mistake, they take place. They are violent actions against people who are not taking part in the picket, but we hear nothing about them in the press or from the Government.

The increases made in the order are, apparently, because of the increase in inflation. Families—it is worth repeating this—will be worse off in real terms as a result of the £1 deduction. Let me give two examples. In 1979, a couple who were both on strike could claim from the DHSS an urgent needs payment of £24. In 1984, a couple, with one person on strike and with two children under 10, receive £24·75. That is a rise of 75p in five years. What sort of justice and welfare is that?

During the strike, thousands of people have become involved in creating alternative welfare systems. A large part has been played by women. Women have always played an important, but under-estimated, role in mining life, but never more so than during this strike. Women are hurt much more than men in a dispute. It is the women who have to take charge of the household and take care of the children to ensure that they are fed.

The women in my constituency decided that if everyone could have one hot meal a day they could survive and would not be starved back to work. In our community we have 13 strike feeding committees. The women from the kitchens meet regularly to discuss their experiences and keep themselves together. Letters of support are read out. Some women read their poems. They keep a note of the best and the worst that happens. The women say that they

[Mrs. Ann Clwyd]

sometimes have a bit of a cry. The pressure on them is terrific and it is hard work, but they also have some laughs. It cannot be denied that the strike has involved enormous hardship.

Living without a wage from the pits, men have received no social security payments, and their families were assumed to be in receipt of—now £16—strike pay. Miners and their families have been forced to live off friends, sacks of potatoes and the odd £10 from relatives. They are having to cash their insurance policies, raise second mortgages, sell their cars and their furniture, and live off tick. But the determination to see it through is there, despite all the hardship. Despite all the hardship, all the worry and all the doing without, people are not broken in body or in spirit. If anything, the opposite is true.

6.50 pm

The Minister for Social Security (Mr. Tony Newton): Rarely can there have been a debate which was so much heralded and which has misfired as badly as the debate in the past three hours. If ever there has been a thin case, deployed in antique rhetoric, we have heard it during the past three hours. Much of the huffing and puffing has been a farce from the beginning.

If the statement that was made last week had been made at the time of the uprating in June, the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) would have said that we were trying to smuggle it out, hidden by the pension increases and the child benefit increases. If it had been done when the uprating orders were made in July, he would have said that we were rushing it through before the summer recess. If we had done it in August, he would have said that it was a disgrace that it was not done in July. If we had done it in September, he would have said that it was terrible that we had not waited until Parliament came back from the summer recess. If we had done it a month ago, he would have said that we were trying to back up the National Coal Board in the offers and negotiations with which it was then involved. We do not know what the hon. Gentleman would have said last week. When he tried to say it, his own hon. Friends would not let him talk.

In the end, we did more than we have done in any of the past four years. We laid the order and we made a press statement——

Mr. Nellist: One cannot eat statements.

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman had a good try last week.

Mr. Nellist: Perhaps the Minister can tell the House the last occasion when he and his wife managed on £6·45 for a week. When was the last time that he went without a meal? Will he tell the House how he expects families to survive for nine months on the pittance that the Government give them? Now another pound has been taken from them. *[Interruption.]* There is hilarity on the Conservative Benches. Those hon. Members would probably spend £6·45 or more on a round in the Bars downstairs. They do not give a damn about people. The Minister stands there making a mockery of people who are fighting for their jobs.

Mr. Newton: If I may say so, one does not have to work very hard to make a mockery of the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Nellist: What I have said is the truth.

Mr. Newton: If the hon. Gentleman will stop behaving like the parliamentary equivalent of a half brick, I shall get on with my speech.

In the past three hours we have heard a great deal about how vindictive and provocative the Government have been. The same things would have been said whenever the announcement was made, despite the fact that it was automatic. We have heard those remarks against the background of 1·25 million payments of supplementary benefit over the period concerned, totalling £23 million. That is without even taking account of payments of housing benefit. On this very day, 30,000 dependants of miners on strike are receiving an increase in the benefit that is paid to them. Is that vindictive and provocative? There are strikers in many other parts of the world who would think that our strikers are doing very well.

Where a man, for whatever reason, chooses to deprive himself of the means to support his dependants, whether of his own volition of because his union asks him or tells him to, it is not vindictive or provocative to expect either that man or his union to make some provision for his needs, and not to expect the rest of the community to pick up the whole of the bill. That is a simple, common-sense proposition.

When I am told that it is provocative that the Government allowed the law to take its course today, I ask myself: how provocative would it have been to the miners who have worked throughout, and those who have gone back, if we had taken special action to change the law to protect those who are still on strike? This is not deemed strike pay, as has been said several times throughout the debate.

My heart less than bleeds when I am told that the National Union of Mineworkers might have gone bankrupt if it had attempted to pay strike pay. Any other organisation which embarks on a course of action which might bankrupt it has to think about that before it starts. The hon. Member for Oldham, West used a delicate phrase to explain why no strike pay has been paid. He talked about the NUM's money being "otherwise immobilised". It was not immobilised; it moved out of the country so fast that nobody could see it go.

There have been some serious and reasonable contributions to the debate. I pay tribute to the hon. Members for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood), and for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton), and to a number of others. I want it to be clear that there has been no attempt whatever—nor will there be—by Ministers to lean on individual adjudicating officers to bend their decisions either way within the existing rules. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Bassetlaw cannot have it both ways. He complains that different adjudicating officers in different places take different decisions.

Mr. Ashton: Initially.

Mr. Newton: How is it that Ministers, who are able to instruct the adjudicating officers, cannot even bring about consistency? The answer is that we do not tell adjudicating officers what views to form. It is their business to interpret the regulations.

The treatment of girl friends is precisely the same as it would be in any other circumstances with claims for supplementary benefit. The rules on trade disputes make provision for meeting maternity need, if necessary, when

the baby arrives. I tell the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) that the rules on gifts and goods in kind have not been changed and are those which apply normally throughout the supplementary benefit system.

I was asked about family income supplement. There was mention of 16 appeals having gone one way. Seventeen appeals have gone the other way. In other words, there is no clear view with regard to FIS. I hope that the position will be resolved shortly by a tribunal of commissioners.

I cannot, in the time available to me, cover all the detailed points which have been made in the debate. For once I found myself having some sympathy with the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn)—and not just because of the slight sense that he had left the real world. *[Interruption.]* It was primarily because I think he may be right to complain that the House has not debated the miners' dispute sufficiently, but he would not be right if he tried to blame the Government for that. The reason why the miners' dispute as such has not been debated often is the same reason as that behind today's debate. The Opposition Front Bench do not want to debate the real issues of the day. *[Interruption.]* They do not dare debate the real issues of the miners' dispute. They will not condemn the violence. They will not condemn the nonsense of the NUM's position. They are all too happy to have those serious issues hidden by the silly smokescreen which has been created by this issue in the past week.

I hope that the House, in proper parliamentary fashion, will do what the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist) did in another and more physical way last week, and tear up the motion with its vote.

Mr. Speaker: The Question is——

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East) *rose——*

Mr. Speaker: I call the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist). He has one minute.

Mr. Michael Cocks (Bristol, South) *rose in his place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put.

Question, That the Question be now put, *put and agreed to.*

Question put accordingly, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 185, Noes 279.

Division No. 17] **[7 pm**

AYES

Abse, Leo
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Bagier, Gordon A. T.
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnett, Guy
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Benn, Tony
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Anthony
Boothroyd, Miss Betty
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'rmline E)*
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, R. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne N)*
Brown, Ron *(E'burgh, Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Buchan, Norman
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Rt Hon J.
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell, Ian
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Carter-Jones, Lewis
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clay, Robert
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S.)*
Cohen, Harry
Concannon, Rt Hon J. D.
Conlan, Bernard
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cowans, Harry
Cox, Thomas *(Tooting)*
Craigen, J. M.
Crowther, Stan
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(L'lli)*
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Dormand, Jack
Douglas, Dick
Dubs, Alfred
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Edwards, Bob *(W'h'mpt'n SE)*
Ellis, Raymond
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forrester, John
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
Freud, Clement
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Golding, John
Gould, Bryan
Gourlay, Harry
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hamilton, W. W. *(Central Fife)*
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Hart, Rt Hon Dame Judith
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Heffer, Eric S.
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart *(Vauxhall)*
Home Robertson, John
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Dr. Mark *(Durham)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
John, Brynmor
Johnston, Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kilroy-Silk, Robert
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Ron *(Carlisle)*
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McCartney, Hugh
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
McKelvey, William
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meacher, Michael
Michie, William
Mikardo, Ian
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Nellist, David
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Penhaligon, David
Pike, Peter
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Radice, Giles
Redmond, M.
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Robertson, George
Rooker, J. W.
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ryman, John
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Short, Mrs R.*(W'hampt'n NE)*
Silkin, Rt Hon J.
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C.*(isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'kl'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Thomas, Dafydd *(Merioneth)*
Thomas, Dr R. *(Carmarthen)*
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Tinn, James
Torney, Tom
Wainwright, R.
Wallace, James
Wareing, Robert
Weetch, Ken
Welsh, Michael
White, James
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Wilson, Gordon
Winnick, David
Woodall, Alec

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John Maxton and
Mr. Robin Corbett.

NOES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Ancram, Michael
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Sir H.
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Vall'y)*
Baker, Nicholas *(N Dorset)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony

Bennett, Sir Frederic *(T'bay)*
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Body, Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Braine, Sir Bernard
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Hon Peter
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon A.
Budgen, Nick
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(N Luton)*
Carlisle, Rt Hon M. *(W'ton S)*
Cartwright, John
Chapman, Sydney
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Clegg, Sir Walter
Cockeram, Eric
Colvin, Michael
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Corrie, John
Couchman, James
Cranborne, Viscount
Critchley, Julian
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
du Cann, Rt Hon Edward
Dunn, Robert
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Fenner, Mrs Peggy
Fletcher, Alexander
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Freeman, Roger
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Gardner, Sir Edward *(Fylde)*
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony
Greenway, Harry
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, E. *(B'y St Edm'ds)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Gummer, John Selwyn
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, John
Harris, David
Harvey, Robert
Haselhurst, Alan
Havers, Rt Hon Sir Michael
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hawkins, Sir Paul *(SW N'folk)*
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, J.
Hayhoe, Barney
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hickmet, Richard
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Hooson, Tom
Hordern, Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Stratf'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(G'ldford)*
Howell, Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irving, Charles
Jenkins, Rt Hon Roy *(Hillh'd)*
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Robert *(W Herts)*
Joseph, Rt Hon Sir Keith
Kellett-Bowman, Mrs Elaine
Kennedy, Charles
Kershaw, Sir Anthony
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knight, Gregory *(Derby N)*
Knight, Mrs Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, David
Lamont, Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim
Lewis, Sir Kenneth *(Stamf'd)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Ian *(Havant)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Richard
Lyell, Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Neil
MacGregor, John
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New F'st)*
McQuarrie, Albert
Madel, David
Major, John
Malins, Humfrey
Malone, Gerald
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Antony
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mates, Michael
Mather, Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Hal *(B'grove)*
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Mills, Sir Peter *(West Devon)*
Mitchell, David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Sir Hector
Moore, John
Morris, M. *(N'hampton, S)*
Morrison, Hon C. *(Devizes)*
Morrison, Hon P. *(Chester)*
Moynihan, Hon C.
Mudd, David
Murphy, Christopher
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Onslow, Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Oppenheim, Rt Hon Mrs S.
Osborn, Sir John
Ottaway, Richard
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Parris, Matthew
Patten, John *(Oxford)*
Pattie, Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Pollock, Alexander
Powell, Rt Hon J. E. *(S Down)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Price, Sir David
Prior, Rt Hon James
Proctor, K. Harvey
Rathbone, Tim
Rees, Rt Hon Peter *(Dover)*
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Malcolm
Rippon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Rost, Peter
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
St. John-Stevas, Rt Hon N.
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Silvester, Fred
Sims, Roger
Skeet, T. H. H.
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Spence, John
Spicer, Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stevens, Martin *(Fulham)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, J.
Sumberg, David
Taylor, Rt Hon John David
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thatcher, Rt Hon Mrs M.
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waddington, David
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Waller, Gary
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watson, John
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Whitfield, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wiggin, Jerry
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Michael
Wrigglesworth, Ian
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Tristan Garel-Jones and
Mr. Peter Lloyd.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 33 (Questions on amendments):—*

The House divided: Ayes 266, Noes 187.

Division No. 18] **[7.14 pm**

AYES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Ancram, Michael
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Rt Hon Sir H.
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Baker, Nicholas *(N Dorset)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bennett, Sir Frederic *(T'bay)*
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Richard
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Braine, Sir Bernard
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Hon Peter
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon A.
Budgen, Nick
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(N Luton)*

Carlisle, Rt Hon M. *(W'ton S)*
Chapman, Sydney
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clegg, Sir Walter
Cockeram, Eric
Colvin, Michael
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Cormack, Patrick
Corrie, John
Couchman, James
Cranborne, Viscount
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
du Cann, Rt Hon Edward
Dykes, Hugh
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Fenner, Mrs Peggy
Fletcher, Alexander
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Freeman, Roger
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Gardner, Sir Edward *(Fylde)*
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony
Greenway, Harry
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, E. *(B'y St Edm'ds)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Gummer, John Selwyn
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, John
Harris, David
Harvey, Robert
Haselhurst, Alan
Havers, Rt Hon Sir Michael
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hawkins, Sir Paul *(SW N'folk)*
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, J.
Hayhoe, Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hickmet, Richard
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Hooson, Tom
Hordern, Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Stratf'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(G'ldford)*
Howell, Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irving, Charles
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Robert *(W Herts)*
Kellett-Bowman, Mrs Elaine
Kershaw, Sir Anthony
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
Knight, Gregory *(Derby N)*
Knight, Mrs Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, David
Lamont, Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim
Lewis, Sir Kenneth *(Stamf'd)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter, *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Richard
Lyell, Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
MacGregor, John
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New F'st)*
McQuarrie, Albert
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Malone, Gerald
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Antony
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mates, Michael
Mather, Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Hal *(B'grove)*
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Mills, Sir Peter *(West Devon)*
Mitchell, David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Sir Hector
Moore, John
Morris, M. *(N'hampton, S)*
Morrison, Hon C. *(Devizes)*
Morrison, Hon P. *(Chester)*
Moynihan, Hon C.
Mudd, David
Murphy, Christopher
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Onslow, Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Oppenheim, Rt Hon Mrs S.
Osborn, Sir John
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Parris, Matthew
Patten, John *(Oxford)*
Pattie, Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Pollock, Alexander
Powell, Rt Hon J. E. *(S Down)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Price, Sir David
Prior, Rt Hon James
Proctor, K. Harvey
Rathbone, Tim
Rees, Rt Hon Peter *(Dover)*
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Rifkind, Malcolm
Rippon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Rost, Peter
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
St. John-Stevas, Rt Hon N.
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Silvester, Fred
Sims, Roger
Skeet, T. H. H.
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Spence, John
Spicer, Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stevens, Martin *(Fulham)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, J.
Sumberg, David
Taylor, Rt Hon John David
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thatcher, Rt Hon Mrs M.
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waddington, David
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Waller, Gary
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watson, John
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Whitfield, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wiggin, Jerry
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Michael
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John Major and
Mr. Tony Durant.

NOES

Abse, Leo
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Bagier, Gordon A. T.
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnett, Guy
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Benn, Tony
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Anthony
Boothroyd, Miss Betty
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'rmline E)*
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, R. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne N)*
Brown, Ron *(E'burgh, Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Buchan, Norman
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Rt Hon J.
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell, Ian
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Carter-Jones, Lewis
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clay, Robert
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S.)*
Cohen, Harry
Concannon, Rt Hon J. D.
Conlan, Bernard
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cowans, Harry
Cox, Thomas *(Tooting)*
Craigen, J. M.
Crowther, Stan
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(L'lli)*
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Dormand, Jack
Douglas, Dick
Dubs, Alfred
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Edwards, Bob *(W'h'mpt'n SE)*
Ellis, Raymond
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry
Fatchett, Derek

Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forrester, John
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
Freud, Clement
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Golding, John
Gould, Bryan
Gourlay, Harry
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hamilton, W. W. *(Central Fife)*
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Hart, Rt Hon Dame Judith
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Heffer, Eric S.
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart *(Vauxhall)*
Home Robertson, John
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Dr. Mark *(Durham)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Jenkins, Rt Hon Roy *(Hillh'd)*
John, Brynmor
Johnston, Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kennedy, Charles
Kilroy-Silk, Robert
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Ron *(Carlisle)*
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McCartney, Hugh
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
McKelvey, William
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meacher, Michael
Michie, William
Mikardo, Ian
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Nellist, David
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Penhaligon, David
Pike, Peter
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Radice, Giles
Redmond, M.
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Robertson, George
Rooker, J. W.
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ryman, John
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Short, Mrs R.*(W'hampt'n NE)*
Silkin, Rt Hon J.
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C.*(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'kl'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Thomas, Dafydd *(Merioneth)*
Thomas, Dr R. *(Carmarthen)*
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Tinn, James
Torney, Tom
Wainwright, R.
Wallace, James
Wareing, Robert
Weetch, Ken
Welsh, Michael
White, James
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Wilson, Gordon
Winnick, David
Woodall, Alec
Wrigglesworth, Ian

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John Maxton and
Mr. Robin Corbett.

Question accordingly agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House re-affirms the policy established by the Social Security (No. 2) Act 1980 that those on strike should be expected to contribute to the cost of maintaining their families; notes that, consequent on the general uprating on social security benefits, all but a tiny minority of strikers receiving supplementary benefit are being paid the same or more benefit, not less; acknowledges that the Government have as in previous years followed the requirements of the Act in uprating the "specified sum" to be deducted from benefit payable for strikers' dependants; acknowledges that the National Coal Board has negotiated constructively in reaching a settlement with the National Association of Colliery Overmen, Deputies and Shotfirers on the central issues of the dispute; and condemns the failure of the National Union of Mineworkers either to meet its obligations to its members and their families or to move from its total unreasonable position in negotiations.

Orders of the Day

Social Security Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Speaker: I have selected the amendment in the names of the Leader of the Opposition and his right hon. and hon. Friends.

7.24 pm

The Secretary of State for Social Services (Mr. Norman Fowler): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Although this Bill contains provisions on statutory sick pay and on invalidity pension, its heart is concerned with the reform of occupational pension schemes — the biggest reform for a decade. I shall put these proposals into context. There are currently around 90,000 occupational schemes with about 11 million members. Their funds are estimated to be worth well in excess of £100 billion, so we are talking about assets on an enormous scale, held and managed on behalf of half the working population and their families.

Four main principles underlie these reforms. First, my aim is to ensure fairness of treatment for everyone. That means members and ex-members, employers and employees. At the moment the balance is tipped against the employee who changes his job and who leaves a scheme before pension age. The Bill redresses that balance. Secondly, I believe that freedom to choose is an essential right. People are entitled to, and should be given, more say in decisions that vitally affect their own and their families' future. This Bill extends that freedom. Thirdly, I want to ensure that people have enough information to be able to make the right choices and to know that assets invested on their behalf are being properly handled and properly safeguarded. This Bill gives them access to full information.

Fourthly — this is an essential pre-condition of economic growth—I believe that people should be free to move employment to where their skills are most needed and best rewarded. Artificial barriers to job mobility which can arise from the operation of occupational pension schemes must therefore be eliminated. The Bill removes those barriers. These principles are fundamental to my proposals. We have consulted very widely and I have carefully considered all the comments received in reply. There is now a high measure of agreement on what needs to be done.

The central feature of the proposals is the fulfilling of the 1983 manifesto pledge to provide better protection for people who leave a pension scheme before retirement age —the group known somewhat misleadingly as "early leavers". It was a Conservative Government just over 10 years ago who took the first step to protect the interests of the group—in the Social Security Act 1973. Then, for the first time, early leavers over age 26 with five years' qualifying service had their pension rights preserved. Before that they had usually received no more than a refund of their own contributions.

Under the 1973 Act, however, there was no requirement to increase those preserved rights in the period between leaving employment and drawing the pension. At that stage no one anticipated the ruinous inflation rates of the mid-1970s. Those record inflation rates seriously eroded the real value of preserved pension rights. Most of those who had changed jobs lost out substantially in comparison with their colleagues who stayed in the same job until retirement. Nor was this problem confined to a small minority of the working population. The fact is that up to 90 per cent. of people in pension schemes become "early leavers" at some stage in their careers—whether through involuntary or voluntary change of jobs. A state of affairs therefore in which so many people either lose out, or go in fear of jeopardising their personal security and that of their families should they change jobs, is surely unacceptable.

Legislation and practice must be adjusted to reflect social realities. The point of view was endorsed in 1981 by the Occupational Pensions Board. The board recommended action to redress the balance against "early leavers". The Government's hope was that pension schemes might take the opportunity presented by the board's report to make improvements voluntarily, but by last summer it had become clear that changes were not going to happen without a firm steer from the Government.

Following a special conference on the early leaver issue, which I convened, I set out the Government's proposals in a consultative document last November. Those proposals were broadly in line with the majority recommendation of the Occupational Pensions Board, and they are now embodied in the Bill. The basic effect will be that all those who leave a pension scheme after the Bill comes into force will have their reserved pension rights increased in line with prices or 5 per cent. a year compound, whichever is the less. They will benefit from that revaluation over the whole period between leaving employment and their pension becoming payable.

This protection will apply to all pension rights earned from 1 January 1985 for people who change jobs from the time this part of the Bill becomes law, which I intend should be 1 January 1986. The protection will apply to all benefits provided under scheme rules, except guaranteed minimum pensions which are, of course, already protected.

Mr. Eldon Griffiths (Bury St. Edmunds): As a supporter of the Bill and my right hon. Friend, I hope that he will not regard this as a niggling or Committee point. However, he will know that over the last few years many people in industry have received wage increases of a good deal less than 5 per cent., and sometimes not at all. As he puts his mind down the corridor of the future, does he not think that there could be difficulties if people were required to have their pensions uprated by 5 per cent. when those continuing in work in the same firms got very much less than a 5 per cent. uprating in pay?

Mr. Fowler: I recognise that problem. That issue has been put by the engineering employers. I should make it clear that this is 5 per cent. or the increase in prices, whichever is less. That seems to be an equitable way of dealing with the position. In no way do I want to pre-empt debate, but I am sure that the Opposition Front Bench will press us to go further than 5 per cent. Perhaps we may see how the debate develops.

I recognise that all improvements have a cost. The Occupational Pensions Board estimated it as being between 1 per cent. and 2 per cent. of payroll. In practice,

[Mr. Fowler]

costs will vary considerably between schemes. The burden will fall least heavily on those who already give increases for early leavers.

How those costs should be met is a matter for scheme trustees and employers to resolve. A variety of options will be open to them. There could be higher contributions from employers or employees, or from both. Non-contributory schemes could become contributory. There could be changes in the schemes' benefit — for example, by taking state benefits fully into account or by changing the way in which benefits are calculated by changing the fraction. Some schemes will have no difficulty in paying for the improvements, given the high rates of return that they have been able to secure in the current very favourable investment climate.

There are those who argue that I should impose even higher costs by proposing higher revaluations. Having considered the matter in some detail, I am convinced that to go beyond the proposals would in practice be unrealistic. It would put an extra financial burden on schemes retrospectively and would risk the collapse of many of them—something which would jeopardise the interests of everyone in occupational pension schemes, early leavers and stayers alike.

Anyone looking objectively at developments over the last five years would concede that not enough has been achieved by voluntary effort. The case for legislation is unanswerable, and I am convinced that our proposals strike a balance that is fair and reasonable for everyone.

But the Bill does not simply seek to protect the position of those who want to leave their deferred pensions with their old employer's. Clause 2 and schedule 1 also enhance freedom of job changers to transfer their benefit rights. One of the early results of the inquiry into provision for retirement, which I am chairing, was to look at personal pensions. A clear need emerged to give early leavers the right to a transfer value.

The majority of large and medium-sized schemes already allow transfers, but not all. However, all too often the critical choice of how these transfers can be used is limited. On this aspect I issued a further consultative document in May setting out my proposals for change. These proposals won almost universal agreement and support, and are therefore incorporated in the Bill virtually unchanged.

The effect of the Bill will be that in future everyone who leaves a job after its provisions take effect will be given the right to take a transfer instead of leaving their pension rights in their old employers' scheme. The value of that transfer will be calculated in a way certified by an actuary to be a fair cash equivalent of the leavers' full pension rights in the scheme. Those rights will, of course, in their own way be enhanced by the revaluation requirement that I have just outlined.

This transfer value can be used to buy rights in a new employers' scheme, where the scheme is willing to accept the transfer. It can be used to buy an annuity with an insurance company of the leavers' choice, or it can be used in any other way laid down in the regulations. That last provision is primarily intended to cover personal pensions when they are introduced, but it will also give us freedom to include other suitable alternatives which may be developed. The right to opt for a transfer will remain open to a year before pension age. This will give maximum choice and flexibility to the member without causing undue difficulties for the schemes.

The details of the approach to be followed in calculating fair values will be set out in regulations. We shall, of course, be consulting widely on these details. However, I can tell the House that at my request the actuarial profession is considering this whole question, and I am encouraged by the progress which it has made so far.

We are making another important but fairly small change. The age limit of 26 will be removed from the preservation requirements of the Social Security Act 1973, so that in anyone with five years' qualifying service in a scheme, regardless of how young he is, will get a preserved pension, unless he chooses to take a transfer value instead.

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): The main grievance has been not that in some cases transferability has not been available but that where it has, the transfer value has been felt to be grossly unjust to the leaver. My right hon. Friend has referred to his discussions with the actuaries, but valuation is absolutely critical. Will he say more about the progress which has been made?

Mr. Fowler: It is because I recognise the critical nature of that valuation that we are holding discussions with the actuarial profession in England and Scotland. The aim is to find an agreed and fair way of measuring what should be transferred. It also goes without saying that if it is impossible to find that by agreement or discussion—I have no reason to believe that that will be the case—the Government will have to introduce their own standards. We are entirely at one with my hon. Friend — I recognise his interest in this regard—in seeking to find a satisfactory way of getting a valuation which is fair to the scheme member. I give him that assurance.

I have explained the important reforms for early leavers at some length because they are the vital heart of the Bill. When taken with our action in the previous Session to end franking, they go a long way to give early leavers a new and much fairer deal. Personal pensions, when they are available, will complete the process.

The reforms proposed in clause 3 and schedule 2 will benefit all scheme members — leavers and stayers. Occupational pension rights are often the biggest single asset an individual holds — worth far more than any investment he controls personally, perhaps even including his home. It must, therefore, be right that full information about that major asset should be readily available. We are taking powers in the Bill to give members access to a range of information about their pension schemes.

The detailed disclosure requirements will be set out in the regulations, and I shall consult fully on them. Members will get basic information about their rights and entitlements automatically. Other information about the way schemes are run and funds are invested will be available. The details will be sufficiently detailed to enable a qualified person acting on the member's behalf to form a complete picture of the scheme.

We shall set different requirements for different types of scheme. For example, schemes with just one member will be completely exempt because it would be nonsense to include them. Only the essential minimum financial information will be required from pay-as-you-go unfunded

schemes, and there will probably also be reduced requirements on schemes whose benefits are fully insured or guaranteed by statute.

One point that was made often when we consulted on our proposals was that members should be given simple brochures about their schemes, so that they would be able to understand the complex data that might be made available to them by schemes. I hope that schemes will provide such literature. But the exact form a booklet takes is a matter for them of presentation, not content, and is certainly not appropriate for legislation.

There have been some worries about the costs of disclosure and I shall be willing to listen to a full discussion of that. I do not, however, believe that those costs will be significant in terms of a scheme's total resources. Many schemes already provide their members with comprehensive information. Schemes which follow this good practice will find that they will have little or no extra burden as a result of the legislation. We propose to back up the disclosure requirements with a pension schemes register on lines similar to the companies registration office. The register will have several functions. It will act as a central check on schemes' compliance with the disclosure requirements. It will provide an additional avenue for members to bring pressure on unco-operative schemes. It will provide a central, readily available public source of information about schemes which will encourage best practice and enable comparison to be made between performance and standards.

Trustees or managers of schemes will be required to lodge copies of scheme documents, annual reports and other information with the pension schemes register. The register's costs will be recovered from registration fees and fees for inspecting documents. The register will provide a powerful incentive to schemes to comply with the disclosure requirements and will act as a powerful back-up to disclosure.

I appreciate the desire of schemes to have their rules set out in one document. That is why the Occupational Pensions Board will be placed under a duty to determine whether scheme rules meet the legislative requirements. If they do, the scheme will be governed by its rules without reference to the legislation. Therefore, schemes which wish can make the override an interim measure only.

That is the position briefly on occupational pensions. They form the major part of the Bill, but that is not to under-estimate the importance of the other provisions in the Bill. My hon. Friend the Minister with responsibility for the disabled will deal in more detail with two important social security changes that feature in part II. The first provides that married women who are entitled to the over-80s pension at the lower rate will qualify for the standard rate paid to men and other women over 80. Their benefit will increase by an additional £8·65 a week when benefits are uprated next year. The second will have the effect of restoring the 5 per cent. abatement in invalidity pensions when I carry out the 1985 review of benefit rates. The rate of invalidity pension will rise by £1·55 a week for a single pensioner and £2·50 for couples in addition to the normal uprating. I am sure that both changes will be welcomed.

Mr. Michael Meacher (Oldham, West): How many of those who will supposedly get the restoration of the 5 per cent. abatement of invalidity benefit will actually get it? What recompense will the Secretary of State make to those who have been deprived of the benefit for the past five years?

Mr. Fowler: I have no proposals on the latter point, but to answer the hon. Gentleman's former point, probably about half. Perhaps I may allow my hon. Friend the Minister of State to deal with this.

Part III of the Bill deals with the statutory sick pay scheme. The Government believe that it makes sense to extend the scheme to cover the whole period for which state sickness benefit is normally paid. This will cut the overlap of occupational sick pay schemes with national insurance sickness benefits. It will reduce the effect of the anomaly caused by state sickness benefit not being taxable. It will save public expenditure and reduce staff numbers in my Department. Above all, perhaps, it builds on the success of the scheme in operation since its introduction in 1983. The responses that we have received suggest that many employees prefer statutory sick pay to sickness benefit from the state. When they are sick, all the money comes from one source, rather than from two. For those reasons, I propose that from April 1986 statutory sick pay will cover the first 28 weeks of sickness instead of eight weeks as now.

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): The Secretary of State said that he has evidence from employees that they favour the change. Will he tell us more about that evidence? I have heard no such views.

Mr. Fowler: The information collected by the Department shows that the staff whom we have been able to survey believe that the statutory sick pay scheme is an improvement upon the other scheme. I shall ask my hon. Friend the Minister of State to provide the exact data on that. *[Interruption.]* I must leave my hon. Friend something to do in this debate.

Obviously, what I propose will mean some extra work for employers. However, now that statutory sick pay has successfully become a part of employers' pay procedures, this should not be extensive. Our aim has always been to keep procedures as simple as possible. To achieve that end we shall continue to consult employers' representatives fully. That is why the detailed provisions have been left to be covered in regulations. The House may wish to know that we have already had an initial response from the CBI acknowledging the basic sense of what we propose.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Cromarty and Skye): Given that the Minister of State will be replying about sick pay, will the Secretary of State nevertheless have regard to the small business man—the shopkeeper—for whom the change will have a significant effect and which may account for his present profits? I am thinking of the small rural storekeeper, of which there are many in my constituency. They are extremely worried about the change.

Mr. Fowler: We have decided to relieve employers of the cost of their share of the national insurance contributions paid on statutory sick pay. The significance of that, as the hon. Gentleman will recognise, is that the National Federation of Self Employed and Small Businesses, and other such organisations, have made this their major complaint about statutory sick pay. We are relieving them of the cost of their share of the national insurance contributions paid on statutory sick pay, so we

[Mr. Fowler]

are meeting their case on that. That will mean a current saving for employers of up to £40 million a year. I propose to make that change not just from 1 April 1986 but from 1 April 1985, a year before we extend the scheme, and I shall table an amendment to the Bill in committee. I hope that the point made by the hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye (Mr. Kennedy) has been met.

Although there may be difficulties of detail on this legislation, the Bill deserves support. The reforms that I am introducing for occupational pensions schemes, in particular, represent the most significant legislative proposals for this subject for at least 10 years. They are only part of our far wider scrutiny of provision for retirement. They are only part of the strategy that we are developing to safeguard the interests of the retired and their families, not just over the next few years but into the next century. I believe that they represent an important step forward, and one that holds a fair balance between the stability of the schemes themselves and the interests of their 11 million members.

These are important proposals that represent an important reform of occupational pensions. I ask the House to give the Bill a Second Reading.

7.51 pm

Mr. Michael Meacher (Oldham, West): Even more than most of the other social security legislation of this Government, this is a deceptive Bill. There are items in it that merit support in principle and that the Opposition support, but, even in these cases, more detailed scrutiny of the small print suggests that they are seriously flawed by many offsetting drawbacks. Thus, some restoration of the previous cuts is balanced by new cuts applied to the more obscure parts of the social security system where public understanding is weakest.

It is highly disturbing that the main thrust of the Bill is towards extending privatisation, with all its known disadvantages, over which the Secretary of State glossed very glibly, into further parts of the welfare state — notably long-term sickness. There are ominous signs that the way is being paved for privatisation to disrupt key parts of the all-important pensions sector—notably earnings-related pensions — and an assault on Labour's Social Security Pensions Act 1975 which laid the framework for by far the best deal that pensioners have ever had. No doubt the suspicious trend that can already be detected in this Bill will be fully reflected in the Secretary of State's reports early next year, when they reveal the full scale of the assault being planned on the whole of the welfare state.

Part I of the Bill deals with occupational pensions. We welcome in principle the proposal to revalue deferred pensions, although we regret that it has taken three years to act on the 1981 Occupational Pensions Board report to this effect. However, the Government's formula, based, as the Secretary of State said, on only 5 per cent. a year, or in accordance with the rise in prices, is seriously defective. The proposals will mean that early leavers are still at a disadvantage compared with stayers, who are covered in the Labour Government's 1974 Act for rises in line with earnings. The proposal is already out of line—the Secretary of State may not fully appreciate this—with what the National Association of Pension Funds, not the Labour party, says is happening—that 70 per cent. of the funds are already revaluing at 8 per cent.

Mr. Roger Freeman (Kettering): That is not true.

Mr. Meacher: That is my information. It is out of line with the guaranteed minimum pension, which is guaranteed in terms of earnings increases. Moreover, it offers a poor prospect——

Mr. Fowler: I thought that I was hearing things. Did the hon. Gentleman say that 70 per cent. of pension funds are revaluing at 8 per cent.?

Mr. Meacher: That is my information.

Mr. Tim Smith: The hon. Gentleman should get his facts right.

Mr. Meacher: It is not a bit surprising, in view of the large actuarial surpluses which are building up in many of these funds.

Moreover, the Bill offers a poor prospect. The Government Actuary estimates that the basic state pension will fall to only 10 per cent. of future average earnings if increased in line with prices only. There is no reason to believe that occupational pensions under a similar formula will do any better. In the 1982 quinquennial review, the Government Actuary illustrated this effect on the assumption of an annual 2 per cent. difference in the increase in earnings and prices, which is a reasonable assumption, over 20 years. Compared with earnings, a pension would be worth 15 per cent. less in real terms after 10 years and more than 30 per cent. less after 20 years.

For these reasons, we believe that the 5 per cent. revaluation figure is inadequate because, on the basis of several alternative comparisons, it will provide the early leaver with a poor deal. I agree that it will be better than what he has at the moment, but, if we are to pick a figure, the Government should pick a better one.

Mr. Tim Yeo (Suffolk, South): Is it not ludicrous for the Opposition to criticise the 5 per cent. figure, which is at least in line with the level of inflation under this Government, when for years under the Labour Government, with double figure inflation, there was no protection of any kind?

Mr. Meacher: If the hon. Gentleman wishes to get into that kind of argument, I should point out that there was double figure inflation under this Government in 1981, when the rate of inflation year on year was 22 per cent. That is my point. Why did the Government not then act to introduce a measure such as this? They waited three years, and inflation is now 5 per cent. Looking at historic trends, the increase should be in line with earnings, or nearer towards the trend of earnings, which is between 7 and 8 per cent.

We also oppose the revaluation arrangements, because they omit all pensions deferred before 1 January 1985. Surely it is reasonable that these retirement pensions should be backdated at least to the time of publication of the relevant OPB report in 1981. The Secretary of State has argued on many occasions, and again tonight, that this would undermine existing schemes, but the OPB has pointed out that pension funds are building up substantial actuarial surpluses, and many actuaries have, by their funding assumptions, built up reserves to cover this problem. In this important respect, the revaluation proposals are flawed.

On transfer values, the Bill's proposals are an advance, but in a manner that leaves much to be desired. First, it is difficult to see how fair transfer values can be

guaranteed without standardising the methods of calculation and the assumptions for calculating those values, perhaps as a result of the discussions to which the Secretary of State referred. If that happens, we shall welcome it. The calculations should be open to the transferring member, and it is reasonable to have an adjudication procedure for disputes, bearing in mind the importance, as the Secretary of State stressed, of occupational pensions as assets. We need an adjudication procedure similar to that for employment and industrial disputes. We should like to see that in the Bill.

Furthermore, the proposed general framework for transfers is far from satisfactory. Unless employers are required to accept transfer values for use in their pensions schemes, the transfers to annuities and other arrangements are inevitable. That is no doubt designed to open up the way for personal portable pensions.

Above all, more protection than is proposed is needed if some early leavers are not to make some disastrous pension investments. As a minimum, this requires stricter controls and publicity material by brokers and insurers in selling deferred annuity policies, requirements that employers make advice from competent pension consultants available to early leavers, a right to a period within which any prospective section 32 policy member can change his mind, as happens with insurance policies and hire-purchase agreements, and discretion for trustees to refuse to transfer to policies which are not approved. None of these requirements is at present explicit in the Bill. In the Opposition's view, all of them should be.

As for the disclosure of more information about occupational pension schemes to their members in clause 3, obviously that is desirable in itself, but again it is offered in a manner which, in our view, falls short of what is needed. In the absence of the details of the regulations, which are not included in the Bill, I can only quote from the consultative document. It is proposed there to provide

"information sufficient to enable an expert pension adviser to form a complete picture of the scheme and its financial soundness."

That is hardly enough. Scheme members themselves ought to be able to judge a scheme on its merits, and the employer should be obliged to provide this information in an easily readable leaflet form.

Mr. Kennedy: I should be interested to hear the hon. Gentleman's view on a matter which follows from that. Looking ahead to potential money purchase schemes, does the hon. Gentleman agree that there is an argument for saying that employees — members of the schemes — should be able to elect trustees and have greater direct control, obviously subject to professional advice, over where investments are made? Is the hon. Gentleman in favour of the direct election of trustees of money purchase schemes?

Mr. Meacher: Certainly I am in favour of more member control over trustees and of more consultation — subject to professional advice, which is very important. Members' interests and the interests of representatives of those members should be more closely taken into account.

Mr. Robert McCrindle (Brentwood and Ongar): Are we to take it from what the hon. Gentleman has just said that the Labour party has now dropped the idea, current a few years ago, that 50 per cent. of the trustees should be appointed by trade unions?

Mr. Meacher: I do not regard that as inconsistent with what I have just said. I believe that there should be more control and participation by members and more information provided to them. It may be that the hon. Gentleman and I have a difference of view here, but I do not see why that should not be done through the trade unions. That has happened in the best cases, and I hope that it will be taken further.

The consultative document also says:

"remedies for non-compliance would correspond to those already available for non-compliance with other statutory requirements."

However, it is impracticable for most individual members of a pension scheme to resort to an expensive and uncertain civil action against the trustees. If we believe in employee redress, we need a right written into the Bill for a member to be able to take steps to force disclosure by reporting an employer to an authority, such as the Occupational Pensions Board, which would then act on the employee's behalf.

What is most worrying about the whole of part I is its pre-empting of the pensions inquiry which is still under way and its assuming some of its recommendations. The original compromise allowing contracting out offers a ready-made structure for a privatisation solution, subject to resolving the major problems of transferability and portability. But, quite apart from the opportunity presented, I cannot emphasise too strongly that any shift away from the earnings-related supplement in the state pension scheme would be nothing short of catastrophic for our 9·5 million pensioners. Not only would it disadvantage severely those unable to obtain an adequate pension through an occupational pension scheme — those on lower earnings; most manual workers and most women — but it would destroy the one escape route from means-tested poverty which was put in place by the Labour Government in their 1975 scheme and which will take virtually every pensioner, as of right, above the supplementary benefit line by 1998. To destroy such a prospect, if that is intended, in the interests of the dogma of privatisation in moving out the earnings-related part of state pensions into the private sector would be a crime against our pensioners.

One demand that we make is that the Secretary of State, or the Minister, should formally repudiate any such intention. I should be glad to give way to the Secretary of State, or to the Minister, if he wished to make such a declaration. Unfortunately, there is no sign of that. I find it disturbing that there is an unwillingness on their part to make a statement of that kind. It is clear that the Bill paves the way for such a possibility, and that is deeply disturbing. It would have extremely damaging effects on pensioners' interests. If that is not the intention, it should be made clear as soon as possible.

In part II, the Secretary of State has brazenly sought to take credit for restoring in November 1985 the Government's former 5 per cent. cut in invalidity benefit. I need hardly say that it should never have been cut in the first place. We cannot express much gratitude to those who merely restore a cut which should never have been made. Moreover, since the 5 per cent. abatement was only justified in 1980 as a precursor to taxation, and since taxation has been recognised by the Government to be impracticable, there is a clear case in equity for the Government being obliged to compensate claimants for the money that they have lost because of an error or

[Mr. Meacher]

foolishness on the part of the Government. The Secretary of State appeared not to have thought about it. I ask him to think about it now.

Between 1980, when the abatement was first instituted, and November 1985 a single person will have been deprived of £354 and a married couple of £569 as a result. Perhaps even more strikingly, had Labour's historic method of fixing invalidity benefit according to the higher of prices or earnings been applied, a married couple on invalidity benefit would now be getting £7·35 a week more than they are. So much for the Government's generosity. They should be on their knees to invalidity pensioners and apologising for having robbed them of money. They show no sign of contrition, and no readiness to return it.

Worse still, the Secretary of State admitted that nearly half the 750,000 disabled people due to receive the 5 per cent. restoration of benefit will find all or part of the increase clawed back. About 150,000 invalidity benefit claimants are also on supplementary benefit, so the increase of 5 per cent. will be correspondingly deducted from the supplementary benefit entitlement. Then the Government have made the mean decision to ban people from receiving both the invalidity allowance and the earnings-related supplement, whereas at present they are entitled to both. That will affect another 150,000 persons.

The Minister for Social Security (Mr. Antony Newton): I shall be commenting on the latter point later. However, to avoid anyone being misled, as on one occasion *The Guardian* has been misled, the hon. Gentleman will recognise that the fact that those on supplementary benefit do not gain from the restoration of the abatement corresponds with the fact that they did not suffer from the abatement in the first place. If they were on supplementary benefit, anything that they lost on invalidity benefit was made up on supplementary benefit.

Mr. Meacher: That is technically true, but it is important that people should have non-means-tested benefits. Labour members always argue that. There is a great deal of difference between a non-means-tested benefit and a means-tested benefit. I am sure that when the Minister replies he will, I regret, assure the House that half those who are supposed to receive that restoration of benefit will receive nothing, because it is clawed back either in whole or in part.

Losing the lower of invalidity allowance or earnings-related supplement may mean that people could lose more by this measure than they would gain from the 5 per cent. abatement. I appreciate that we cannot know for certain, because we do not know the figures for November 1985. But a ministerial statement on 12 November 1984 said:

"existing beneficiaries will be protected to ensure that their benefit is not actually reduced."

Therefore, will the Secretary of State give a commitment that those claimants will not lose more by this further cut than they will gain by the belated restoration of a previous cut? That is an important question. Once again, I shall be happy to give way if I can have an assurance that that will be so. If the Secretary of State will not give that commitment, it shows that, so far from the Bill improving the position of invalidity pensioners, it will make matters worse for many of them.

Let me give an example. On the November 1984 rates, as from today, a person incapacitated at the age of 40 with an invalidity allowance of £7·50 a week will lose an average earnings-related addition of £2·50 a week and will gain only a single person's 5 per cent. abatement of £1·71 a week. That is not generosity; it is a further imposed deprivation. That is why we have strongly opposed that part of the Bill. By all means restore what should never have been cut, but it is exceedingly mean to make further cuts as a result of which many people will once again be worse off.

The third major change in part III is the extension of statutory sick pay from eight to 28 weeks. The effect of that major extension of privatisation is that all the worst anomalies of sick pay will be exacerbated. The Secretary of State's extremely bland reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) staggered me. Substantial arguments have built up against statutory sick pay in the light of experience. If he does not know them, I shall spell them out.

First, benefit rates for sick pay are paid on the basis of salary, not need. That means that families with children are worse off under sick pay than under national insurance sickness benefit.

Secondly, taxation is levied on sick pay, not on sickness benefit. National insurance contributions are also payable, with all their regressive burden weighted against the low paid.

Thirdly, sick pay and sickness benefit are paid only after four or more days of illness. But while sickness benefit links different short periods of illness within an eight-week period, sick pay only does that within a two-week period. That is far meaner and will mean that a number of people will not get the benefit of sick pay whereas they would have got it if sickness benefit were still on offer.

Fourthly, there is a significant drawback under the statutory sick pay arrangements. If, for example, a worker has received his holiday pay in advance within the eight-week assessment period prior to the sickness, or if he were on an overtime ban or anything that might reduce his wages, his sick pay will be correspondingly lower.

Fifthly, sick pay, under the aegis of employers, is refused if a worker goes sick during an industrial dispute.

Sixthly, if a worker books his holiday and then becomes sick, employers are entitled under the sick pay arrangements to regard him as being on holiday.

Seventhly, and importantly, since most illnesses are over in eight weeks and only the serious ones go on to 28 weeks, there are real fears that employers will discriminate against people with frequent sickness records. Indeed, the unions have already picked up monitoring by employers which shows an increase in their concern with health records. There must be a real worry that that will be turned against those who, through no fault of their own, are frequently ill.

Eighthly, sick pay is often wrongly calculated. The Secretary of State should know that his Department has been making inquiries. The National Federation of Self Employed and Small Businesses recently found that one in four small businesses was making errors. In December last year the Department stated that out of 180,000 cases checked, one in six—16 per cent.—made either over or under-payments.

Ninthly, employee redress is clearly weaker under the sick pay arrangements. If people are unwilling to take on the DHSS at a tribunal, even fewer will be willing to take on their employers.

I could go on, but I shall not. The Secretary of State said that he was not aware of any disadvantages, but I hope that I have given him nine strong reasons why sick pay is manifestly bad. Employer-controlled sick pay suffers from a series of hidden drawbacks. That is why we strongly reject this extension of it.

One final major objection concerns the abolition of employers' national insurance contributions on sick pay. Did I hear the Secretary of State say that that was to be done a year early? That is an extraordinarily generous concession when we are told that there is not the money to pay people the kind of benefits that are needed and when there are extra cuts so that invalidity benefit claimants cannot have the full 5 per cent. restoration. That is extraordinarily generous of the Secretary of State when he has been extremely mean to employees.

The abolition of national insurance contributions on sick pay proposed in the Bill is a blatant repudiation—not only when it is paid a year early but whenever it is paid — of the principle enunciated by the Minister with responsibility for the disabled as recently as 1982. The hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Sir H. Rossi) said:

"In relation to the question of principle . . . the earnings-related contribution schemes are geared to the basic concept of employers and employees both paying contributions on all assessable earnings. It is alien to the scheme structure to expect employees but not their employers to contribute on one type of assessable earnings."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 2 February 1982; c. 367.]

I should be interested to know on what grounds there has been a U-turn in Government thinking, so much so that they are eager to offer that benefit to employers one year early.

The Government have largely caved in to the employers to secure that big extension in privatisation—if I am wrong, the Minister will tell me—even at the expense of substantially reducing any savings in public expenditure. The first offer to employers was a reduction of 0·5 per cent. on national insurance contributions to compensate for their extra cost. Savings to the Exchequer for removal of sickness benefit responsibility would then be £375 million. The Exchequer would lose £420 million in national insurance contributions from employers and the Government would get tax on sick pay worth about £200 million. They would also save £30 million in administration costs. Thus, public expenditure would be reduced by £400 million for a net revenue loss of £200 million. That was the original offer, as I understand it. Now, several offers later, the Government have agreed that employers are to deduct the full cost of their payments of sick pay from national insurance contributions. Therefore, compensation to employers has risen sharply to £565 million and the Government have made only half the estimated savings on Civil Service costs.

The net saving to the Exchequer from that huge exercise, with the enormous disadvantages to employees that I have spelt out, is only £40 million, not the proposed £200 million. In addition, the net effect is a direct transfer from employees' incomes via taxation to the incomes of employers. That is why we strongly reject it. Those financial effects are another fundamental reason why we oppose these provisions.

This is a mixed Bill and we give it a mixed reception. We support the principle of revaluation of deferred pensions, but we reject the failure to backdate that protection to existing pensioners, at least for three years. We support wider disclosure for occupational pension scheme members, but we insist that it must benefit not only experts, but ordinary members. We welcome the restoration of the 5 per cent. cut in invalidity benefit, but we are appalled that the Government can be so brazen as to make further cuts which will prevent half the potential beneficiaries making any gain. We oppose the major extension of privatisation of sick pay, because, in manifold ways, it will worsen the position of many groups of low-paid and vulnerable workers in terms of sickness provision, will not bring about the public expenditure savings that were promised and will redistribute income from poorer workers to employers.

For all those reasons, we give the Bill conditional support. I shall therefore ask the House to vote for our reasoned amendment.

8.20 pm

Mr. Robert McCrindle (Brentwood and Ongar): I shall deal solely with the occupational pensions aspect in part I of the Bill.

The House will know that for a long time I have been concerned about the problems of early leavers from occupational pension schemes. I suppose it could be said that I have been a thorn in the flesh of successive Governments in pressing on them just the sort of legislation that we are considering.

It was about eight years ago that I first drew to the attention of hon. Members the inequity and injustice which appeared to exist in regard to those who changed their occupations with any frequency. Therefore, it is a considerable personal pleasure for me to be able warmly to welcome the legislation.

The Bill is not perfect. In an ideal world we could no doubt go much further, but, by any reckoning, the Bill is a major step along a road which I have been anxious to travel for some time.

Few people would now contend that it is other than wrong to penalise those whose only crime is that they wish to change employment. Whether on grounds of equity or mobility of labour, there is a strong argument for dealing more fairly with those who change their jobs.

We all know about the different pensions payable to the man who changes jobs two or three times in his working lifetime and the man who stays with his original employer until retirement. The man who, on the face of it, has shown enterprise and initiative by changing jobs, perhaps to go where the work is or to better himself so that he can look after his family, is penalised, whereas the man who stays with his employer gets a pension which may be 50, 60 or 70 per cent. higher than that of the man who has moved around.

Some will say that such a result is no more than the reward for loyalty, but that is an attitude of yesteryear. If we are to encourage enterprise and mobility, we cannot continue to penalise those who change jobs. I have no doubt that the Bill will immeasurably assist in that aim.

I am sure that the Bill will receive almost universal approval. I particularly welcome the fact that not only are we to have preservation or uprating of pension entitlements after an employee has left, but that there is to be the alternative of transferability and, within that, a range of options. It is a fair Bill, which recognises that whether or not the 5 per cent. is adequate it is a reasonable

[Mr. Robert McCrindle]

percentage at which to pitch the required annual revaluation. The range of options available to those who go for transferability is also a move in the right direction.

However, I am a little disturbed that until the speech of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State there had been so little mention of the cost of the proposals or who was likely to have to pay for them. I regret that I find in this world little of the "nothing for nothing" approach.

Earnings on previous employees' contributions have been used to boost the pensions of those who stay with the employer. That is unfair, but it has been cost-effective.

We must presume that the same pensions will be expected by those who have remained with one employer during their working lifetime, yet there is to be more justice given to early leavers. Therefore, the total costs must rise. Thus, it is appropriate for us to ask who will carry the financial burden. Will it be those who have stayed loyal to one employer? That would be unjust in the extreme. Will it be those who have changed employment frequently and who are now to be given some belated justice? If so, it would seem to be a case of giving with one hand and taking away with the other. One reaches the inescapable conclusion that employers will have to find the additional cost.

I am worried that employers with smaller pension schemes may discover that it becomes so difficult to find the extra outlay to meet the provisions of the Bill that they will have to consider seriously the continuation of the scheme. I hope that that will not be the case, and I stress that pension funds will probably have to think carefully about their investment performance. Not all pension schemes perform in such a way as to minimise the cost to the employer. In addition, administration costs of some schemes could be brought under better control. However, there will be additional costs and they will have to be met by employers.

There is no problem for the Government. Even the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) did not suggest that there should be a subvention from Government funds to enable transferability to be implemented. However, just because the Government have no direct responsibility, Ministers cannot sweep these matters under the carpet. On the contrary, they will have seen only this weekend a statement by the Engineering Employers Federation, which is worried that the Government's proposals will impose considerable additional costs on employers. That must be conceded and, therefore, it is important that the Government do not put any additional impositions on occupational pension schemes.

The proposal to give more information to members of pension funds is obviously a move in the right direction. However, much depends on the sort of information that one has in mind. I hope that we shall not become so prone to communicating every jot and tittle of pension fund management that we succeed only in confusing pension fund members with comparative irrelevancies. We should consider providing more information on how the fund is performing, particularly against the expectations that have to be achieved if the promised pensions are to be delivered.

It is right that fund members should be made aware of where money is invested and what steps are being taken to redress any shortfalls on investment returns, but I beg the House not to assume that every member of a pension scheme is accustomed to the jargon of institutional investors. The fundamentals must be communicated to the average member of a scheme, but I hope that such communication will be meaningful.

The Bill is a trailer for the introduction of portable pensions. They were talked about previously as the force which would open the oyster to produce a major step forward in the advancement of a property-owning democracy. In the recent past a more realistic assessment of the limits of what can be achieved by portable pensions has come upon us.

Such a move would extend freedom of choice, assist mobility and ease the pressure on the state system, and to that extent I am in favour of it. The competition that portable pensions would bring to the traditional occupational pensions schemes would do nothing but good. The performance of some occupational schemes has been sluggish, to say the least.

Portable pensions have long-term implications. They would have an effect on occupational pension schemes. Who will opt for a portable pension? I predict that the young or mobile will choose a portable pension. If they leave occupational pension schemes, the imbalance in the age distribution might make some of the occupational schemes unviable.

A good argument can be made for applying some controls on where portable pensions funds can invest pensioners' money. Without controls we run the risk of providing the individual with an inadequate pension, which might force him back on social benefits, which is the antithesis of what the Government wish to achieve.

Although I welcome the broad concepts of portable pensions, we must be careful when introducing them not to destabilise existing occupational schemes. No benefit could be gained from doing that. We should be looking for balance when the successor to the Bill is introduced. A competitive spur can do nothing but good for the existing schemes at the heart of the legislation.

Mr. Tim Smith: My hon. Friend says that young and mobile people will opt for portable pensions, but why should anyone opt for portable pensions if there is no obligation on the employer to make up the contribution?

Mr. McCrindle: That is a considerable defect. If my hon. Friend suggests that he will join me in pressing for a change in that proposal before a scheme is introduced, he will find a ready listener. *[Interruption.]* Some of us know a little about these matters, and hon. Members might do well to pay attention.

Opposition Members should also pay attention to another fundamental and important point which I want to make to the Secretary of State. I cannot welcome the Bill without raising the associated and inseparable topic of the tax treatment of pension funds and contributions. Tax relief applies in three areas—to the contributions to an occupational scheme, to the lump sums that can be taken in lieu of part of a pension and to the fund itself.

The suggestion is that there may be a movement towards removing some or all of those tax reliefs. If there were a move to change tax relief on pension funds' contributions, I should consider that a betrayal which would upset personal budgeting. If that happened, we could no longer make membership of an occupational pension scheme a condition of employment. It would also probably lead to a substantial undermining of occupational

pension schemes, and would have a powerfully adverse political effect. I hope that my right hon. Friend will pay particular attention to that.

If tax exemption on the lump sum which can be taken on retirement is to be the target of changes, many of us believe that, since tax is paid when the lump sum is spent, it would be close to double taxation. It would also compare unfavourably with the position of a person who had tried to arrange for his retirement through an endowment pension scheme, the proceeds of which are free of capital gains tax. The threat that such a change might happen in future is leading people such as senior police officers coming up to retirement age to opt for retirement because they cannot face the thought of the lump sum to which they are entitled being subject to taxation.

If 10 per cent. were levied on the fund itself and the benefits had to remain as promised, that would have to be paid in some way. Once again, one would have to expect improved performance from the fund and turn to the employers. That, allied to the additional costs which are implicit in the Bill's proposals, could be the straw that breaks the camel's back.

I hope that my right hon. Friend will take my comments on board and not fail to communicate the concern which many of us would feel if there were a move towards taxation under one of the headings to which I have referred.

Although my right hon. Friend may be forgiven for not understanding me, I give a warm welcome to the Bill. My welcome is allied to a call for realism about the cost entailed to employers in introducing its provisions. My welcome is also allied to a warning to the Chancellor of the Exchequer that he could yet torpedo all that has been achieved by occupational pension schemes. I hope that it is not unparliamentary to say that the best advice I can give to the Chancellor in this respect is, "Hands off".

8.37 pm

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Cromarty and Skye): On behalf of my right hon. and hon. Friends, I warmly welcome the principle of the Bill.

Mr. Frank Field: Where are they?

Mr. Kennedy: That is like the pot calling the kettle black. In proportional terms, I probably represent the alliance better than those Labour Members present just now represent their party.

We welcome the principle which the Secretary of State is advancing in the Bill. A reform of occupational pensions is long overdue. As the Secretary of State said, unfairnesses have afflicted the so-called early leavers.

The Secretary of State was right to emphasise fairness, freedom of information and the need to encourage job mobility. Although I endorse that thrust, I believe that the Bill could have been more ambitious. The hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. McCrindle) sees the Bill as a forerunner to a further change, and the Secretary of State will probably confirm that.

The Bill is probably only the first step towards any real improvement. We should be cautious, because the American experience of 10 years ago with the employee retirement income security legislation, based on the same principles, caused difficulties with the burdens that it put on employers. It became self-defeating.

Eventually, it thwarted its own purpose. There is some disappointment with the pace that the Government have set themselves. Some say that they are being too cautious but it is probably right to proceed with some caution rather than frenetically in the way that ended with the American experience.

When the scheme is implemented, there will inevitably be financial pressure, and pressure will obviously fall on employers. I am sure that none of us wants employers to be inhibited by additional pressures in taking on new employees. That would run contrary to the spirit of other measures in the Bill.

Comparability between those who have retired and those who are in work has been discussed. There will also be two groups in work. One group will be in the occupational scheme and the other will consist of those who contract out into their own schemes. If inflation is above 5 per cent., there will be a cut in the pension entitlement, and if it is less than 5 per cent., or if public sector wage increases are higher that 5 per cent., some will be caught by that limit. That could be a cause for frustration and division. It will be interesting to hear the Government's thinking on these matters. I am reminded of the value of X in the privatisation of British Telecom. The then Bill included the RPI minus X formula. There will always be arguments about the value of X in terms of the figures that are brought forward as a result of the Bill.

The policy set out in the Bill is that those who change jobs should have the pension entitlement that they have built up in previous employment protected against an inflation rate which has been set at 5 per cent. That rate could be regarded in some circumstances as too high. If there is a target figure against which pension increases are being paid, that measure may be adopted by employees for their pay increases. The annual expectation of a 5 per cent. increase or a 5 per cent. revaluation rate could be inflationary. A 20 per cent. increase in pension costs for employers could act against their interests and the interests generally that the Government wish to promote

The Engineering Employers Federation has said that it would like the rate to be nearer 3 per cent. and to be determined from year to year. That reflects the difficulties that employers could face. It is difficult to make predictions at this stage and we shall have to wait until the scheme is set up and implemented. Like the Government, we are conscious of the doubts of both employee and employer organisations.

Mr. Tim Smith: I thought that the hon. Gentleman was advancing the arguments which have been advanced by the Engineering Employers Federation. Surely there would be inflationary expectations only if the rate of inflation were less than 5 per cent. If the rate of inflation were less than 5 per cent., the increase in deferred pensions would also be less than 5 per cent.

Mr. Kennedy: I am not reciting an argument that has been presented to me by the federation or anyone else. If inflation is running at a rate lower than 5 per cent., there may be expectations. At the same time, the Government must not rest on their laurels and ignore the possibility of inflation increasing once again. It would take only an oil price explosion to ruin the Government's economic policies or those of any other Government.

There is an unfairness because the current percentage calculations are based on final salary. The problem can be overcome if there is an elimination of that criterion. One approach is to take account of the defined contributions

[Mr. Kennedy]

that will be necessary. These contributions should be invested and they should move with the transferee when he or she moves to alternative employment. Those in the City who are involved in assessing possible mergers already consider the pension savings that may accrue when a merger takes place. If two companies are brought together and there is a shedding of staff, that can have a considerable demographic effect on the pension scheme.

A second example that should be considered is that of a holding company that has overall control of two separate organisations from which employees may transfer and who in doing so lose certain entitlements. The Minister is probably aware that between 25 and 33 per cent. of employees are in the younger age group and can be expected to move on elsewhere. What does the Minister think will be the overall effect of that on those who are left in the companies from which they move? They will obviously have less incentive, if any, to withdraw from the scheme. There could be extremely damaging effects on pension schemes for those in the 35 to 40-year age group, and those who are older, who are left with a scheme which is receiving a smaller financial contribution overall. The scheme will offer a less attractive investment and problems will accumulate.

I am conscious that time is passing and I am aware that other hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), wish to participate. That being so, I shall not detain the House for much longer.

The Secretary of State spoke about the need for professional advice in investment policy. Even with professional advice, when stocks are at a low value that can lead to the quality of the investment being reduced. It might be argued that that is the purpose of professional advice. Given the way in which the market works, there may be instances when that happens. That will lead to difficulties for the employees who are involved. It is desirable that we try to make trustees of schemes answerable to employees when they want to know what is happening to their investments, subject to professional advice.

I hope that the Government, in showing that they are willing to take greater steps towards increased scrutiny —for example, with the register—will not bow to the wishes of the employees who tend to want to call the shots when deciding the nature of the investment. I welcome the setting up of the register. It may allow greater information to be made available. There is concern, however, that the register incorporating pension schemes, annual reports and financial documents could result in too much money spent on administration and not enough on the benefits of the scheme.

In principle, we welcome the legislation, although there will be points to be argued at greater length. We shall certainly give the Bill our support.

8.50 pm

Mr. Roger Freeman (Kettering): I welcome the Bill wholeheartedly. I commend my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and his colleagues in the Department for the speed with which they have brought the Bill forward to deal with the urgent problem of the early leaver. The difficulty in comprehending this complicated issue is borne out by the fact that the Opposition Benches are so empty and the fact that the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) made such a dramatic and appalling error when he talked about the current practice in the private sector of indexing the deferred rights of early leavers.

I shall set the record straight. The hon. Member for Oldham, West was incorrect in saying that 70 per cent. of private sector schemes index by up to 8 per cent. the deferred rights of early leavers. The truth is that few schemes in the private sector index in that way; hence the need for the Bill. The hon. Gentleman may have been confused by the provisions for indexing the graduated minimum pension or the provisions for pensions in payment. That error should be corrected and the record set straight.

I shall concentrate on two issues: first, the rate of indexation; and, secondly, the effective date for indexation of deferred pension rights. The Bill provides that for early leavers only service after 1 January 1985 will be indexed. We are not talking about the whole of the pensionable service of an early leaver who leaves the pension scheme after 1 January 1985.

To a certain extent the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Griffiths) were misplaced. The initial effect on industrial and commercial costs of operating a final salary pension scheme will be modest. We are talking of between 1 and 2 per cent. of payroll costs. That is not an excessively onerous provision. I hope—I know that several of my hon. Friends will agree—that some companies will take the initiative and index the whole of those deferred rights for the whole of the qualifying pensionable service. It is right that the Bill should require the much more modest and, I believe, financially acceptable provision for service only after 1 January 1985.

A balance must always be struck between equity and cost. I join my hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. McCrindle), who dealt eloquently with the inequities in the historical provision for early leavers, in commending the Government for introducing provisions to right the great historical wrongs to the early leavers. We must, however, take account of the costs which are ultimately borne by the employer, who is the final guarantor of final salary schemes.

The maximum rate at which early leaver benefits can be indexed is 5 per cent. Last Session I introduced a Bill on the subject. Frankly, I should have preferred a different approach. I would have required pension schemes to make the same increase for deferred pensioners as has been decided for pensions in payment. That would provide equity between the early leaver and the pensioner who received a pension in payment.

I accept that the Bill provides broadly the same thing. Hon. Members may be aware that 5 per cent. is the recommended target rate for increasing pensions in payment. This dates back to the Occupational Pensions Board's recommendation. That is a target, not a legislative requirement. The Bill contains a legislative requirement to index the early leaver's benefits up to a maximum of 5 per cent. I accept that one of the benefits of the medium-term fiancial strategy during the next few years will be to hold inflation below 5 per cent—as we hope that it will decline from that level—and therefore the provisions in the Bill are equitable and just. In practice, most companies will be increasing pensions in payment for the pensioner

who has retired at the same rate as the increase that is awarded for the pensionable service of the early leaver earned after 1 January 1985.

Transferability is confusing. My hon. Friends the Members for Brentwood and Ongar and for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) touched on this point. The House must appreciate the fact that the transferability rights written into the Bill are the other side of the coin to indexing the rights of the early leaver. There is no enhanced value to transfer without the indexation provisions for the early leaver's benefits. It is only because the first part of the Bill provides for the indexation of the frozen or deferred rights that one gets an enhanced value to transfer if one chooses to move those rights to another scheme or a portable pension plan. The transferability rights are complementary to the provisions on indexation.

I echo what my hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar said about taxation. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said that there would be no problem for private sector employers in paying the 1 or 2 per cent. increase in payroll costs because recently investment returns had been good. Surely that is the key. If there are dramatic moves in next year's Budget—for example, taxation of investment income and realised capital gains from occupational pension schemes—we will be pulling the rug out from the excellent two feet which the Bill introduces — provisions for indexation and transferability. I hope that the Ministers in the Department of Health and Social Security will remind our right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer of the importance of retaining stability in the tax regime.

I commend the provisions on disclosure. It is a great sadness that hitherto it was not until one reached the age of 50 or 55 that one began to worry about one's pension. I hope that the provisions contained in the Bill for greater disclosure and access to information by employees will encourage those aged 20 and 25 to make proper provision for pensions.

8.59 pm

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): Although I am sure that it was unintentional, the Secretary of State misled the House when he concentrated upon the pension proposals. One can see how misleading it was, because so far no one has disagreed with the substance of the proposals. My hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) made the valid point that the measures do not go far enough, and the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. McCrindle), who brings considerable expertise to these debates, was laying down marks of caution to his hon. Friends. He was telling them that they should go so far but no further. However, there is no dispute about the nature of the reforms being proposed.

There was agreement about the proposal relating to the revaluing of pensions and the disclosure of information. I do not believe that any of us will vote against them. There have been some modest changes.

We are really debating the compulsory savings that most people have to make. They are compulsory savings to occupational private schemes, and we should be judging whether we are giving those people, who have no choice in the matter, a fair deal. We see how far we are from giving them a fair deal when the Secretary of State reminds us that even taking into account the value of a person's home, their right to a pension is probably their "biggest single asset", and I quote him there. When wealth figures are published, the tendency is to add pension rights into them, yet when one considers the Bill against those figures we see how modest the reforms are that the Government are proposing.

When most people think about wealth, they think about their rights to realise an asset and to make a choice about it. The pension contributions are a major form of compulsory saving yet most people cannot gain access to the assets until they retire, and then it is on terms which are not determined by them.

If the Government were non-paternalistic, as they often like to tell us they are, they would bring forward a measure which would allow people if they so wished to cash their pensions long before their pensionable age. In other words, we would say, "If you believe that you can make a better deal by a business initiative yourself, or to invest the funds yourself, we will give you the right to take the value of your pension now to do just that." Of course this would have to be accompanied by an understanding that if that initiative failed, there would only be the state scheme to fall back on. It is some measure of how timid the Government are, that we are discussing only these reforms tonight. They show also how paternalistic the Government are because they would throw up their hands in horror rather than bring forward such a measure.

Mr. Yeo: Apart from my amusement at the hon. Gentleman's apparent condemnation of the paternalistic attitude, it is possible for someone with a personal portable pension to borrow against the value of that pension. Does that not go a long way towards giving people in the freedom of choice that the hon. Gentleman wishes them to have?

Mr. Field: I am not sure why the hon. Gentleman finds it amusing that I should put forward non-paternalistic views. In every contribution I make, I try to put forward libertarian rather than paternalistic views. He is right to say that that severe disadvantage can, to some extent, be overcome if one can find someone to lend money against that accrued value. As he is aware, that is not always possible.

We shall nod through these proposals. In Committee, we shall put down amendments to try and make them more effective, and the Government, with the help of the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar—if he is allowed on the Committee—and the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith), will vote them down.

There are one or two other measures in the Bill which have already been welcomed by most speakers. There has been a general welcome that the 5 per cent. abatement is being restored—if only to half of those who have had their pensions abated, and for the fact that elderly women pensioners are to be treated equally with male pensioners.

The main part of the Bill, however, is about extending the statutory sick pay scheme from eight to 26 weeks. I wish to address myself to that. As my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) said, this is a major measure of privatisation and I find it strange that the Government did not wish to tell the House that such was the case. They are proud of such measures and usually take great pains to tell us that another election pledge has been fulfilled.

Hon. Members and their constituents outside are puzzled to know why the change is taking place. The Secretary of State gave two rather vague reasons. He said,

[Mr. Field]

first, that we must build on success, but he did not say on what success we would be building. Then he said that it "made sense". But does it?

The Minister will probably remember that on 3 November 1983 one of the Government's supporters asked whether the statutory sick pay scheme would be extended. The reply from the then Minister for Social Security was:

"We have no plans at present to extend the scope of the statutory sick pay scheme."

He said that there had been discussions to extend it in a very small way but went on to say:

"In the light of the comments received, we have decided not to proceed with its extension."—[*Official Report*, 3 November 1983; Vol. 47, c. 452.]

So in November 1983 we learned that there was to be no move towards extending the scheme.

It is of interest to go back to the original debate in Committee on the Bill which introduced the eight weeks statutory sick pay scheme. In that debate one of the Government's own supporters suggested that it would make sense not to have eight weeks but to have all the sickness benefit paid by employers. The then Minister for Social Security—not the one who is to reply tonight—gave three reasons why we should be rejecting an extension of the sick pay scheme. First, he said that, in the eight weeks scheme being proposed, about 90 per cent. of people drawing sickness benefit were covered, so why bother to extend the scheme? Secondly, he said that, even if the scheme were to be extended, there would be very few staff savings, and that was one of the original attractions in introducing the statutory sick pay scheme. Then we suggested a third reason, and the Minister replied:

"Further, after eight weeks about 40 per cent. of the working population is no longer covered by occupational sick pay schemes."

We have heard a good deal tonight about the wonders of occupational sick pay schemes, but not about the important point about which the Minister for Social Security reminded us in Committee on the original Bill. He went on to say:

"For that group it is more important that financial provision be tuned to their family circumstances. While it is true that supplementary benefit to top up SSP is available to employees who qualify, it is administratively simpler for us to pay sickness benefit and supplementary benefit together rather than to pay supplementary benefit only."

As though the issue should not be left there, later in the debate the Minister returned to the theme and told us:

"If employers took over the whole of the sickness benefit scheme . . . or if we were to extend that period beyond eight weeks, there would be problems with employees' families. There has already been criticism of the sick pay scheme on the basis that it provides for flat rate payment, irrespective of family circumstances, and there is the fall-back on supplementary benefit. That argument would be much reinforced if we were to carry the period beyond eight weeks." — [*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 15 December 1981; c. 156-7.]

They were the three reasons, which seemed so compelling, against extending the scheme beyond eight weeks. However, if I remember correctly, the Government put the Whips on and voted against the amendment that was orginally proposed by their own side.

Therefore, we are still left with the question why the measure makes such good sense now when it did not make sense when we originally considered the introduction of the limited period of statutory sick pay. The answer is in the explanatory and financial memorandum of the Bill. The Government have had to deliver some cuts. They have delivered them to the tune of at least £200 million. While the Secretary of State has been successful in presenting himself to the press as resisting Treasury cuts—he will be supported now, thank goodness, on both sides of the House, in resisting social security cuts—this appears to be one cut that he has willingly delivered to the Treasury.

Therefore, the reason why we are debating this major extension is not that it will be better for our constituents, not that they will get a better deal, but that the Government are making a further reduction in social security provision. The Minister for Social Security shakes his head. I shall listen carefully not only to what he says now but to his replies to some of the other questions to which he will have to address himself when he winds up.

Mr. Newton: I shall say more about his matter, so I shall not go into the details now. I hope that the hon. Gentleman, who is always very fair, will acknowledge that family circumstances have been somewhat altered by the abolition today of child dependency additions to short-term benefits.

Mr. Field: The circumstances have been altered to some extent. The Minister has some cheek to get up and refer to abolishing additions paid to claimants with children. He says that the situation is now less rough on them than it would have been had that cut not been made originally. He gets full marks for cheek, but I do not think that he will fool many people outside the Chamber.

The Minister may have had time to consult the Library brief prepared by Julia Lourie for those participating in the debate. If he has done so, he will realise that the measure goes against one of the themes in the Conservative general election manifestos of 1983 and 1979. They said that the Conservative party was the party of the family, and favoured those with children compared with those without children. In the brief prepared for all hon. Members, Julia Lourie says:

"Sickness benefit is neither taxable nor subject to deductions. Thus a married man receiving £60 would receive only £32·26 SSP net (c.f. £44·05 sickness benefit). But a single man earning £100 would receive £37·34 SSP as opposed to £27·25 sickness benefit."

So when the Secretary of State tells the House that it makes sense to make the change, it makes sense if the Government are committed to penalising those with children, but it is the exact opposite of sense for the Conservative party that fought two general elections saying that it was in the business of protecting families with children.

I should like to consider some of the other problems of the scheme. Any Government who had not introduced the measure in haste under pressure from the Treasury to save money presumably could have told us a little more about two other important aspects of the scheme. First, I should have thought that we would be told about the policing of the benefit, given the figures quoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West from the small businesses groups, which are finding an error rate of one in four payments. That is not much out of line with the figures published by the Government, giving an error rate of about one in six of sickness benefit claimants investigated.

I know that the Government figures include over-payments as well as under-payments, but under-payments are bad because, unless the inspector tells the person, the chances are that he will not know of the under-payment,

and no doubt over-payments are clawed back by employers, just as the Department of Health and Social Security claws back over-payments in benefit. If it had not been a rushed measure, and if it had not been mainly concerned with delivering some cuts to the Treasury, why, when he introduced the measure, did the Secretary of State not tell us a little about the extra policing for the scheme to ensure that people get the right introduced in the Bill?

There is an even more disturbing aspect to the Bill. If the Bill had not been a rushed measure, would not the Secretary of State have been able to tell us something about those who will be eligible for invalidity benefit after the six months of sickness benefit? How will they fit into the scheme? It is extraordinary that we should be presented with a major change in the welfare state, affecting not only those who have paid in for sickness benefit but affecting entitlement to invalidity benefit, while at the same time the Minister says that we shall have to wait until the Committee stage before we know who will be affected. If we are so told, this will be the first Committee stage of a social security Bill on which I have served since 1979 during which we shall have been given the details. I look forward to that experience.

The Secretary of State has misled the House by emphasising almost exclusively the pension changes in the Bill. Those changes are very modest. No hon. Member will vote against them, although some of my hon. Friends and other hon. Members may well try to make them more radical.

We should, however, study the part of the Bill which concerns sickness benefit. It involves a major privatisation in the welfare state, introduced to effect savings to the tune of at least £200 million, and it will mean cuts for all too many of our constituents. Nevertheless, it has been introduced in such a rush that, despite his ability at the Dispatch Box, I suspect that the Minister for Social Security may well not be able to fill in all the details when he replies.

9.17 pm

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): My right hon. Friend has told us that there are 90,000 occupational pension schemes with 11 million members, and funds in excess of £100 billion. The hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) has told us why, in his view, the extension of statutory sick pay from eight weeks to 28 weeks is fundamentally objectionable. Both proposals are of major importance. Yet only two Labour Members and one alliance Member are present. It is an appalling reflection on the Opposition that they should take so little interest in the Bill.

Mr. Kennedy: How many Conservative Members are present?

Mr. Smith: I shall confine my remarks to part I of the Bill. The Bill imposes obligations on occupational pension schemes. Such schemes are essentially voluntary arrangements. It is important to recognise that fact at the start of any debate on pension schemes, because, in theory at any rate, any occupational pension scheme may be wound up at any time, should the employer choose that it should. If we place too great a financial burden on occupational pension schemes, there is a real danger that many small schemes may be wound up.

Some people say—it has already been said from the Front Bench this evening—that the Bill provides too little, too late. However, I believe that the Government were right to give pension funds the opportunity to put their own house in order, and that has been the main cause of the delay. The pension funds failed voluntarily to introduce revaluation of deferred pensions, so the Bill is now necessary. With one major exception, I welcome the provisions in part I. The exception relates to what I believe to be an important omission—the failure to introduce a comprehensive statutory framework for pension schemes.

Last February a consultative document, entitled "Greater Security for Rights and Expectations of Members of Occupational Pension Schemes", was published.

According to the consultative document, pension schemes are subject to the general law of trusts. The document noted that that gives rise to two main problems. First, there is lack of clarity of definition of legal rights and obligations of all the parties to schemes — employers, employees, members and trustees and their professional advisers. Secondly, trust law makes no particular provision for the day-to-day administration of pension schemes.

The document also noted that, in its 1980 report, the Wilson committee recommended that there should be a new legal framework for pension schemes—a pension schemes Act. In 1982, Professor Gower supported the case for reforming legislation in his discussion document. I therefore regret that the Government have not taken the opportunity to clarify the legal rights and obligations of the various parties to pension schemes. The only reason given by the Government in their consultative document was that opinion now seems to have moved substantially in favour of retaining trust law as the appropriate legal basis. No evidence has been given to support that assertion. I believe that it would have been much simpler and clearer if, in one Act of Parliament, each party to a pension scheme could find set out his rights and duties.

The consulative document said that the Government proposed to amend employment protection legislation to require employers to inform employees of their pension rights and the extent to which they form part of their contract of employment. That does not appear in the Bill. I assume, therefore, that it is a matter for the Department of Employment. Perhaps my hon. Friend, in his winding-up speech, will say when the change will be made. Subject to that important reservation I welcome part I.

The 5 per cent. revaluation of deferred pensions from 1 January 1985 is a compromise proposal, but it is about right. There must be a ceiling for funded schemes. A minority of the Occupational Pensions Board wanted 8·5 per cent., or the increase in average earnings if less; the majority wanted 5 per cent.; and, in a late bid, the Engineering Employers Federation said that it wanted 3 per cent. At 5 per cent., or the increase in prices, the Bill provides the right amount.

The important thing is that the principle is right. In the past, stayers have been advantaged at the expense of early leavers. Employers have argued that they are in business to encourage people to stay, not leave. That may be so, but the Government must take a wider view of the consequences for mobility of labour. The Bill does that.

The transferability provisions are welcome for the same reasons. As I said in an intervention in my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's speech, the key element missing from the Bill is the basis of calculation of transfer values. That is critical, and I hope that it will be possible for my right hon. Friend to reach agreement with the

[Mr. Smith]

actuaries. Nevertheless, I was glad to receive his assurance that, in the absence of such agreement, regulations will clearly set out the basis of calculations.

The disclosure and registration requirements are also welcome, because they will increase the accountability of pension schemes. In the *Financial Times* last week, Eric Short complained that only the pensions expert will understand the information provided. The same could be said of companies' disclosure and registration requirements, but nobody suggests that they should be changed for that reason. As with companies, published pensions information will be scrutinised closely by those who have an interest, and the accountability of schemes will increase accordingly. Many schemes will also provide simplified versions of their reports and accounts to members, as do many companies. Moreover, the consultative document made it clear that regulations will require schemes to provide members with individual benefit statements. That will be of special value because pension scheme members are often not aware of the precise benefits of their scheme.

The registrar's job will be similar to that of the Registrar of Companies. I wonder whether there might not be some administrative saving if the Registrar of Companies was given the job and became the Registrar of Companies and Pension Schemes.

In one article last week, Eric Short talked of the Government's proposals for radical changes for occupational pension schemes. In another, he spoke of "a mouse of a solution".

However, to complain that the Bill does nothing for existing early leavers is completely unrealistic. Apart from the restrospective nature of such a proposal, a huge cost would fall on employers. The hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) gave no indication of what it would cost even to backdate these provisions to 1981. Making them open-ended would put an intolerable burden on employers. Bearing in mind the voluntary nature of schemes, I believe that the Government have gone as far as they could reasonably be expected to go. I welcome that.

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. In the past you have afforded me gracious patience when I have experienced difficulty with the procedures of the House. The hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith), for whatever reason, stated that only two Labour party Members and one member of the SDP were taking part in the debate. Any hon. Member who kept his eyes open and saw less than double would know that that was quite untrue. When do truth and untruth become distinguishable, and when is untruth permissible?

Mr. Speaker: Every hon. Member must accept responsibility for what he says. It is not for me to adjudicate on such matters. However, if the hon. Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook) wishes to make a speech, perhaps he will catch the eye of the Chair.

9.26 pm

Mr. Alan Howarth (Stratford-on-Avon): I add my personal congratulations to my right hon. Friend and my welcome to the Bill in which he is tackling the problem of the early leaver. There has been a widespread and serious problem about the early leaver and his unsatisfactory treatment, and it was right to deal with it.

By the same token, it is disappointing that the pension fund industry was so unwilling to address itself to this problem and that it was so dilatory in its response to the report of the Occupational Pensions Board in 1981. Despite multiple and various proddings, the industry refused to come forward with constructive suggestions for a change. Indeed, according to a report from the National Association of Pension Funds, in 1982 82 per cent. of private funds were still granting no increase on deferred pensions. Far from proposing constructive reforms the industry indulged in a curmudgeonly and graceless rearguard action against constructive changes proposed by others—for example, the Centre for Policy Studies.

I warmly congratulate my right hon. Friend on introducing his inquiry into provision for retirement; on insisting that these issues should be thoroughly scrutinised and addressed; on the open manner in which he conducted the inquiry, which ensured that the views of the public as well as the pensions establishment were heard; and on pressing ahead with the introduction of this legislation.

The improved deal for early leavers embodied in the Bill is an elementary act of justice. It will also be of major economic benefit. In so far as it removes one of the principal impediments to labour mobility it will tend to make the economy more flexible, responsive to change and innovative, and over time it will help to generate more jobs. In passing, I express the hope that the Minister for Housing and Construction will take his cue from my right hon. Friend and act to remove rent control, the other major impediment to labour mobility.

Two major uncertainties loom over the Bill. The first is the basis for transfer values. One reason why early leavers have been in such an unsatisfactory predicament is that their benefits have been cut in two ways simultaneously—by the conservative calculations of the actuaries of both the fund from which they were departing and the new employer's fund.

There are genuine difficulties in arriving at an agreed basis for transfer values. The age structure and other circumstances of each fund may vary considerably, and there is large scope for different assessments of future prospects for inflation, increases in earnings and returns on investment. The members of the actuaries' profession, who are a clever and a conscientious breed of men, may be more prone to draw attention to the complexities and difficulties in arriving at an agreed basis than to put forward a basis for a ready and liberal assessment of transfer values, and I suspect that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State may once again be fairly vigorous in encouraging a concentration of minds. It would be good if the basis upon which transfer values are calculated were agreed relatively soon so that Parliament can understand the full circumstances for which it is legislating.

The second major uncertainty that looms over the Bill is, as my hon. Friends the Members for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. McCrindle) and for Kettering (Mr. Freeman) said, the intention of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer in respect of the tax treatment of pension funds. The Chancellor should not be casting around for new burdens to lay upon pension funds. He should be concentrating on reducing inflation, because that has wrought havoc to the position of early leavers. If the Government are to require funds to revalue deferred benefits to take account of inflation, it is the more incumbent upon the Government to reduce inflation. Therefore, the Chancellor should concentrate on limiting

public expenditure, not increasing taxes. I commend to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor the practical maxim of Marie Stopes: it is more important to turn off the tap than it is to mop up the bath water.

If my right hon. Friend the Chancellor introduces a more unfavourable treatment for pension funds, I fear that he will undermine and make a mockery of the reforms introduced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services. Moreover, he would be spiting himself and his successors. If he taxes lump sum pension benefits he will strike a blow against the private investor. That is presumably not his wish; it is certainly in contradiction of other purposes. If, in other ways, he makes the tax treatment of pension funds less favourable, he will add to the burdens on employers, making it more expensive for them to achieve equivalent pension benefits for their staff. He will almost certainly end by increasing the pressures on public expenditure and increasing the demands on the state earnings-related pension scheme. He will also make it much harder to extend personal and portable pension schemes.

If I have one regret about the Bill, it is that my right hon. Friend has not chosen to take a decisive step forward to create a framework in which there can be the option of personal and portable pensions for everyone. The benefits of that would be great, and perhaps I could find common ground with the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) in recognising that personal and portable pensions would tend to make for greater choice and responsibility. They would be valuable in encouraging recognition by the individual that his interests should be identified with the profitability of enterprise. They would help to promote self-employment and small businesses, to which we must look in the future, not least for the generation of the new jobs that we need.

In my view, many purchase schemes are preferable, given the non-inflationary conditions which it is the duty of the Government to provide, in that they do not involve expectations and promises of pension benefits that have not yet been earned. That is safer and healthier.

We should in this debate consider our broad philosophy on pension provision and our expectations for the future in pensions. The post-war national insurance legislation, deriving from the Beveridge report, was based on the proposition that it is the role of the state to provide against destitution, to ensure that the individual is not destitute, but that it is not the role of the state to provide or guarantee a higher standard of living. However, the National Insurance Act 1959 introduced graduated pensions, and the Social Security Pensions Act 1975 introduced the earnings-related scheme. Between them, they marked a clear change and the implementation of a different approach—one that said that the state should provide more amply.

In our debate, we should recognise at least two possibilities. One is that the state earnings-related pension scheme presupposes an economic performance by this country over the coming years that we have no right to assume. We should not have excessive confidence that that will take place. Secondly, we should recognise that there will be—there already are—structural changes in the pattern of work. It may become an anachronistic view to suppose that final salaries are necessarily peak salaries. For those reasons, we should at least question whether we should expect the paternalistic approach, whether state or corporate paternalism, to continue.

We should do our best to make sure that we make a success of the state earnings-related pension scheme. We should, with the new flexibility and the reforms that my right hon. Friend wishes to introduce into occupational pensions, accept that they will play an improved and valued role in the provision for retirement. It is also right to recognise that there is a basic function of the state—to ensure that there are stable financial conditions. It will be as well if my right hon. Friend proceeds to introduce personal and portable pensions and provide a framework in which there can be maximum individual responsibility, in which citizens can freely and in their own responsibly chosen ways make provision for their retirement.

9.37 pm

Mr. John Watts (Slough): The principle of protection for the value of deferred pensions and the extension of the right to a fair transfer value will be as widely welcomed outside the House as they have been in the Chamber. However, I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will recognise that translating that principle into practice is a complex matter. Witness to that is the complexity of the Bill's schedules, some of which I tried to understand, with little success, earlier today. Therefore, I was pleased to hear my right hon. Friend say that discussions with the actuarial profession are continuing. I am saying that not just because I am an adviser to the Institute of Actuaries, but because it is important that the implementation of these principles should not be hampered by any technical flaws in the legislation.

If I had one criticism of the proposals, it would be directed towards the proposed register and registrar. I am not sure why we need to have a new bureaucracy and why it is not possible for the Occupational Pensions Board to undertake certain necessary additional functions. I remain to be convinced that the register, as distinct from the extension of rights to information for members, will bring benefits that are commensurate with either public expenditure costs or the compliance costs that will all on pensions schemes.

The Bill makes a valuable contribution to the protection of pension rights, but, as some of my hon. Friends have pointed out, this will not be without additional costs. Therefore, I add support to what was said by my hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar, who urged my right hon. Friend the Chancellor not to make changes in the tax regime that will undermine the valuable work of this legislation in enhancing and improving pension rights.

Any of the proposed changes in tax treatment, over which there has been speculation, will necessarily be to the detriment of pension benefits or make pension provision more costly. However attractive in the short term it may appear to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer to suck off some money from pension funds, such a view would be short-sighted and in the longer term the burden on the social security system could be considerably increased if the result were to discourage employers and employees from making adequate provision for retirement.

9.40 pm

Mr. Tim Yeo (Suffolk, South): Whatever may have been said earlier, accurately or inaccurately, about the number of Opposition Members present during the debate, it is a pleasure to be the fourth consecutive Government

[Mr. Tim Yeo]

supporter to be called. No doubt this is the pattern that we are likely to see in the future, but it also reflects the concern of my right hon. and hon. Friends for this important but not very controversial subject.

I endorse entirely what my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) said in sounding a warning to the Chancellor of the Exchequer about the adverse consequences for pensions and pension funds of any attempt to change their taxation treatment.

I address myself briefly to part I, for which the ground has been well prepared by the Government. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on the consultation process which has been gone through, as a result of which the Bill contains very few surprises. I hope that that will make the task of the House in considering it a light one.

The Bill contains measures which are most welcome and which are in the interests of the members of occupational pension schemes, especially early leavers. I endorse the concern which was expressed for that group by my hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. McCrindle). Their rights are improved in a number of ways, all of which are desirable, but, as has been pointed out, there is no such thing as a free lunch. The cost of these improvements has been estimated at between 1 and 2 per cent. of the payroll, and it is employers who will bear that cost. To that extent the effect of the Bill will be to increase employment costs, and thus it may represent an influence, albeit a marginal one, in the direction of higher unemployment. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor's reference to higher real wage costs as a cause of unemployment cannot be ignored. The possibility must also exist that some smaller employers will choose not to offer occupational pension schemes.

Looking at the specific items in the Bill, a provision to extend entitlement to preserve benefits to early leavers under the age of 26 but with five years' service is sensible. The revaluation of deferred pensions by 5 per cent. or the increase in prices is also very much in the interests of early leavers. But it must be recognised that many employers are worried about the cost of this provision. However, it will force them to make a more rational assessment of how the burden of paying for pension rights should be allocated. For far too long the absence of these rights for early leavers has been the lifeline through which employers have been able to fund the cost of their pension schemes.

The Opposition's argument that the 5 per cent. level is too low is quite ludicrous, bearing in mind that they presided over a period of Government with very high rates of inflation during which no attempt was made to look after the position of early leavers. Furthermore, the suggestion that the provisions could now be backdated to 1981 is another example of how the Opposition wish to support an apparently attractive amendment, the costs of which would be enormous and would be borne by employers, and the only direct effect of which would be to destroy other people's jobs. Once again we see the Opposition defending the privileged people who are already in secure work, as they are members of occupational pension schemes, at the expense of the unemployed. This will be seen right across Opposition policies. They are likely to damage the interests of unemployed people.

I welcome unreservedly the requirements in clause 3 and schedule 2 for the wider disclosure of information about pension schemes to members and prospective members. For far too long information has been limited and too difficult to obtain. The wider scrutiny which should result from the greater disclosure of this information will be beneficial.

One consequence of that scrutiny may be to uncover inadequacies in the record keeping and administration of some existing schemes. I note the comment of the Occupational Pensions Board about that in the advice that it gave to the inquiry earlier this year.

The only note of caution that I would sound is about the complexity of the subject and the difficulty which some lay people may have in understanding some of the information which will be made available. The benefit of providing that information may be lost for individuals if they cannot understand what it is they are being told. Those complications are a problem for the professionals as well.

A lesson may be drawn from the experience since the passing of the Social Security Pensions Act 1975. More than 450 statutory instruments have been made. The Bill's provsions for the disclosure of information will again be effected by regulation. I merely express the hope that they will not be excessively numerous, so that members of schemes and their advisers can cope with the flood.

The Bill's provisions on occupational pensions are helpful to members. They will impose some costs on employers and may be complicated for laymen, but they are thoroughly desirable and they deserve the full support of the House.

9.45 pm

Sir Brandon Rhys Williams (Kensington): I am sorry that I have not heard the speeches in the debate other than the opening speech of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, but I am glad to be able to make a short contribution as "explication de vote".

In 1970 the Conservative party manifesto said:

> "We will ensure that everyone can take their pension rights with them when they change their job",

but after the election we lost our nerve. Now we have this Bill nearly 15 years later and, frankly, it is disappointing. I regret that I shall be unable to support the Bill in the Lobby on Second Reading.

The Bill follows the pusillanimous and misconceived Brimelow report, in that it places emphasis on preservation rather than transferability—which is the right answer to the early leaver's problem. It does too little for job mobility. It takes too long to tackle the unfairness of the treatment of early leavers. It chooses the 5 per cent. formula, which is neither natural justice nor actuarially defensible.

The Government should be helping early leavers now, not in the 21st century. They should be protecting rights which have already accrued in occupational pension schemes. The Government should have been ready to spell out now the terms for calcualting transfer values. I listened with interest to what my right hon. Friend said on that subject. He still might do so and incorporate a fair formula for the transfer values in Committee. I hope that he will do so, but in the meantime I am bound to reserve judgment. The Bill does not do enough to protect the rights of the early leavers.

9.47 pm

Mrs. Margaret Beckett (Derby, South): I hope that no one will mind if I welcome the remarks of the hon. Member for Kensington (Sir B. Rhys Williams), if only because they form such a welcome contrast to the trail of praise of the Government which we have had from those Conservative Members who spoke before him.

The hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. McCrindle) said that the Bill is the trailer in many ways for the Government's personal pensions provisions that are likely to come in later years and in a later Bill. The more one looks at the trailer and the more one sees the reactions of people to those proposals, once so welcomed and still spoken of by the Secretary of State as if nothing has happened since he first introduced them, the more one realises the likelihood that, as so often in motion pictures, the trailer may be exciting but the main feature will be extremely disappointing.

Mr. McCrindle: Wait and see.

Mrs. Beckett: We shall all have to wait and see, at least for another year.

When I say that the main feature may be disappointing I have in mind some of the reservations about the sort of proposals that the Secretary of State is laying before us as a trailer or that he seems likely to lay before us in the main Bill and which have already begun to be expressed since he gave us a description of those proposals in such glowing terms.

In its evidence in July the Institute of Actuaries made one or two pertinent remarks about the dangers of the kind of arrangements that the Secretary of State is discussing. For example, it suggested that in its view such arrangements would lead to less pension provision overall. Furthermore, and perhaps even more alarmingly, if that were not the case it suggested that that would be disadvantageous in another respect in that if the proposals result in a substantial increase in the number of people contracted out from existing schemes, contribution rates to the national insurance fund generally would have to be raised. Those are only some of a number of substantial criticisms that have been made in that document and many others.

That evidence was given to the Government's inquiry in July. That inquiry has not yet finished and I therefore wonder why the Government have chosen to bring this trailer—a part Bill—before us. Their full proposals will be delayed for at least another year. All Governments complain about the dangers of retrospectivity, but surely the Government could have announced their intentions now and allowed that much retrospectivity in legislating for the full scheme. I hope that the Minister for Social Security will be able to cast some light on the decision about timing.

We are interested not only in the information that will be disclosed to experts but in the idea of a brochure that will be more comprehensible to ordinary mortals. However, I wish to raise one matter, partly to discover whether I have understood the Government's proposal correctly and partly to ask the Minister for Social Security to deal with the alarm that I feel at my understanding of the implications of what the Government are saying.

If I understood the Secretary of State correctly—and that understanding certainly accords with what was said in the consultation document on occupational pensions—it seems that no requirements will be made about disclosure for schemes that cover only individuals. Therefore, I assume that the disclosure provisions will not apply to the sort of personal pension proposals that we have been discussing.

Conservative Members may believe that a person with a personal pension will know all the necessary details, but most people recognise that it is likely that many of those who choose to opt for personal pensions will do so within the framework of a more general scheme provided by, say, insurance companies. Therefore, I hope to hear from the Minister tonight or in Committee what is intended in terms of the disclosure of information. We shall be alarmed if it proves that in this area, too, there will be less protection than is afforded under existing schemes.

Almost all the hon. Members who have taken part in the debate have concentrated on the part of the Bill dealing with occupational pensions. I wish to concentrate on the other part of the Bill.

I was surprised to hear the hon. Member for Suffolk, South (Mr. Yeo) speak so fulsomely about the Bill and how wonderful it was, while not mentioning the proposals for invalidity pension or the changes proposed for statutory sick pay. I thought that the hon. Gentleman felt strongly about the interests of the sick and disabled. He has been known to lecture the Opposition about his concern for those people, yet he was so anxious to praise the Government tonight that he had not a word to say on behalf of the sick and disabled. Perhaps I should be charitable and say that it was because the hon. Gentleman wanted to paise the Government that he did not feel able to mention the proposals in the second part of the Bill.

Why are the proposals on invalidity pensions in the Bill? There is no need for primary legislation to restore the 5 per cent. cut in invalidity benefit. When the abatements in unemployment benefit and invalidity allowance were restored in earlier years, it was done in the annual uprating.

If there is no need for primary legislation, and if the Government are so delighted about the fact that they have been able to restore the 5 per cent. abatement, there is no need for them to wait until the Bill has received the Royal Assent; they could restore the 5 per cent. abatement now, by means of a fresh uprating statement. Therefore, I should like the Government to tell us why, if they feel able to be generous to those on invalidity pension, they cannot be generous this year instead of next year.

I suspect that one reason why the Government are taking action in primary legislation is that, although they are pleased with what they are doing in restoring the 5 per cent. cut, they are taking away with the other hand, as is usual with everything that the Government give in social security. As with all social security under this Government, there is always another side of the coin which takes away a little more than the Government give.

The Secretary of State says that the decision to offset the earnings-related supplement to invalidity pension against the invalidity allowance is a logical step. Surely the earnings-related supplement relates to what the individual earned when he was able to work. The invalidity allowance, by contrast, specifically relates to what an individual has been unable to earn. It is intended specifically as a compensation for loss of earning power because of disability. That is why it is related to age. There can be no question of an offset. The two components relate

[Mrs. Beckett]

to two different areas. There can be no other excuse for the Government offsetting one against the other than a desire to make savings.

During the passage of the Social Security Act 1975, Conservatives pressed the Labour Government to be more generous and to make greater concessions on the earnings-related supplement. The late Brian O'Malley referred to the separate nature of the invalidity allowance and said that he would have had to make concessions had the invalidity allowance not existed to cover the different circumstances of lost earnings.

The Secretary of State admitted that many invalidity pensioners will not receive the full 5 per cent. Certainly, they will receive no recompense for the money that they have lost as a result of the cuts over the years. For example, someone who is now receiving £2·50 earnings-related supplement and £2·48 addition will, under the proposals, lose the whole of the £2·48. Someone on a similar earnings-related supplement plus a £7·50 age addition—the maximum—will lose £3. Unfortunately, it is typical of this Government that they take comparatively small sums from those who can least afford to lose them. That record is bringing them more and more into disrepute.

It is suggested that the current position of invalidity pensioners will be protected, although only in cash terms. That means that they could lose all the benefit related to inflation in next year's uprating, leaving aside that before then there might be other changes.

Sometimes I think that I have a nasty, suspicious mind. When I heard that the Government were to restore the 5 per cent. abatement of invalidity benefit, I immediately thought that that was because the Chancellor would tax it in the next Budget. I looked back through all the parliamentary answers, which assured us that that was too difficult and out of the question. I thought that perhaps I was mistaken. I was gratified to have my faith—or lack of faith—in human nature on the Government Benches restored when I noted that the Secretary of State and the Minister were noticeably unwilling to give an assurance that invalidity benefit would not be taxable from the date of the Budget. Perhaps they are being even less generous than we supposed.

What will happen to people who are currently to be protected, although only in cash terms, if there is a break in their entitlement to benefit? The rules for means testing child dependant additions suggest that if there is a break in entitlement for as little as one day a week the person becomes a new claimant and loses whatever protection might be available under the Bill. I look for an assurance that that will not happen.

The final area of Government involvement with invalidity benefit is the earnings rule. Again, I seek information from the Minister. I am sure that the House is aware that there are two different earnings rules. One rule applies to women and the other to men. One rule is significantly more generous than the other and for once it is the one that applies to women. The Secretary of State said on 12 November that, although he intends to harmonise the two rules and to have one common rule, the details are still under consideration. I take it from the Minister's nod that the details are still under consideration. If he cannot give us the figures, perhaps he can tell us whether it is likely that the new earnings rule will be as generous as the more generous one that now exists. Is it likely to be a little lower in value or a little higher?

It being Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at this day's sitting, the Social Security Bill and the Motion relating to Ways and Means may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Mr. Sainsbury.]*

Social Security Bill

Question again proposed, That the amendment be made:—

10 pm

Mrs. Beckett: The final part of the Bill deals with statutory sick pay, a subject on which Conservative Members were notably silent. My hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) asked why the Government are not taking more pride in this area. It is the privatisation of sick pay, and normally they are proud of privatisation. It is an election pledge that has been fulfilled. In another sense, it is not. When the Government boasted so much about privatisation they made it less than clear that it might apply even to welfare provision which is so long established. Why are the Government making the changes in advance of the publication of their review? I know that statutory sick pay will not be included in the review, but presumably the review will have some impact on those who receive it. Why are the Government rushing into activity? Are they doing so, as my hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead suggested, to make savings?

Why do the Government intend to relieve employers of the burden of paying national insurance contributions a full year ahead of their having to assume the burden of paying an increased period of statutory sick pay? I look to the Minister to give us an explanation as the Secretary of State singularly failed to do so. I hope that he will tell us how much this will cost.

The low-paid in particular tend to be much worse off when on statutory sick pay than they would be in receipt of sickness benefit. The proposal to extend the period of statutory sick pay goes contrary to the arguments advanced by Ministers not so long ago. I am aware that the Select Committee suggested at the time of the debates to which I have referred that an extension to 28 weeks might be suitable. However, I remind the Minister that it entered two important caveats, neither of which shows any sign of being met by the Government. First, it pointed to the difficulties of families with children which will lose all entitlement to additions related to the size of the family. It said that there should be substantial increases in child benefit sufficient to make up for the loss that such families would endure under statutory sick pay. Secondly, it recommended that the low-paid should receive normal earnings rather than, as now, a substantially reduced figure merely because they are low paid.

I hope that the Minister will explain the protection that is likely to be offered to employees after the extension of statutory sick pay. If he does not do so this evening, I hope that he will respond later. It has already been said that there are problems with the correct administration of the scheme. There is another problem which has not been identified so far in the debate. The Secretary of State said much about freedom in his introduction. As is often the case, it appears that in some areas the freedom which might be created is the freedom to lose out substantially. What freedom will be enjoyed by an employee whose employer does not pay statutory sick pay? The employer will receive refunds of contributions and he may receive them for a year. However, I understand that the Department has no power to force employers to make payments of statutory sick pay. Unfortunately, already the leeway in the administration of the scheme allows the possibility of substantial harassment in terms of the requirements for notifying sickness, and so on. The fact that someone whose employer refuses to pay statutory sick pay can do nothing other than go to the ordinary courts is an alarming aspect of the scheme. It is even more alarming when one realises how greatly the Government intend to extend the provision.

This is a rather strange Bill. It is something of a hotchpotch. It is noticeable that Conservative Members including the Secretary of State have concentrated on the popular and what the Secretary of State called the exciting sections of the Bill, leaving the Minister for Social Security to mop up the disagreeable bits. In Committee, we shall try to ensure that the disagreeable bits as well as what the Secretary of State thinks are the more pleasurable bits are fully highlighted. It is for that reason that we will vote for the amendment.

10.5 pm

The Minister for Social Security (Mr. Tony Newton): I am forced to observe that it is in the nature of the world that Secretaries of State take what they think are the agreeable bits and Ministers of State mop up what they think are the disagreeable bits.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security (Mr. Ray Whitney): What about Parliamentary Under-Secretaries of State?

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend may well ask about the unfortunate Parliamentary Under-Secretaries of State. I shall think about that later. In spite of all that has been said, I do not regard the restoration of the 5 per cent. abatement of invalidity benefit in advance of taxation as a particularly disagreeable bit.

I am conscious of the fact that the House is anxious to make progress. At least one former Deputy Chief Whip who is not paying attention was particularly anxious to make progress. I hope that, in those circumstances and especially in light of the fact that the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) kindly acknowledged that some of her points could be covered in Committee, my hon. Friends will acknowledge that some of their points could be covered at a later stage. I hope that the House will understand if I move fairly rapidly over the issues raised in the debate.

We shall consult about the extension of statutory sick pay, the invalidity benefit proposals and the detailed provisions in the regulations governing the various occupational pensions. We shall certainly ensure that the useful and important comments by my hon. Friends are taken fully into account.

The hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) asked for various assurances on the pensions review. There is no question of us seeking in the Bill to pre-empt the pensions review. The logic of the hon. Gentleman's request that we should not pre-empt the pensions review is that we should also not engage in the interim in the business of giving undertakings about this, that and the other. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will acknowledge this point. For example, before the latest public expenditure round, endless requests were made to say whether we would do anything about housing benefit. Once Governments or Oppositions get into the business of denying everything they are asked to deny, they are in an impossible position the first time they do not deny something. If we are not to pre-empt the conclusions of

[Mr. Newton]

reviews, we cannot go about denying everything that is put to us for denial, because it would make a nonsense of the basic proposition.

As has been clear from the debate, the Bill concentrates mainly on occupational pensions. A good deal has been said also about a number of other issues. As a number of hon. Members have observed, the statutory sick pay scheme is being extended from its present eight weeks to 28 weeks. Much of the detail of that extension which has not hitherto been discussed in detail with employers will be set out in regulations. We want to ensure in resolving the details that we get the views of organisations representing employers and employees.

The hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) mentioned the linking rules for invalidity benefit. The hon. Members for Derby, South and for Oldham, West raised the point of the contrast between the two and eight-week linking rules for periods of sickness. Those points clearly need studying, and we shall certainly consider them in the process of refining the proposals that we shall seek to bring before the House in due course.

It must be recognised—I want to emphasise this—that employers have demonstrated, and that is what made us move towards the extension, that they can operate statutory sick pay successfully. They deserve considerable credit for the way in which they have done so.

It now seems sensible to move forward to rationalise the arrangements for sickness benefit, in the broadest sense, so that employers are responsible for the first six months in virtually all cases except for those who fall sick while unemployed, or those who are self-employed who will not be covered by the statutory sick pay scheme. The Department then takes on responsibility for the longer-term sick in the shape of the invalidity benefit scheme.

We recognise that employers will be caused some extra work. It is partly in recognition of that that we make the proposals, upon which the hon. Members for Derby, South and Oldham, West commented, for compensating employers on the liability for national insurance contributions on existing SSP a year in advance of the proposal to extend SSP. Employers will not pay contributions for the extended SSP scheme.

That is sensible, for two reasons. First, it recognises that there are costs for employers and, secondly, as I said during the debate on the national insurance regulations late at night some time last week, a reduction in national insurance contributions is one of the ways in which the Government can foster the creation of jobs. Although in that context £40 million is a modest sum, it is another gesture in the direction which we believe to be important of trying to keep down employers' overheads so that there will be more jobs. That is the Government's fundamental objective.

Mr. Frank Field: The Minister says that there will be job advantages because employers will pay less in national insurance contributions. As employers will be paying sickness pay, there will be no decrease in their costs. Where is the gain for jobs?

Mr. Newton: There will be a reduction in the overheads borne by employers. The hon. Member must remember that the full amount of SSP paid out is reimbursed to employers through the national insurance fund. Over and above the full reimbursement of what employers pay in SSP, they will no longer have to find £40 million for contributions which they would otherwise have had to find on that SSP paid out.

The hon. Member for Oldham, West talked about this proposal as if it were a great public spending saving measure in terms of reducing the amount paid to people who are sick, I should make it clear that the saving of expenditure on national insurance sickness benefit, which is of the order of £200 million, is matched by the £270 million of SSP paid out and reimbursed.

The major difference between the two is made up—there are some more complicated calculations with which I shall not weary the House at this stage—of the extra tax paid on SSP which we expect to be about £70 million.

It will not escape the observation of the House having given those figures, that this is not, in any sense, a cut in the amount of money that people receive in the form of help when they are sick. There are redistribution effects, some of which have been touched upon, but in the large majority of cases, so far as we can judge—it of course depends to some extent upon whether people have adult dependants—the effect will not be as adverse as the hon. Member for Oldham, West gave the impression that it would be. It is a little difficult to make those comparisons in detail at this stage, because the rates of SSP and the rates of DHSS sickness benefit are out of gear. SSP rates go up in April while DHSS benefit rates went up today. At the moment it is true that for a married couple, or a man with a dependent wife, the rate of statutory sick pay is slightly lower than he would get, as of now, on DHSS sickness benefit. On the other hand, that position will be reversed next April, at which point he will be getting slightly more on SSP, on our expectations of the uprating of SSP, than he is currently getting on DHSS sickness benefit.

The effects are more complicated than the hon. Gentleman acknowledged. It should also be recognised that, while single people in the lower-paid ranges are likely to be better off, most people in the lower bands of earnings, attracting the lower rates of statutory sick pay, are much more likely to be single people, especially young single people without dependent wives or husbands, or alternatively they will be people who are themselves dependants, that is to say, who are themselves spouses of somebody who has earnings and therefore would not qualify for an adult dependency addition, even if they were on DHSS sickness benefit. That may have sounded complicated. It is indeed complicated. I hope that we shall be able to explore it rather more in Committee than we have been able to do this evening.

Mr. Frank Field: The Minister is telling the House that the Government are not breaking their election pledges to pay the families by saying that it is not so much families who will be made worse off under the measure but young people, especially young single people, will be put in a more advantageous position. Is not that somewhat ironical, in that frequently at question time Ministers tell us that the rates paid to younger claimants should be cut because of the incentives to work? If the Minister argues successfully on the family front, he defeats himself on the other front.

Mr. Newton: I am not sure that there is too much of an issue in regard to incentives to work when we are talking about short-term pay for sickness. That is an issue

which can be seen as much more significant in relation to supplementary benefit for the unemployed, and is a much wider argument than we can sensibly engage in at this time of the evening.

I am conscious that the House wants to move fairly rapidly to a decision on the Bill. However, I want to say a few words about two significant useful improvements that we are introducing.

The first increases the pensions payable to some of the oldest members of the community. From November 1985, we intend to increase the rate of the over-80 pension paid to married women. All married women who qualify for this special non-contributory pension at the lower rate, which is £12·85 from today, will then be entitled to the standard rate of £21·50 at 1984 benefit levels. That is a small but long overdue rationalisation of the non-contributory retirement pension scheme for pensioners over 80 and will end an unfairness between elderly married women and other elderly people.

The effect of the change will to to top up the pensions of those few married women of 80 or more who receive a lower rate category C pension to the standard rate of category D pension. It means that all people over 80 who satisfy the residence test, which we have also rationalised this week, will now receive the same amount of non-contributory retirement pension.

With regard to the points raised on invalidity benefit, I shall not attempt to rehearse the grounds of the 5 per cent. abatement, except to make it clear to the House that the question of taxation remains for the Chancellor of the Exchequer, but neither I nor my right hon. Friend have said that the question of taxation will be abandoned. On the contrary, it remains the view of the Government in principle that taxation of invalidity benefit is right. *[Interruption.]* It has been common ground that benefits of this kind should be taxable. That has been common ground between both Front Benches for a long period. *[Interruption.]* My understanding was that it had been accepted by the Opposition Front Bench.

My right hon. Friend has said that two further changes will be added in Committee, and there has been some reference to them. First, duplication between invalidity allowance and the earnings-related additional component or guaranteed minimum pension under an occupational pension scheme will cease. The point is that when invalidity allowance was introduced in 1971, it was intended to provide extra financial help, as the hon. Lady said, to those who became chronically sick early in their working lives. But the thinking behind that was that they would not be able to build up earnings-related pension rights for later in life. As a result of the changes that have been made, since 1979 it not only has been possible for invalidity and retirement pensioners to get an extra earnings-related element in their pension—the additional component—but in practice they have visibly shown their ability to do so by doing so. In other words, those rights have started to come into effect. We feel that those two additions to invalidity benefit and retirement pension are broadly for the same purpose. Therefore, we think it reasonable and sensible to deal with the overlap between them. That is a logical change.

I was asked for these figures. We estimate that 375,000 existing invalidity and retirement pensioners who receive both invalidity allowance and additional component or GMP will be affected. Their loss will vary between a few pence and the maximum invalidity allowance of £7·50, but for the majority it should be a relatively small loss, and in any case we shall make transitional arrangements to ensure that no existing invalidity or retirement pensioner has his benefit reduced when the change comes in.

As the hon. Lady knows, the second proposal relates to adult dependency additions. She rightly identified the extent to which there is a rule that discriminates against women. We think it right to move against that discrimination, although we are not compelled to do so by the EEC directive. I hope that we shall at least have the hon. Lady's assent to move against that discrimination. I cannot give her the concrete undertaking that she sought that the rule will be no less generous than the existing rule for men in relation to their dependents partly because there are some injustices in the present position and some doubts about how far the present rule can be seen as a realistic test of dependency. However, we are giving further thought to precisely how that should be done and I hope that we shall be able to consult about that, too, as I am sure the hon. Lady wishes as well. I cannot give an absolute undertaking at the moment, but we shall consider what she said.

I am sorry—perhaps I am not—that my speech has been rather a rattle through several complicated points. I hope that I have dealt with some of the issues that were raised and I look forward, if that is the right phrase, to discussing them further with the hon. Lady, the hon. Member for Oldham, West and, who knows, the hon. Member for Birkenhead in Committee. Meanwhile, I commend the Second Reading of the Bill to the House.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 138, Noes 217.

Division No. 19] **[10.22 pm**

AYES

Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Ashton, Joe
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnett, Guy
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Benn, Tony
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Blair, Anthony
Boyes, Roland
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'rmline E)*
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, R. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne N)*
Brown, Ron *(E'burgh, Leith)*
Buchan, Norman
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Rt Hon J.
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell, Ian
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Carter-Jones, Lewis
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clay, Robert
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S.)*
Cohen, Harry
Concannon, Rt Hon J. D.
Conlan, Bernard
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cowans, Harry
Craigen, J. M.
Crowther, Stan
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Dormand, Jack
Douglas, Dick
Dubs, Alfred
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forrester, John
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Golding, John
Gourlay, Harry
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hamilton, W. W. *(Central Fife)*
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Hart, Rt Hon Dame Judith
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Heffer, Eric S.
Holland, Stuart *(Vauxhall)*
Home Robertson, John
Hughes, Dr. Mark *(Durham)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
John, Brynmor
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kilroy-Silk, Robert
Lambie, David
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ronald

Lewis, Ron *(Carlisle)*
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McCartney, Hugh
McKelvey, William
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Michie, William
Mikardo, Ian
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Nellist, David
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pike, Peter
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Redmond, M.
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Richardson, Ms Jo
Robertson, George
Robinson, G. *(Coventry NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Sheerman, Barry
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'kl'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Thomas, Dafydd *(Merioneth)*
Thomas, Dr R. *(Carmarthen)*
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Tinn, James
Torney, Tom
Wareing, Robert
Weetch, Ken
Welsh, Michael
Wilson, Gordon
Winnick, David
Woodall, Alec

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Allen McKay and
Mr. Sean Hughes.

NOES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alton, David
Ancram, Michael
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Sir H.
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Richard
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bright, Graham
Bruce, Malcolm
Bryan, Sir Paul
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon A.
Budgen, Nick
Butcher, John
Carlisle, Rt Hon M. *(W'ton S)*
Carttiss, Michael
Cartwright, John
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Clegg, Sir Walter
Cockeram, Eric
Cope, John
Couchman, James
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dykes, Hugh
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Fenner, Mrs Peggy
Fletcher, Alexander
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Marcus
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Freeman, Roger
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Gardner, Sir Edward *(Fylde)*
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodlad, Alastair
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony
Greenway, Harry
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, E. *(B'y St Edm'ds)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Harris, David
Harvey, Robert
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Sir Paul *(SW N'folk)*
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, J.
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hickmet, Richard
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Hooson, Tom
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howell, Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Howells, Geraint
Hunt, David *(Wirral)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jessel, Toby
Johnston, Russell
Jones, Robert *(W Herts)*
Joseph, Rt Hon Sir Keith
Kellett-Bowman, Mrs Elaine
Kennedy, Charles
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Gregory *(Derby N)*
Knight, Mrs Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, David
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim
Lewis, Sir Kenneth *(Stamf'd)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Neil
MacGregor, John
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New F'st)*
McQuarrie, Albert
Major, John
Malins, Humfrey
Malone, Gerald
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Antony
Mather, Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Hal *(B'grove)*
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Mills, Sir Peter *(West Devon)*
Mitchell, David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Sir Hector
Morris, M. *(N'hampton, S)*
Morrison, Hon P. *(Chester)*
Moynihan, Hon C.
Mudd, David
Murphy, Christopher
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Onslow, Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Osborn, Sir John
Ottaway, Richard
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Parris, Matthew
Pawsey, James
Pollock, Alexander
Powell, Rt Hon J. E. *(S Down)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Proctor, K. Harvey
Rathbone, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Rifkind, Malcolm
Rippon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ross, Stephen *(Isle of Wight)*
Rost, Peter
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Sims, Roger
Skeet, T. H. H.
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Spence, John
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanley, John
Steel, Rt Hon David
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stevens, Martin *(Fulham)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, J.
Sumberg, David
Taylor, Rt Hon John David
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Waddington, David
Wainwright, R.
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Watson, John
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Whitney, Raymond
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Michael
Wrigglesworth, Ian
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes
Mr. Peter Lloyd and
Mr. Tony Durant.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 41 (Amendment on second or third reading), and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee pursuant to Standing Order No. 42 (Committal of Bills).

SOCIAL SECURITY BILL [MONEY]

Queen's Recommendation having been signified—

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Social Security Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any expenses of a Minister of the Crown incurred in consequence of the provisions of the said Act, including any increase attributable to those provisions in sums so payable under any other Act.—*[Mr. Garel-Jones.]*

WAYS AND MEANS

Social Security

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Social Security Bill, it is expedient to authorise—

(a) any increase attributable to the said Act in the sums which, under the Social Security Act 1975, are to be taken as paid towards the cost of the National Health Service in Great Britain; and

(b) the payment into the Consolidated Fund of fees paid to the registrar of occupational pensions schemes.

—*[Mr. Garel-Jones.]*

Coal Industry

10.35 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State For Energy (Mr. David Hunt): I beg to move,

That the draft Coal Industry (Limit on Deficit Grants) Order 1984, which was laid before this House on 12th November, be approved.

Following the decision of the House on Friday to allow three hours to debate this order and the draft Redundant Mineworkers and Concessionary Coal (Payments Schemes) (Amendment) Order 1984, it might be helpful if at this stage I briefly describe the effect of both.

The purpose of the draft Coal Industry (Limit on Deficit Grants) Order is to increase the maximum amount of deficit grant which the Government may pay to the National Coal Board. The Coal Industry Act 1983, which was considered by the House last year, provided in section 2 that the aggregate of deficit grant paid in the finacial years 1983-4, 1984-5 and 1985-6 should not exceed £1,200 million. Provision was made, however, for this limit to be raised in one or more stages to £2,000 million by order, subject to affirmative resolution of the House. The order before the House in draft would increase the limit to £2,000 million, the maximum amount permitted under the 1983 Act.

It is important that I should explain why, less than a year after the 1983 Act became law, and only half way through the period which the Act was intended to cover, the Government are seeking the agreement of the House to this extension of the power to pay deficit grant.

As the House will be aware, the NCB made a very much larger loss in 1983-4—a loss of £875 million, in fact—than had originally been anticipated.

The circumstances in which this loss arose were investigated by the Energy Select Committee of the House in February this year, and were explained in the answer which my right hon. Friend gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) on 4 June.

The strike and overtime ban in the industry increased the NCB's loss by £197 million. A further £143 million resulted from additional provisions which the the board was obliged to make to cover the costs of putting right subsidence damage, following the emergence during the year of a serious under-provision in the north Notts area of the board. The remaining £535 million of the board's loss in 1983-4 reflected underlying imbalance in its trading position — the twin problems of overproduction in relation to market demand and of the tail of high cost pits whose operating losses represent a heavy burden on the industry as a whole.

The Government concluded that, because the reserves on the board's balance sheet were already negative at the start of the 1983-4 financial year, there was no alternative but to meet the board's deficit in full. If the Government had not done this, the extent of the board's insolvency would have increased, which might in turn have cast doubts on the propriety of continued lending to the board from the national loans fund.

The Government have also sought provision, in the main Estimates for this year, for £526 million to cover the board's loss in 1984-5. The projection of the board's loss for this year was made in March. It took no account of the strike, which at that time had only just begun, or of the immense damage which we now know it has done to the NCB's finances and prospects.

Payments of deficit grant are made monthly by my Department to the National Coal Board. The total payment of deficit grant made since the beginning of 1983-84 is £1,077 million. Therefore, there is little room within the ceiling of £1,200 million under the 1983 Act for payments to continue. That is why the Government are seeking the agreement of the House to an increase in the ceiling. A note to the summer Supplementary Estimate drew the attention of the House to the fact that an order would be made to increase the ceiling on the amount of deficit grant which could be paid to the board.

Although the order is not a direct consequence of the strike and was foreshadowed by the Government some months ago, it will at the same time make it possible for the Government to meet part of the additional losses which the NCB will incur, and has incurred, in 1984-85 because of the strike. As hon. Members may be aware, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State informed the House on 12 November, in answer to a question from my hon. Friend the hon. Member for Broxtowe (Mr. Lester), that it was the Government's intention to present a winter Supplementary Estimate for an additional £607 million in deficit grant to the NCB for consideration by the House. The House will have a later opportunity to consider that Supplementary Estimate. I would wish only to draw the attention of the House to the fact that this Supplementary Estimate would take the aggregate amount of deficit grant payable to the board since the beginning of 1983-84 to the full amount of £2,000 million permitted by the order that we are considering today.

I cannot at present estimate with any precision how large the NCB's loss for this year will be. It depends upon factors such as when the strike will end and how quickly production can be restored, but present signs are that the whole of the £607 million, which the Government have said that they will seek in a winter Supplementary Estimate, will be needed. During the two years 1983-84 and 1984-85, the NCB is likely to require at least £2 billion simply to meet its losses on revenue account. That is the extent of the seriousness of the position of the coal industry today.

Mr. Ralph Howell (Norfolk, North): Why are the Government rewarding the appalling irresponsibility of the National Union of Mineworkers during the past nine months by suggesting that we pay this money?

Mr. Hunt: The order underlines once again, as we have always sought to underline, how desperately serious the position is. It must be unprecedented for an industrial concern in Britain to lose £2 billion in two years. If the National Coal Board were a private sector company, such losses would have forced it out of business years ago.

The underlying reasons for the industry's plight have been plain for many years and were examined by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission 1983. The facts are, as no doubt my hon. Friends will point out during the debate, that the industry is producing far more coal than it can sell profitably. It is producing coal from a tail of high-cost capacity whose losses are a heavy burden to the rest of the industry, and that is a major factor in the present dispute.

Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Does my hon. Friend understand that some of us have a great sense of frustration at the fact that we are now cutting £39 million from student grants, and that we have cut £350 million from necessary housing improvements —many sacrifices are being made by people who have no right to expect to make those sacrifices—to keep a strike going and, as my hon. Friend says, to keep going an industry which is over-producing, over-priced and over-manned? How do we explain that to our constituents?

Mr. Hunt: I acknowledge that this order will enable the industry to keep going. However, it will not enable the strike to keep going. The Government must support the working miners and seek to point out to the country that we cannot possibly carry on with the level of losses which the Coal Board is suffering. Fundamental to this strike, and to the reason for its perpetuation, is the insistence of the president of the NUM on an unprecedented demand which no president of the NUM has made before, which no NCB has ever conceded and which no Government could possibly concede. It is that uneconomic pits, no matter how uneconomic, should be allowed to carry on and to extract coal until the last ounce has been taken out of the pit. I hope that tonight the cry from my hon. Friends the Members for Norfolk, North (Mr. Howell) and for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Mr. Beaumont-Dark) that enough is enough will be heard by striking members of the NUM so that they speedily join the 35 per cent. of the NUM who are at present working because they believe in the future of the industry.

Mr. Ian Wrigglesworth (Stockton, South): What is the total outstanding debt of the Coal Board? So far, the Minister has mentioned only the debt outstanding for the past two years.

Mr. Hunt: I shall give that figure during the debate.

Mr. Jack Dormand (Easington): The hon. Gentleman appears to be leaving the figures. Do they include the £5 million that is being set aside for the enterprise company in the coalfields? Labour Members place great emphasis on that, because in coalfields we want alternative employment, which we do not have. That is the basis of our argument. The hon. Gentleman is making great play, as are his hon. Friends, of the spending of vast amounts of money. Is not £5 million for such a purpose absolute peanuts? Should not that figure be greatly increased, and should it not be done tonight?

Mr. Hunt: The figures include the £5 million that has been set aside. That is a proper range of expenditure, and I should like to see the resources of the NCB enterprise company increased. I hope that the 150 inquiries that have been made so far by various people seeking to gain the support of the enterprise company will be responded to speedily and that we shall be able to see the company working to restore job opportunities to those communities. Lack of job prospects lies at the heart of some of the problems of the industry.

Mr. Dormand: The more inquiries, the less money there is to go round.

Mr. Hunt: Yes, I accept that, but I should like to see increased resources for the enterprise company, rather than see the waste of resources that is so infuriating my hon. Friends.

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): Why did the NCB go in for this strike four or five months before setting the company up? The company had its first meeting only on 30 October. Is this not like closing the stable door once the horse has bolted?

Mr. Hunt: This action has responded to the concerns expressed by communities faced with the problems of closure. Rather than decry the notion, I should like hon. Members on both sides of the House to respond to the setting up of the new company. These things take time and must be done carefully. The chief executive must command the respect not only of hon. Members but of those involved in the industry.

By some curious coincidence, I now have the figures at my finger tips. The limit on National Coal Board borrowing at present, established by the Coal Industry Act 1983, is £5,500 million. Borrowing at present amounts to a total of £4,600 million.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): Will the Minister confirm that some £450 million of what he describes as the "losses" of the National Coal Board represent interest payments on the loans to which he has just referred and therefore are not attributable to the miners in pits which perhaps are difficult geologically or perhaps have been starved of investment? The hon. Gentleman's political master, the Secretary of State for Energy, has tried to explain that each of the miners in what he calls uneconomic pits is costing £130 a week to the Coal Board, but does that not include those interest payments? The hon. Gentleman also gave a figure for subsidence in such areas as Nottingham. Does that include pits which have closed down in the past? Is not his figure for uneconomic pits made up of factors over which miners have no control?

Mr. Hunt: It is very difficult to bridge the commonsense gap between the majority of right hon. and hon. Members and the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist). Every business which functions efficiently borrows to invest in new machinery and new possibilities and has to pay interest on that debt. Of course it forms part of the figures. It may be an indication of why it is so difficult to overcome the distortions of the president of the NUM when he constantly reiterates the absurdity that we have the cheapest deep-mined coal in the world. We may have the best deep-mined coal, but we do not have the cheapest. The calculation that is done by the NUM president is very similar to the one that the hon. Gentleman has just made. It is to leave out depreciation, to leave out subsidence, to leave out interest charges, to exclude a range of normal businesslike charges and to reach a figure which purports to be the cheapest deep-mined coal in the world. But he leaves included in the Australian and American figures depreciation, interest charges and subsidence. Faced with that sort of logic, it is small wonder that we cannot bridge the gap between us. I hope that the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East will be able to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to try to explain the nonsense that he has just uttered.

The second order under consideration is the Redundant Mineworkers and Concessionary Coal (Payments Schemes) (Amendment) Order 1984. The reason for its introduction has been highlighted by the strike which is inflicting so much damage both on the industry and on striking miners themselves.

[Mr. Hunt]

One effect has been to cause men who agreed to take redundancy, in many cases before the dispute began, but who failed for whatever reason to work normally through to their redundancy date, to lose out on redundancy benefits under the redundant mineworkers payments scheme. This has come about because of the link, which has existed since the scheme's introduction, between entitlement to RMPS weekly benefits and eligibility for unemployment benefit. Men who found themselves disqualified from receiving unemployment benefit for the duration of the dispute by virtue of section 19(1) of the Social Security Act 1975 also found themselves, as a result of the linkage, ineligible for RMPS weekly benefits.

My Department is aware of about 400 men who have lost entitlement to RMPS through having been disqualified or suspended from receiving unemployment benefit. Many of these unemployment benefit cases are subject to appeal, and obviously therefore I cannot tell how many men will ultimately be affected.

The rules governing unemployment benefit, as interpreted by the independent social security commissioners, apply to everyone, and the miners can be no exception. However, the Government have no desire to see miners who take redundancy penalised as a result of the strike. My right hon. Friend therefore announced on 25 May 1984 that amendments would be introduced into the redundant mineworkers payment scheme to enable men whose scheme benefits are affected during the period of the dispute to receive additional payments designed to compensate for RMPS basic benefit or pension supplement which, at the moment, they have lost. That is the main purpose of the modest amendment order.

The addition of a new subparagraph (g) to article 10 in the existing order will sever the link with section 19(1) of the Social Security Act 1975 for the future, and the new paragraph 10(6) will enable an additional lump sum to be paid to men who lost basic benefit or pension supplement before the coming into operation of this order. If the House approves the draft order, those sums will be paid as soon as possible after the new order comes into effect on 7 December. Consequential changes are made in article 5(2) of the existing scheme to ensure that the uprating of benefits for inflation is unaffected.

Finally, the meaning of "coking plant operator" in the 1984 scheme is clarified. Some hon. Members may recall that when the scheme was extended in 1980 to cover certain employees made redundant in the coke industry, the background was the desire to rectify the anomalous position whereby men made redundant at coking plants within the steel industry were included in that industry's redundancy scheme, while those employed at similar plants operated by the NCB were not covered by the RMPS. The purpose of the present clarification, in line with that original intention, is to eliminate any residual uncertainty regarding the meaning of "coking plant operator" and hence where exactly the limits on eligibility for the scheme fall.

I hope that the House will agree that the amendments which the draft order seeks to introduce are sensible in themselves and further evidence of the Government's continuing support for the coal industry. They are modest amendments affecting a relatively small number of people at a relatively small cost, but they should remove what I know to be a considerable source of grievance among those affected.

I hope that by explaining the two orders briefly I have now given the House an opportunity to participate in the debate. I hope that I shall be able to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, at its conclusion.

10.57 pm

Mr. Alexander Eadie (Midlothian): Again, it falls to me to welcome another Under-Secretary of State to the Front Bench. I had the pleasure during the previous Parliament of welcoming the hon. Gentlemen's two predecessors. We did not always agree, but we respected the courtesy that they always showed and their readiness to consider the problems and anomalies that arose from orders dealing with the coal industry. It is my wish and I am sure it is the wish of my hon. Friends in welcoming the hon. Gentleman to the Front Bench, that he will see fit to endorse the approach which I have tried to outline in my introduction.

I think, Mr. Walker——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. The hon. Gentleman should address me as Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Eadie: I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

If the House appproves the Redundant Mineworkers and Concessionary Coal (Payments Schemes) (Amendment) Order, it will come into operation on 7 December, and the Under-Secretary claims that the amendments will make it easier for miners to qualify for benefits under the redundancy scheme.

I can confirm the Under-Secretary's explanation, because my understanding of the issue is the same as his. Indeed, we raised the matter in the previous coal order debate in the Chamber. History has prompted the order, because, before the commencement of the mining dispute, about 500 men had been given notice of redundancy. That figure is agreed by the Under-Secretary and by the union. However, because the period of notice given to those men extended into the strike, they were disqualified from receiving state unemployment benefit and denied weekly make-up benefit under the redundant mineworkers scheme. In some cases, the men were paid lump sum benefits on reaching their termination dates.

I wish to put on record a timely example of the difficulties that have been caused. Last weekend, I saw at my surgery a constituent who is a former employee of the NCB and was made redundant before the dispute commenced. As his notice ran into the strike and because he was a skilled worker, he was called to do safety work during the dispute, with, I understand, the agreement of the union.

My constituent's notice has now expired and he finds that he cannot get unemployment benefit and has problems getting other money that he believes is due to him. That is a little different from what the Under-Secretary told us. Perhaps it is an anomalous case, but can the Under-Secretary tell me the implications of the order for my constituent? I do not expect the hon. Gentleman to give an off-the-cuff answer, but perhaps he will do me the courtesy of writing to me.

The NUM initially tried to resolve the problems facing the 500 or so men to whom I referred earlier by making appeals to local tribunals against those men being refused unemployment benefit, but the appeals were unsuccessful.

I want the House to note that appproaches were made to the Government by, among others, some members of the miners' parliamentary group. Those approaches resulted in a written answer from the Secretary of State for Energy:

"The Government have no desire to see miners who take redundancy penalised as a result of the strike. They therefore intend to introduce amendments to the redundant mineworkers' payments scheme to enable men whose scheme benefits are affected during the the period of the dispute to receive additional payments designed broadly to compensate for RMPS basic benefit and pension supplement lost. Such amendments are necessary because under the existing order entitlement to weekly RMPS benefit is linked to eligibility for unemployment benefit so that a man who is ineligible for the latter also generally loses entitlement to the former. A man's entitlement to lump sum benefit is not affected." — [*Official Report*, 25 May 1984; Vol. 60, c. *580*.]

I do not want to sound ungrateful, niggardly or even petty, but it is a long time since 25 May. We welcomed that approach.

The order makes provision for those NUM members who have been denied basic scheme benefit. They will be compensated by the payment of a lump sum.

I hope that I shall receive a favourable response from the Minister to my questions which seek clarification. The Minister was vague about when the compensation will be paid. When will the payments be made? People are due moneys. Under the terms of the order, the compensation does not appear to cover loss of unemployment benefit. In his reply of 25 May the Secretary of State considered that to be an anomaly which he wanted to put right. We think that the order should be extended to cover the unemployment aspect.

Another way to deal with the problem would be in unemployment benefit regulations, which could remove the exclusion for persons serving notice of termination prior to the commencement of an industrial dispute. My request is reasonable. The Government have already conceded that the estimated 500 men are the subject of an anomaly. In justice and equity our proposition is reasonable. These men should not suffer the loss of unemployment benefit as a consequence of an industrial dispute. We are talking of men who have served the industry for 30 or 40 years. In another place a former Prime Minister, the Earl of Stockton, said—I paraphrase —that miners are some of the best people on earth. He observed that the country needed them and that they were responsible for beating the Kaiser in the first world war. In the second world war they played their part.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: With quite a few others.

Mr. Eadie: Yes, I accept that. However, I am paraphrasing what the Earl of Stockton said. If the hon. Gentleman wants to challenge the statement, let him challenge his right hon. and noble Friend. It was the Earl of Stockton who passed the compliment. He said that the country needed the miners then and that it would need them again. We are saying that unemployment benefit should be paid to those who are caught up in an industrial dispute.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: Whose fault is that?

Mr. Eadie: It certainly is not their fault.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): There is talk of patriotism, and in another place reference was made to the miners beating the Kaiser. What the Earl of Stockton did not say was that in 1940 some of the miners were engaged in the second world war or in their industry, which was essential.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): They went on strike.

Mr. Skinner: Ian MacGregor, the chairman of the National Coal Board, seemed to miss the boat when it came to the second world war. He did not join the Army or the Air Force and he did not go down the pits. Instead of wrapping himself in the flag, he took a boat to the other side of the world. Some would say that he was dodging the column. He did not beat the Kaiser; nor did he beat Hitler. He looked after number one.

Mr. Eadie: Surely the House does not want to get heated on this issue. I was advancing an argument based on justice and equity. I am sure that the House will want to remedy the injustice that we are discussing. The hon. Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) suggested that all that the miners did during the second world war was to go on strike. That comment was unworthy of him and he should consider withdrawing it.

Several Hon. Members: Withdraw.

Mr. David Ashby (Leicestershire, North-West) *rose*——

Mr. Eadie: I am not referring to the hon. Gentleman and I am not giving way to him.

Mr. Ashby *rose*——

Mr. Eadie: I am not giving way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Midlothian (Mr. Eadie) has made it clear that he is not giving way.

Mr. Eadie *rose*——

Mr. Ashby *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Midlothian is not giving way.

Mr. Eadie: I move on to the limit on deficit grants order, which will come into operation a week later than the payments schemes order on 14 December. There will be an increase in provision from £1,200 million to £2,000 million, and the House will want to know the Government's plans for the coal industry. The miners' dispute is most costly and damaging. It is probably the most costly and damaging dispute that we have had in our history. The Minister referred to the cost, and that can probably best be illustrated by saying that it will equal about a quarter of the defence budget or about half the education budget. It is a scandal that the chairman of the Coal Board remains in office when at one time he described the dispute as a little local difficulty outside town. The Chancellor made the biggest guff when he talked about it being a worthwhile investment. Some little local difficulty; some worthwhile investment.

The Library figures on investment at 1983-84 prices confirm what I have stated for a long time in the House — that since 1979, during the Conservative

[Mr. Eadie]

Government's term of office, not one new pit has been sunk. In an extractive industry like coal mining, that means inevitable contraction. The National Coal Board has acted on investment. I have cited approximate figures before. About 81 per cent. of investment in the coal industry occurs in the Yorkshire-Midlands-Nottinghamshire area. That leaves 19 per cent. to be distributed between south Wales, Kent, parts of Derbyshire, Lancashire, Durham, Northumberland, Scotland and Cumberland, where mining has practically disappeared. Those areas have to fight for 19 per cent. of the investment.

I shall cite the investment figures in 1979-80 prices. Some of my hon. Friends may seek to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, on this matter. Investment in 1979-80 —I must take some responsibility as a former Under-Secretary of State for Energy — was £32 million. In 1983-84 it was £31 million. That means a reduction of £1 million in investment.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: That is not much.

Mr. Eadie: Is it not? The hon. Gentleman should listen to some more figures. Some of my hon. Friends from the north-east are listening to this. In 1979-80 there was £67 million investment in the north-east. It is now £39 million. There was also a reduction in investment in Nottinghamshire. The hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) is receiving small thanks for the part that his miners are playing while working, as the hon. Gentleman describes it, during this dispute. In 1979-80 there was £78 million investment in north Nottinghamshire, which has now been reduced to £55 million. In south Nottinghamshire there was £55 million investment, which has been reduced to £27 million. That is the thanks the miners in Nottinghamshire are getting from the Government. There is a policy of less investment. If there is less investment, there will be a contraction of industry.

Mr. Nellist: Is my hon. Friend aware of the NCB report covering north and south Nottinghamshire, which states that the introduction of new technology will mean the removal of 44 per cent. of all miners' jobs in those two areas by the end of 1987?

Mr. Eadie: We in the trade union movement are always in favour of new technology. My quarrel with the Government is that they have not been sinking new pits to give us the advantage of that new technology. Other jobs, not necessarily associated with the mining industry, arise from that new technology.

Mr. Andy Stewart (Sherwood): With this lack of investment, why is the north Nottinghamshire coalfield the only profitable part of the NCB's coalfields in the whole of the United Kingdom?

Mr. Eadie: I give the same answer to the hon. Gentleman as I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist). If there is no investment in Nottinghamshire there will be no new pits. The mining industry will inevitably contract, and that is the Government's policy.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: Rubbish.

Mr. Eadie: I am not talking rubbish. I am giving the facts, and they are not my facts; they come from the Library.

I wish to finish by giving the investment figures for south Wales. In 1979-80 the figure was £52 million. Today, I am sorry to say that the figure is £24 million. That represents a massive contraction of the coal industry.

Mr. J. D. Concannon (Mansfield): There are still one or two Labour Members in Nottinghamshire. I should like to say to my hon. Friend that during 1979-80 we were thankful for the amount that he was responsible for investing in north Nottinghamshire because it allowed a number of big schemes to take place. However, I did not get to my feet to say that. I want to kill some of the rumours that come from hon. Members who do not know what the hell is taking place in Nottinghamshire. I wish that sometimes they would keep their mouths shut about what is happening in Nottinghamshire and leave it to those of us who know something about it.

Mr. Eadie: When my right hon. Friend speaks about the coal industry, Conservative Members should not giggle, because he knows what he is talking about. That is why he understood the point that I was making. If there is less investment in Nottinghamshire, or elsewhere, the coal industry will inevitably contract. That is why my right hon. Friend got to his feet. He more or less underlined the point that I was trying to make. *[Interruption.]* We shall not be sidetracked by the guffaws of Conservative Members.

During Energy Question Time today the Secretary of State talked about a ballot. I know the subject will be discussed during the debate. Those hon. Gentleman who managed to attend Question Time today will recall what the Secretary of State said. He claimed that the national executive of the NUM could order a ballot any time that it wanted. I want to put the record right. That is not true. The only body that can decide on a ballot is the NUM annual conference. It has decided at three separate conferences that it will not have a ballot. That is so, whether the hon. Gentlemen agree or disagree. It is not in the gift of the national executive of the NUM or of Mr. Arthur Scargill to decide on a ballot. The annual conference, or a special conference of the NUM, will decide that.

The Secretary of State has made some blunders during the dispute. I have a great respect for the Secretary of State, but he has been making statements that were unworthy of him. When we were talking about whether pits should be closed he said that the NUM wanted to keep pits open even if it meant mining mud. That statement was unworthy of him.

The Secretary of State must be aware, because it is on record, that in the negotiations that took place between the NCB and the NUM three areas of closure were agreed to. The first was geological; the second was safety; and the third was that, where a pit had limited reserves and it was expedient to close it, if it could be done by means of transfer to an adjacent pit, that would be done.

How can anyone talk about the mining of mud when already in the negotiations three reasons for pit closures have been agreed? To say that the NUM has not moved in the negotiations is a travesty of the facts. The NUM has moved, and it is a matter of public record. *[Interruption.]* If Conservative Members are so keen and enthusiastic about the details, they can find all the references in the Library of the House of Commons.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it not a custom of the House that the Minister and the Opposition Front Bench spokesman speak for the same length of time? The Minister spoke for 22 minutes in putting forward a very complicated case. We have heard 28 minutes of waffle so far from the hon. Member for Midlothian (Mr. Eadie) and not one minute of case.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that I have no power to impose a time limit in a debate such as this.

Mr. Eadie: It is clear that the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Mr. Beaumont-Dark) does not like what I have been saying.

I think that the Minister, at Question Time today, was guilty of trying to massage the facts in regard to strikers and non-strikers. To some extent he may regret having done so, because there are great areas of doubt about the figures that he mentioned.

The Government's policy of starvation and the NCB's policy of bribery are doomed to failure. There should be a clarion call from all parts of the House to the Government and the NCB. We know that there will be no mass return of men to work, so we should call for an end to this costly and damaging industrial dispute. We should call for it to be ended in the only way that it will end—round the negotiating table—and the sooner the better. We should urge the parties to get back to the negotiating table before Christmas, in the interests not only of the deprived miners and their wives and families but of the British nation.

11.28 pm

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): I am tempted to follow the last remarks of the hon. Member for Midlothian (Mr. Eadie) by saying that, if one person would cross the Urals and the other would cross the Atlantic, perhaps the dispute would soon be ended.

I shall confine my remarks to the second of the two orders that the Minister introduced. Very real hardship is being done to a small but important group of people who have for many decades been the backbone of the mining industry. I thank my hon. Friend for bringing the order before the House, because it is a real but belated recognition of a genuine problem. But I hope that he will agree that it does not solve the problem.

Many Conservative Members have the privilege of representing mining constituencies. Quite a lot of Conservative Members perhaps do not fully understand that a striking miner is not necessarily a violent miner. It is equally true that there is not sufficient understanding of the very real hardship that I wish to talk about.

A constituent came to me about 10 days ago in real distress. He is typical of several constituents of mine and of my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Mr. Howarth). Littleton colliery is in my constituency, but the workers come almost equally from his and my constituencies. The south Staffordshire coalfield voted 73 per cent. against a strike. However, for the first three weeks of the strike, however much the mineworkers wanted to get into Littleton colliery and Lea Hall, they could not do so. There were scenes of almost indescribable violence and nastiness on the picket lines. Miners on those picket lines—not, I hasten to add, from Staffordshire—were filling polythene bags with urine and throwing them at the police. There were many similar incidents that were utterly distasteful and nauseating, some very violent.

The police urged miners not to attempt to go into the collieries. In fact, during those first three or four weeks, about 12 people managed to get through the gates. However, as soon as the NCB was able to organise an adequate programme of bussing, a flood back to work—it was no drift back—occurred. Within a matter of weeks, the vast majority of miners were back, and now between 80 per cent. and 85 per cent. of those employed at those two collieries are working.

Many miners are nearing the end of their working lives, and of them a considerable number accepted voluntary redundancy. This problem is shared by my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) and several other colleagues who represent mining constituencies. Those men took their voluntary redundancy and believed that they were accepting a package that included a lump sum, an entitlement to the redundant mineworkers concessionary payment scheme and unemployment benefit. It is important for hon. Members in all parts of the House to underline the fact that the lump sum payments that many of those people received were very modest. Indeed, one of my constituents had a sum of much less than £2,000.

Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse (Pontefract and Castleford): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that not only did those miners believe that they had a certain entitlement but that when they were interviewed by a representative of the NCB and persuaded to take the redundancy terms, they were told categorically the amount of payment that they would receive when they were made redundant?

Mr. Cormack: Indeed, they were. They were told in good faith, and they accepted the information in good faith.

However, the fact is, as the hon. Gentleman knows as well as me, that my constituents and others, although they received the lump sum, have not received any other money since. That is an anomaly which the second of the two orders introduced by my hon. Friend the Minister goes some way to redress—but only some way. He cannot this evening—we accept this—with a stroke of his pen or by introducing an order from his Department make them entitled to receive unemployment benefit. Therefore, although the constituent to whom I referred and many like him will receive some benefit from the orders, they will not receive enough—and there is very real hardship.

I was approached by one constituent who had had to go to his bank for a loan because he had nothing to live on. I am sure that he will be given a loan, but he will have to pay interest on it. That is a total contradiction of what such men thought they were to get and what they are entitled to have. It flies in the face of logic and natural justice.

I am prepared to accept that the majority of striking miners, although I believe them to be wrong, are perfectly honourable and are standing by what they consider to be their principles. But whatever views are taken of striking miners, the men about whom I am talking were not striking miners. As soon as they could get through the colliery gates, they went in. They subsequently accepted their redundancy. They expected to receive a package, but that package has not been delivered.

I do not hold my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State responsible. He has gone some way

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towards redressing the problem, and hon. Members in all parts of the House should be thankful to him. Nor do I in any sense accuse my hon. Friends at the Department of Employment or the Department of Health and Social Security of bad faith. However, I urge that something be done about the matter. If the rules are being applied correctly, the law in this case is indeed an ass, and it is Parliament's duty to change that law so that these men shall have what they fully believed they were entitled to and what, in justice and equity, they are entitled to.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: I well understand the human side of the case that my hon. Friend is making, but he is putting the case for men who, because they have worked in the mining industry, are suffering because of what is going on in the industry. What about people in other industries, who are losing their jobs and will get no compensation at all? The miners will get their compensation in due course. Why should they not have to wait?

Mr. Cormack: Not for the first time, my hon. Friend has got it wrong. He is thoroughly confused. Two wrongs do not make a right. I am glad to see my hon. Friend nodding. These people are the victims of an anomaly. Unless what I urge is done, they will never get the unemployment pay under the current rules.

Mr. Allen Mckay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): Let us consider two men who are interviewed and given their notice at the same time. One accepts three months' wages in lieu of notice. He then becomes unemployed and receives unemployment pay and redundancy benefits. The other, if he serves out his notice and that notice terminates during a strike, is not unemployed, even though he was interviewed at exactly the same time. As yet, he does not receive unemployment pay or redundancy payment. He will now receive redundancy payment, but there is still the question of the unemployment pay.

Mr. Cormack: Indeed. I am talking about the deficiency that will remain after the order has been passed. There will still be the problem of unemployment pay. The situation is riddled with anomalies. Section 19 of the 1975 Act, to which my hon. Friend referred in his opening remarks, states that unemployment benefit is not payable to those who have been involved in a trade dispute. However, these men have not been involved in a trade dispute. The adjudicating officers will say that they will be beneficiaries in the long term of the results of a trade dispute, but they will not necessarily be beneficiaries, because there is no formal agreement between the NCB and the NUM to backdate any subsequent wage increase to those who have left the industry. However one looks at the problem, the men are in real danger of being thoroughly penalised. I am delighted that my hon. Friend readily understands the anomaly.

I do not believe that there is any disagreement among those who know anything about the mining industry. I am delighted to have the support of my hon. Friends the Members for Sherwood, who has more coal mines in his constituency than any other hon. Member, and for Cannock and Burntwood. We have worked together on these matters and have seen the men and those who have been trying to help them. We are anxious to help them and believe that a manifest injustice is being done. I have today written to several of my colleagues in the Cabinet and to the Prime Minister about this matter. I intend to carry on pleading the cause until something is done.

The people of whom I am speaking are the backbone of the mining industry. In some cases they have given 40 years' service, many of them underground. They have picked up a derisory sum at the end of that time and are being denied their unemployment benefit. Although their Christmas will be made a little brighter as a result of the proper initiative taken by my hon. Friend tonight, there will still be gloom, real worry and real hardship among people who, by any definition, do not deserve it. I urge my hon. Friend to use his best endeavours. I am delighted to see my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security here. I urge him also to use his best endeavours to ensure that this great wrong is righted and that justice is done to this deserving section of the mining community.

11.40 pm

Mr. Michael Foot (Blaenau Gwent): I hope that the Government will listen to the case that the hon. Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack), has just put. I am sure that the House agrees that he advanced a very persuasive argument. I hope that we get a proper response from the Minister.

I should like to refer to what the Minister said about the enterprise company that is to be established to assist in mining areas. He asked for a friendly response to the Government's measures. He will get a friendly response from us, but the whole thing should be on a much more ambitious scale. It is absurd to talk of £5 million to be spread all over the country. We could use the £5 million in my constituency and still have plenty more to do. The Government must think on an entirely different scale. I say that having had some experience in these matters.

My constituency was much involved with the establishment of British Steel Enterprise Ltd. We strongly favoured it, as it was a means of adding fresh investment and finance to what we could get from other quarters. We wanted to develop it to the maximum. We still want to sustain it, but one of our battles in the past five years has been to keep the very pattern which the Government have adopted and intend to apply to the coal industry. I am sorry to say that we fought a losing battle against the Government and the gentleman who was at that time the head of the British Steel Corporation — his name happened to be Mr. MacGregor. When we went on deputations to Mr. MacGregor or responsible Ministers, we were told that they could not be concerned with such matters, that they were concerned only with producing steel or coal. They were not concerned with what would happen to employment.

I cannot take Mr. MacGregor—or the Government, although they are a bit better than he is—as a name that will establish confidence, because it was Mr. MacGregor who wanted to run down the experiment in the steel industry. If it had not been for our objections he would have succeeded in abolishing it. Even so, what now prevails in the steel industry is a shadow of that which prevailed during the previous Labour Government. We want a full scheme for the coal industry. It should be on a far larger scale that £5 million. It will have to be if it is really to provide jobs in mining communities. The scheme in the steel industry should also be restored, as we are still

suffering from its rundown. Under Mr. MacGregor the rundown there was considerable. Instead of a peanut £5 million scheme which is apparently covered by the order, we want a full scale scheme for the coal and steel industries to provide the alternative jobs which will be necessary whatever happens in the coal industry.

The main issue in this debate is the coal dispute, yet apparently the Government will do nothing about it. As the Parliamentary Under-Secretary's speech illustrated, the cost of this dispute has been astronomical, and it has had national and international implications on society. The Government should be bending all their energies, imagination and efforts to trying to reach a sensible solution, yet apparently they are doing nothing of the kind.

As far as I can see, they have now come to the conclusion that nothing can be done at the negotiating table. It was not Arthur Scargill who left the negotiating table and said that he would not return. It was Mr. MacGregor. It certainly was not the mining representatives who broke off the last negotiations.

In my view, the Government have adopted this position at this moment because they believe that that is the way to end the strike. However, in many other debates the Government have come forward with their authoritative, sensitive understanding of the situation in the coal industry and told us that they know best how to deal with it. Each time they have said "Here it will end if only we take these measures", they have been proved wrong. They will be proved wrong again.

Even the combination of measures taken against the NUM — the measures taken on the picket lines, the money and the ministerial statements over the last few weeks that there will be no more negotiations—will not succeed in breaking the will of the NUM. I say that because, like most hon. Members, I judge by what is happening in my own constituency. My constituency has three or four pits, and there the strike is pretty well 100 per cent. solid, as it is in most of Wales.

The hon. Member for Staffordshire, South showed some appreciation of these matters. I urge the Government to think again. Despite what Ministers often reiterate, the strike is not broken because of intimidation. I am all against that, and I do not believe that it should be practised at the homes of miners. I am absolutely opposed to that. But, if the Government believe that the strike is kept going only because of intimidation, they have not attempted to discover the facts.

Such a belief is absolutely false in relation to my constituency. My experience and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) and hon. Members throughout Wales is that when a few weeks ago a huge effort was made to get miners back into the pits, only a few did so. Out of the five miners who went to the main pit in my constituency three weeks ago, two are now on the picket line. They made that decision after they had been approached by striking miners who went to their homes to discuss the matter. They are now supporting the strike.

Those men went back to work chiefly because of the appalling distress which they and their families faced. No one wishes to minimise the great distress being felt. That is why the Archbishop of Cardiff spoke in such terms a few days ago, and what nonsense it is for the Government to try to brush aside those remarks as though they did not count.

The strike continues not because of intimidation or threats. There are three reasons why it continues: first, the solidarity of miners and the mining communities. That is the patriotism of the miners. That is what the Earl of Stockton was talking about in the House of Lords the other day. If anyone shows disrespect for that feeling of comradeship, I must tell him that, first, he does not understand this country, secondly, he does not understand the mining communities, and, thirdly, he is not fit to govern in these matters.

The second reason why the strike continues is that the miners believe what they are told by their leaders. They do so partly because their leaders were saying it for many months before the strike, and partly because of what happened at the beginning of the strike. That is what convinced them that what their leaders had been telling them for months past had much more validity than they had previously supposed.

What convinces them further is the Coal Board and the way in which it has been operated, and the utter failure of Mr. MacGregor to conduct his affairs properly. When it results in a man such as Geoffrey Kirk—a man who has served faithfully many bosses in the Coal Board and in the Government, and a man who has given his life, like so many miners, to the industry—finding it impossible to continue to work for the Coal Board, or when, even worse, the Coal Board manager says that he will not need Mr. Kirk's services any more, what effect does the Minister think that that has? The conduct of the dispute by Mr. MacGregor and those associated with him—I am sorry to say with the backing of the Government—has been an outrage. The Minister probably knows it. At least he was not responsible for appointing him to the job.

During the past few days we have had a direct conflict of testimony between what was said at the Dispatch Box by the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Energy about guaranteeing redundancies and what Mr. MacGregor said. How do the Government imagine that they can leave MacGregor in charge of matters? Perhaps they are thinking of edging him out. They should take charge now and put an end to the lie—I know that I should not use the word in exactly those connotations—or to the gross attempt to mislead the country that there has been no intervention by the Minister or by the Prime Minister. There has been intervention by the Government all the time; in my opinion, there should have been.

Our charge against the Government is that they should have intervened before the strike started. If they had done so, and the Secretary of State for Employment had been doing his job, they could have prevented the strike. After it had started, and they could calculate the huge costs on which the House must vote tonight, they should have come to their senses and used their mediating powers to end the dispute. They alone have those mediating powers. The only person who has been to talk to both sides is my right hon. Friend the Member for Salford, East (Mr. Orme). The Government should have been following the route that he has, and, if that had been done, we could have, if not avoided this strike, stopped it after a few weeks. We could even have avoided it long ago.

I say to the Government as strongly as I can that, if their idea is that this strike will be fought to a finish, there will be a bitter and costly finish. It is already costly enough. Huge costs will have to be paid to the areas concerned, particularly as the communities will have to be rebuilt. There will be huge costs for our nation as a whole, and in

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trying to repair the damage in those communities. Some of us urge and argue for what we have asked from the beginning. We have said it to Arthur Scargill and everybody else. There must be a fresh, new, attempt at a proper, honourable and negotiated settlement, with neither one side nor the other winning, but only the nation. It is of that that the Government should be thinking tonight.

11.56 pm

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): I understand the Government's position. I know that they need and must have this measure. I know that the Government have made statements during the current dispute, and I know that there are bills to be paid. However, I shall take the luxury of looking at the measure from the point of view not of the Government but of an individual Back Bencher committed to the truth and to the interests of his constituents.

This is the last in a long line of extravagant measures. This progression has gone on for too long. The time must come when someone, even a humble Back Bencher such as myself, must stick his thumb in the dike. I know that my hon. Friend the Minister is concerned that an action, such as voting against this measure, could be misrepresented and misunderstood in the country. However, it is because I have faith in the courage of the work force and in the future of the industry that I seek to raise tonight, perhaps mistakenly, the flag of future financial sanity in the industry.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: The tattered flag on the stricken field.

Mr. Marlow: The debate is about the amount of taxpayers' money that is to be spent not on covering all the needs of the coal industry but its losses.

We are—at least I hope we are—at the terminal stages of a rollicking, rip-roaring rake's progress. It started in earnest with the Coal Industry Act 1980, although it had started even before that. In 1980, we imposed a limit of £525 million on the grants payable for paying off the Coal Board losses, for providing cheap coal to power stations and for subsidising coal stocks and coking coal. In case that was not going to be enough, there were provisions for an order to increase that amount to £590 million. It will not be an overwhelming surprise that on 10 August 1981, that limit was duly raised. Sadly, that, was too modest. We had a new Act in 1982, which raised the limit for these purposes to £1,000 million, which again could, by order, be increased to £1,750 million. As is the way with these things, the House will not be surprised to know that on 10 August 1982 the limit was duly raised to £1,750 million.

The situation became difficult. After all, £1,750 million is quite a lot of money, and it is not easy to finesse such sums even late at night. Some people were beginning to smell a rat. A new strategy was required, so we had a brand new Coal Industry Act in 1983 which, instead of amending the overall limit, amended the individual limits within that overall limit—a whiff of parliamentary smoke and fog. In that way, the limit to pay off the annual loss alone, not for worthy causes such as cheap electricity or redundancy payments, was increased to £1,200 million, with the ability by order to increase it to £2,000 million. Surprise, surprise, tonight we have the order.

As Sherlock Holmes might have said, it is the case of the vanishing billions—the only true-life case of money being poured into holes in the ground. It is the syndrome of the bottomless pit. One of the reasons why I intend to vote against the measure is that I believe that this syndrome is the greatest single cause of the tragic dispute in our coalfields. It is why we have got where we have got. Anyone would go to sea for a luxury cruise on the otherwise doomed Titanic if he believed that there was an Almighty hand ready to bail it out every time that it hit an iceberg. No industry can prosper, develop or hold up its head if it is to be the permanent pensioner of the public purse. The mining industry is no exception.

How much money do the Government seek? The increase alone is £800 million. It is a massive sum compared with the small change over which blood and sweat were spilt in the Chamber last week during the debate on overseas aid. I invite the House to compare it with the £24 million by which we intend to restrict student grants this year—a factor of 33 for the massive amount of damage that that one measure will do. We are asked to approve the expenditure of £800 million almost on the nod late at night when the country is asleep and representatives of the press have gone home. It represents £15 a head for every man, woman and child in the country.

In the constituency which I am proud to represent I have 70,000 electors, perhaps 100,000 souls. If I am to walk through the Aye Lobby in favour of the measure, I am frisking my constituency of £1·5 million. I will not do it.

The total sum is even more dramatic. It is £2,000 million. That represents 2p off the rate of income tax, dearly beloved by my brethren on the Government Benches. It represents 40p off a gallon of petrol. Think of the smiles that that would bring to the faces of those in rural communities. I can also tell Opposition Members that it would almost double the existing housing programme. It is greater than the total Foreign Office budget, including aid, and how well that sum would have gone down last week. It is also more than three times our net contribution to the European Community. For those with a proper social conscience, with this amount of money we could increase child benefit by some 50 per cent. Think of the magic spells that we could weave with £2,000 million.

Who will pay this vast amount of money? I know that Opposition Members realise that it will not be the City bankers who expect to make a killing out of the sale of British Telecom. As always in such cases, it will be Mr. Average, the poor bloody infantryman of the taxpaying community. It will be people such as the footwear workers in Northamptonshire who, three or four years ago, lost their jobs as a result of the recession and international competition without massive redundancy pay. They have now found their way back into other work, although that work is not highly paid. It is their taxes that will be used to pay the bill. It will be people such as those from the Northampton welfare rights support unit who came to see me today to complain about changes in social security and about cuts in the heating allowance. Strangely and paradoxically, they were wearing "Coal not Dole" badges, supporting Arthur Scargill's strike. If they had this £2,000 million, they would have heating allowances beyond the dreams of avarice, sufficient warmth and heat to bask in tropical temperatures for the rest of their lifetime.

What about the coal industry, hooked as it now is on the insidious drug of perpetual, carefree, subvented overdraft? In February 1974 I had the honour to be the

candidate for Normanton, a mining constituency, during the miners'—not Arthur Scargill's—strike. Like my noble Friend Lord Stockton, I believe that the miners, who defeated the Kaiser's army and who are now poised to defeat Arthur Scargill's army, are among the finest and best of men.

I cannot begin to claim the understanding of many right hon. and hon. Members of the mining communities, but I have a loyalty, drawn from those days, to the miners and their cause. For them there has to be another way. I do not want to embarrass anybody by talking about privatisation, although that did not embarrass the workers of the National Freight Corporation and it does not seem to be embarrassing the workers of British Telecom who are jamming our pillar boxes with their applications for shares. But why not co-operativisation, with loans, with support and with eventual prospects of freedom?

This measure is not about money for jobs. It is probably destroying jobs in other areas from where the money is taken. It is not about money for investment or machinery. It is about money to cover losses. How debilitating and depressing. Surely we all believe that the mining industry is justly too proud to be for ever in the public financial sick room. Surely we owe it to that hard-working and courageous community to find a different solution. We are floating on a sea of coal. When the ghastly dispute is over, let us enrich rather than inpoverish ourselves. I believe —perhaps mistakenly—that by signalling that the long progression has been in the wrong direction, we can at last begin to embark on a different direction.

12.8 am

Mr. Alec Woodall (Hemsworth): Like my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian (Mr. Eadie) and the hon. Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack), I shall confine my remarks to the Redundant Mineworkers and Concessionary Coal (Payments Schemes) (Amendment) Order 1984.

Welcome as the Minister's announcement this evening may be to those who were made redundant just before the strike commenced inasmuch as they will receive increased redundancy payments in lieu of unemployment benefit, it will be of no joy to some of my constituents. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian, I too had a surgery last Saturday, when I met four of my constituents who will not be happy about this announcement in one particular respect. I refer to these gentlemen by name because I said that I would raise the matter this evening. They are deeply concerned because they are experienced mineworkers who have worked in the industry all their lives, but at the moment they are not employed by the NCB.

Mr. J. Milnes, Mr. P. O'Neil, Mr. H. Taylor and Mr. P. Williams are all employed by Amco. When the strike started on 9 March they reported for work, but were told that there was no work for them and that they would have to sign the unemployment register. They did that and continued to receive unemployment benefit until October, when someone at the Department of Employment decided that any result of the strike that benefited the NUM would benefit those men. That argument is based on the fact that the men are members of the NUM, but they are obliged to be members of the union because they work on NCB contracts. They are wound into and out of the pits by NUM colliery winding enginemen, they work alongside NUM members down the mines and, because of the closed shop agreement in the industry, they are obliged to become associate members of the NUM. They are not on strike; they are locked out.

Those four men were employed by Amco during the 1972 and 1974 disputes and they received their full entitlement of unemployment benefit. Suddenly, some bright boy at the Department of Employment says, "These guys are going to benefit." I do not know how the hell he made that out. Excuse my language, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The four men are on social security and, because they are associate members of the NUM, they have to suffer the injutice of having £15, shortly to be £16, deducted from their social security payments.

When I was first approached about the problem I telephoned the Department of Employment office in Leeds to get the facts. I was told exactly what I have told the House—that because the four men were members of the NUM they stood to benefit. I asked how they would benefit and, to my amazement, the officer said, "If there is any increase in wages as a result of the dispute, these men will benefit." I had to point out that it was a dispute, not about wages, but about jobs and keeping pits open, but the Department still insisted that the men, who were employed by an outside contractor and not by the NCB, would benefit and that their case had to go to an adjudication officer.

I raised the matter with the Secretary of State for Employment during Question Time on Tuesday. On Friday I received a reply to my letter of 21 October. I find that hon. Members usually get a result if they prod Ministers at Question Time. The letter said:

> "When claims were first made by the sub-contract employees in Yorkshire they were referred to the independent Regional Adjudication Officer in Leeds for a decision . . . different Adjudication Officers will come to different decisions on what seem similar cases."

That is true, because I am told that five men employed by Cementation in south Wales were refused unemployment benefit and their appeals were upheld. Mr. Tony McCann, who lives in Chesterfield and was also employed by Cementation, was working in the Bentley colliery in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond). Mr. McCann was denied unemployed benefit and the adjudication officer upheld his appeal. The precedent is there, but the Yorkshire regional adjudication officer reached the conclusion

> "that such sub-contract employees should not be disqualified from receiving benefit."

Earlier today the Minister said that several judgments in favour and several against had been made and that there was no balance. The most telling part of the letter states that

> "the Leeds Adjudication Officer became aware that his decisions were at variance with those elsewhere (and he was advised accordingly by the Chief Adjudication Officer)".

That is remarkable, because he had to reconsider his first decision and decided, lo and behold, that employees do fall within the disqualification rules. What a cock-up. That is terrible language, and I apologise, but this is a load of sago pudding. It is all nonsense. You know what I am talking about, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Minister is saying that any adjudication officer can make a decision which is out of step with that of other adjudication officers. What sort of ruling is that? The Department of Employment stopped the benefits, but cannot interfere to reinstate them.

We are talking about men who have worked in the industry all their lives. They are the most experienced

[Mr. Alec Woodall]

mineworkers that we have. They have experienced every ambit of the work. When they work for a private contract, a clause in each contract states that if a dispute occurs at the colliery at which they are working they will stop work and the contract will be withdrawn. That applies even to a local dispute. Those men should receive unemployment benefit. They will gain no joy from tonight's announcement, because they are being denied their right to unemployment benefit and their full rights under the social security legislation. They are associate members of the NUM and they should not forfeit the £15 which is being deducted from mineworkers.

In 1972 and 1974 these men received not only their full unemployment benefit but all the other benefits, including milk tokens. The Minister will say that the decision has nothing to do with him and that it is a matter for the Department of Employment. I hope that he will tell his colleagues in that Department to get moving and pay the men.

Mr. Michael Welsh (Doncaster, North): The argument about outside contractors has been taken to Wales and a commissioner has ruled that such workers should receive unemployment pay. As a general rule, that is accepted. Is it not strange that some people do not accept that ruling?

Mr. Woodall: That is right. I have a copy of the decision by the social security commissioner who ruled on the south Wales issue. The five men are named and the commissioner gives his ruling in favour of them. He rules that they should receive their benefit. At the end of his report—I suppose that a copy went to the Secretary of State—he stated that should be done

"because the dispute related to pay as well as pit closures"

—that was the case made by the social security benefits officer.

The commissioner continued:

"However, in view of the conclusion to which I have come, these points are irrelevant and I do not find it necessary to deal with them in any detail."

There was a ruling by an adjudication officer and by a social security appeals tribunal. What is good enough for south Wales is good enough for Yorkshire. I ask the Minister to take this on board, refer it to the Department of Employment and tell it to get the matter sorted out.

12.21 am

Mr. Neil Hamilton (Tatton): I endorse entirely the words of the hon. Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Woodall), who used rather more colourful language than my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack) in taking up his remarks on the Redundant Mineworkers Concessionary Coal (Payments Scheme) (Amendment) Order. I served under my hon. Friend the Minister when he was a Whip, and I know him to be a reasonable and persuasive gentleman. I am sure that he will use his talents to ensure that the just request of those currently adversely affected are met.

In his reasonable way, my hon. Friend gave way frequently during his opening remarks to allow hon. Members to intervene. That is one of our complaints about his Department. It gives way too often to financial claims that are put upon it. My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Mr. Beaumont-Dark) referred to the frustration that is felt by some Conservative Members at the continual demands put upon us to vote hundreds of millions of pounds to support the coal industry. I go further than that. I feel a sense of outrage rather than frustration at being asked once again—this is the third, fourth or even fifth occasion since I came to this place—to vote more subsidies to the coal industry.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) said, over the past few weeks there has been a painful search for small economies in an attempt to constrain the uncontrollable engine of public expenditure. That search led us to overseas aid, students' grants and even the £1 note. I think that the note's replacement by a coin is designed to save £3 million. My hon. Friend the Member for Selly Oak talked about the battles that we had last year on housing benefit.

All these painful battles will be rendered entirely negative by the sums that will be poured away this evening as on other occasions. The old proverb tells us that if we look after the pennies the pounds will look after themselves. We seem to spend a great deal of time searching for pennies, but when it comes to spending pounds it is all too easy for the savings to disappear into the great maw of public expenditure.

Since the general election, we have discussed the coal industry's affairs on numerous occasions. We have put the Coal Industry Act on the statute book, which authorises borrowing to the tune of £6,000 million on the part of the NCB. There was a Supplementary Estimate of £290 million in March. There was another Supplementary Estimate of £393 million in July. The Minister has warned us that if the order is passed this evening he will be coming before us again for another £600 million in the winter Estimates. Where will it all end?

Since 1979-80, when the Government took office, we have paid out in deficit grant to the Coal Board £2,747 million. Beyond that, we have added £3,850 million by way of investment in the industry. I draw that to the attention of the hon. Member for Midlothian (Mr. Eadie), who went through the catalogue of changes in investment area by area in the NCB. Nearly £4,000 million has been invested in the industry in the past five years. The return on that investment, far from being positive, does not even break even. It is minus 5·9 per cent. We are having to pay for the privilege of investing in the coal industry.

Mr. Jack Thompson (Wansbeck): Has the hon. Gentleman given any thought to the reasons for the deficit and to the breakdown of the figures? It may be difficult to break down the figures. As one employed for 39 years in the industry, my experience is that a substantial part of the deficit arises from bad management decisions, not bad work by employees or miners. In 1983 a mine closed in the area in which I live and where I worked. A bad management decision in 1966 caused that closure. About 1,500 employees would otherwise now work in that mine. A fire in the mine was caused by bad management decisions. The mine was flooded and was closed in 1983. A large part of the responsibility for the deficit in the mining industry rests on the shoulders of management, not miners.

Mr. Hamilton: I am not seeking to apportion blame between the miners' leaders and the NUM for the losses that have been incurred. As my father was a manager employed by the NCB for 30 years, I am unlikely to agree with the hon. Gentleman's generalised statement. No one

is infallible. Mistakes will be made by management, and I do not deny that. The ultimate causes of the losses experienced for many years are the geological difficulties faced in many deep mines which make them unpleasant places in which to work and expensive places from which to extract coal. I in no way say that it is the miners fault that the NCB is in its present plight. I endorse the good things that have been said about the miners as a breed of men. When there are pits that are inherently uneconomic because of the high cost of extracting coal, one is bound to produce figures such as those I have cited.

The total amount paid out to the NCB during the past five years is £6·5 billion . We are talking about enormous sums of money. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has already pointed out that the subsidy presently enjoyed by the industry amounts to £131 per man per week. That is £5,381 per man per annum which is accounted for by the operating deficits. On top of that, there is another £2,917 per man per annum for investment. The total amount of subsidy per man employed by the NCB is £8,298 per annum. That is an average. In areas that are suffering losses, the average subsidy is many times that figure. In areas such as the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) the profitable pits are disguising the amount of subsidy enjoyed by those who are working in the uneconomic pits. It must make sense in the interests of the coal miners, the NCB and the economy generally to close uneconomic pits and to open up new capacity . That is being done, in spite of what was said by the hon. Member for Midlothian (Mr. Eadie).

Mr. Eadie: Is the hon. Gentleman challenging my statement from the Dispatch Box that, since the Conservative party took office in 1979, not one new pit has been sunk?

Mr. Hamilton: I am not challenging that. We know that investment has gone on apace in the pits that are already in existence. Selby and Asfordby are new pits even though they may not have been sunk during the period of office of the Conservative party. That fact should not disguise the amount of money spent on equipping them and ensuring that they have the best machinery and so on to make them profitable in the years to come. For the hon. Gentleman's benefit I repeat that total amount of investment incurred during the past five years amounts to nearly £4 billion. That is a significant amount of taxpayers money. When we talk about the enormous sums of money that we have constantly to vote to keep these uneconomic pits going, we should see it in the context in which the Labour Government placed the NCB when it was created in 1946.

I do not know whether my hon. Friend has taken hold of the Coal Industry Nationalisation Act 1946 in the short period during which he has held his post. He will find that under section 1(4) an obligation was placed on the board, taking one year with another, to break even.

Mr. Allen McKay *rose*——

Mr. Hamilton: My hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North has already said, and it is worth repeating, that the losses being incurred this year by the NCB — taking the investment in the industry into account — would be sufficient to be able to reduce income tax by 2p in the pound, to take 2 per cent. off VAT or 28p off a gallon of petrol or add £2·70 a week to the old-age pension.

Those who live in areas where uneconomic pits are found are justifiably apprehensive that if the pit closes there will be considerable unemployment. I understand that. I represent a constituency which, although it does not have coal mines, has many energy-intensive industries, and as 83 per cent. of the country's electricity is produced from coal, the cost of coal vitally affects employment in those industries which are dependent upon it.

Sir Walter Marshall, the chairman of the CEGB, has said that if he were free to buy coal in the cheapest markets he could cut his costs by 25 per cent. and reduce the price of electricity to the domestic and industrial consumer by 10 to 15 per cent.

The chemical industry in mid-Cheshire is highly energy intensive. It has been spending money as a result of the Government's boiler conversion scheme and re-equipping with coal-fired rather than oil-fired boilers, and it will face enormous costs if we do not introduce some sanity into the coal board's accounts.

Mr. Welsh *rose*——

Mr. Hamilton: I cannot give way again. On the Press Association tape this evening I saw that British Steel says that at Ravenscraig it is costing £10 per tonne more to produce steel as a result of the strike, thus placing the jobs of people in steel-making areas at risk as well.

It is a cost that is faced not just by those who are immediately dependent upon the cost of coal but one that is being faced by the whole country. Professor Patrick Minford, professor of economics at the university of Liverpool, has calculated — I realise that this will be unpleasant for Opposition Members to hear, but I am sure that it will be good for their souls to listen — that for every £100 million of job-creation expenditure in coal mining, we destroy 900 jobs because of the costs which are distributed throughout the rest of the economy and which make us less competitive, less efficient and less able to sell our goods in the world markets upon which the majority of our people depend for employment.

The unreality which pervades these debates, and which has pervaded the dispute, is due entirely to the belief of those who remain on strike that, whatever the cost, the taxpayer will pick up the bill; and that, however long the strike and whatever the costs, no jobs will be lost in the industry. It is time for the Government to say to those who remain on strike that there will come a time when we shall be unable to guarantee jobs for all those who wish to stay in the industry. The problem from which we ran away in 1972, from which the country ran away in 1974, and from which the present Government ran away in 1982, faces us again tonight and will face us yet again before the end of this year. It will no doubt face us again next year unless we bite the bullet, for there will come a time when the taxpayers' patience will be exhausted. Indeed, I believe that that time has already come.

12.35 am

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): I shall not immediately follow the speech of the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton) but will return to it.

I refer, first, to the draft Redundant Mineworkers and Concessionary Coal (Payments Scheme) (Amendment) Order. The hon. Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack) mentioned the anomalies which will still exist, notwithstanding the terms of that order. I agree with the

[Mr. James Wallace]

hon. Member that there is still something that can be done in terms of unemployment benefit to relieve even more the burdens faced by many people who have sought redundancy.

I should like some clarification from the Minister about the status of payments under the order. I understand its purpose to be to enable the weekly benefits under the scheme to be made payable, breaking the link with unemployment benefit, where a trade dispute is in operation. I understand that in other respects the scheme is still related to the uplift part of the benefit and to other regulations akin to unemployment benefit.

My attention was drawn to the case of a miner who visited a son who was ill in the armed forces in Germany, and who lost his entitlement to the uplift benefit because he was not able to seek work. Although there are no age limits, I understand that the scheme is still largely taken up by people who would otherwise be seeking early retirement. When the Government have given people every encouragement to give up their work, I question whether it is wise to put them into competition for jobs with 4 million people who are already desperately searching for employment.

Is there any reason why the redundancy payments scheme should not also apply to those who are engaged in opencast mining? My hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) is particularly concerned about this matter. I understand that in the European Community regulations concerning similar schemes no distinction is made between those who work in deep coal mining and those who are engaged in opencast mining. Have the Government any reason for making a distinction? The problem could become increasingly more acute as the redundancies arise in opencast mines which are nearing exhaustion.

With regard to the points made by the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot), my right hon. and hon. Friends, from the early stages of the dispute, have keenly pushed the argument for an enterprise company, and we are still not satisfied that the Government have provided sufficient funding for it. We welcome the small amount that has been done, but we think that £5 million is wholly inadequate to meet the challenge that would face such an enterprise company if it were to do its task well. We look forward to hearing from the Minister what proposals the Government have to increase the sums spent.

I listened to the remarks of the hon. Member for Tatton and the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) about deficit grants. Although I understand the theory that makes them question the spending of public money, they never seem to ask themselves what sort of energy policy they want. They always talk in terms of money being spent. It is obvious that the demand for coal has dropped significantly in recent years, in many respects because of the Government's economic policies. What would happen to the coal industry if the sums were to be cut off, as the hon. Members suggest? My right hon. and hon. Friends believe that there is a long-term future for the coal industry in supplying the country's energy needs. One is entitled to ask those who criticise the amount that is being put into the coal industry what future they would see for it if they withdrew those sums so harshly by voting against the orders.

Those people ask whether all that money is going into a bottomless pit and whether it goes down a hole. If one examines the accounts of the NCB, one finds that there is often much talk of uneconomic pits and that the deficit grant in some years has matched the amount of interest repayments made by the NCB to the Department of Energy. In 1983 the deficit grant amounted to £374 million, but the interest paid back to the Secretary of State for Energy was £364 million. Admittedly last year the gap was bigger, but, none the less, of the £875 million of deficit grant, over half could be said to have been taken back by the Department — £467 million in interest payments.

Mr. Neil Hamilton *rose——*

Mr. Wallace: The hon. Gentleman has had a good opportunity to speak, and others wish to take part in the debate.

While the Government continue this conjuring trick, one might well ask whether the time has come to take a positive initiative to try to restructure the NCB's finances and to write off, or significantly write off, a large part of that debt. That matter was raised in another place in February this year when the Earl of Avon, who was then the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, said that the board enjoyed what amounted to a year-by-year capital reconstruction because of the deficit grants. He said that the Government would consider writing off the debt when the industry became more viable. My appeal is that the Government should consider something like that now. They have been willing to put together a package to restructure other nationalised industries, such as British Airways, when they want to present the industry in a more acceptable form for privatisation. Why do they not take such an initiative to break the stalemate in the dispute?

All that we see are the Government pinning their hopes on a drift back to work. That is the only method that they have to end the strike. I am not denying those who have gone back to work, but I do not think that that can be a complete answer. At the end of the day there will still be a hard core—it may be a substantial hard core—who have not gone back to work. One believes that the dispute can be solved only by a negotiated settlement. It cannot be solved by hoping that the drift back to work will carry on until the strikers are down to a small number.

At Question Time today, and in this debate, Opposition Members, including the hon. Member for Midlothian (Mr. Eadie), have called for the Coal Board to go back to the negotiating table. One might well ask them what they wish the Coal Board further to concede. That is a fair question. Perhaps they will enlighten us on that matter.

My right hon. and hon. Friends believe that the figures in the "Plan for Coal" are no longer relevant to the present circumstances. The time has come for its renegotiation. "Plan for Coal" was a tripartite agreement. It involves the Government, and they cannot abdicate that responsibility. They could show their long-term confidence in the mining industry and could go a long way towards taking much of the heat and bitterness out of the dispute if there were a fresh start, with a proper reconstruction of the board's finances, rather than the Minister coming back to the House time and again to put more money into the industry. We ask the Minister to reply to that and to give the Government's view of what they would do towards achieving a proper reconstruction of the board's finances.

12.44 am

Mr. Eric Cockeram (Ludlow): I intend to keep my remarks brief as time is running short and to confine them to the Coal Industry (Limit on Deficit Grants) Order.

The circumstances of the tabling of the order are quite extraordinary. Here we are, at nearly 1 am, debating the sum of £800 million. Over the past three months or so, the Government have made repeated attempts to contain the public sector borrowing requirement. That has been one of their prime preoccupations. Expenditure estimates have been examined with a toothcomb down to the smallest items. Department by Department. The Financial Secretary to the Treasury has been bargaining with Cabinet Ministers over £1 million here and £5 million there. The whole exercise was concerned to save only £300 million, in an attempt ot keep Government expenditure next year within the total of £136 billion.

After all that, what happened? There was what is called the star chamber procedure, with the Deputy Leader chairing a Cabinet Committee which went through all the estimates once again, seeking to pare down the excess over the original target to the smallest possible amount. What was the outcome? There have been cuts in the BBC's overseas services and in the British Council. The cuts may have amounted to only £1 million or £5 million, but they have been significant as a proportion of the expenditure on those items. There have been cuts in our diplomatic representation abroad, with the closure of 10 consulates. Parental contributions to students' fees have been increased.

However, we are asked to agree to the spending of £800 million. On what is it to be spent? My hon. Friend the Minister says that the money is needed to support the working miners. That is partially true. But what about the two-thirds who are not working? The money is to support them, too.

The strike has cost the taxpayer a great deal of money already in policing, social security payments and loss of production. Some of my hon. Friends may think that that money has been well spent. But what has caused so many miners to return to work in the past few weeks? After six months of negotiating, the NCB has made it clear that there is nothing further to negotiate. Everything that can be offered has already been offered. In the face of that firmness, the miners recognise that it is no good waiting for something else to come along; this is the end of the road. They can take the offer or condemn their industry to decay. In consequence of that firmness, miners have been returning to work day after day. Today, 975 returned to work. The trend will continue.

What are we doing about the money? Are we to continue to give miners the illusion that a tap can be turned on, from which endlessly, more and more money will flow? We must not do that. That would be unfair to all our constituents who have had to face cuts in many other spheres—many more that I have mentioned. It is time for the Government to make it clear that the taxpayer does not have a bottomless purse, that there is no endless flow, and that £800 million cannot be voted through on the nod at 1 o'clock in the morning. It is time that the miners were told that they cannot expect endless subsidies from working people earning less than they earn—and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton) pointed out, at an astronomical cost per miner. If the money were spent in other spheres, it would go much further and create jobs for more people than are employed in the mining industry. It is time that the tap was turned off. I cannot support the Government in their request for this large sum of money.

12.49 am

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): I thought for a minute that the hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr. Cockeram) was about to go on to the cost to the Exchequer of the common agricultural policy or the Trident programme, although, as he said, the Government seem to be scraping round for other orders.

I am pleased that the order concerning the redundant mineworkers payments scheme is going through. It is a pity that it did not go through in the previous Session. Since the end of March, we have known about the anomaly by which hundreds of retired miners have not received weekly benefit from that scheme. The debate has centred around the cost of the strike. I refer the House to an article which appeared in *The Times* on 25 August 1983. The then chairman of the NCB, Sir Norman Siddall, warned the Government and that section of the British people who bought *The Times* about the consequences of appointing Ian MacGregor as chairman of the NCB. He also issued a grave warning about the running of the British coal mining industry and said:

"I would say that to return the industry to profitability within three years is a fairly massive task".

Indeed it is a massive task and it has not been helped by the appointment of Mr. Ian MacGregor. With the strike, that return to profitability will cost the money being granted in the Limit of Deficit Grants order and perhaps more in the winter Estimates. But a cost is attached to the appointment of Ian MacGregor and to the Government changing and ripping up "Plan for Coal". That is what is causing the dispute in the British coal mining industry. I refer Conservative Members to the debate of 22 November 1983 on the Coal Industry Bill. It was said that:

"the National Coal Board should aim to maximise its long-term profitability by securing those sales which are profitable on a continuing basis, its competition with other fuels. It should plan its marketing, production and capital investment accordingly and bring productive capacity into line with its continuing share of the market." — [*Official Report, Standing Committee H*, 22 November 1983; c. 38.]

That statement was made by the hon. Member for Pudsey (Mr. Shaw), who is now the Minister of State for police. His statement effectively ripped up "Plan for Coal" which had been agreed by the Government, unions and the NCB in 1974. That plan enabled the NCB, for the first time, to plan investment and production. The appointment of Mr. Ian MacGregor in 1983 put an entirely different complexion on the matter.

It is important for people to realise why Mr. MacGregor was brought into the coal industry and who is responsible for the dispute. On Thursday 16 February, just a few weeks before Mr. MacGregor caused the strike on 6 March, the *Financial Times* wrote:

"The National Coal Board is set to present its plan for the future of the coal industry to the Government without union agreement. This would mark a break with the past decade, when plans have been agreed between government, board and unions."

Indeed, it is a break with the past decade. It was a ripping up of "Plan for Coal" as had been said by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy in 1983. Mr. MacGregor continued:

"It has proved impossible to get any basis for agreement. I can't wait for the union. I work for the Government not the unions."

[Mr. Kevin Barron]

That was what he said in February, just prior to the strike. No one should be surprised that it has developed in the way it has, nor should anyone be surprised that Ian MacGregor became an expensive transferee to the coal industry to do exactly what he did with steel—to instigate a massive run down in jobs and coal production based on what could then be sold in the market.

The Government have not convinced me, or anyone else in the NCB, that in the last five years they have looked for further markets in which to sell British coal. They talk about overproduction. Only last year the House debated the reissuing of conversion grants, yet up to December the Government withheld the decision to continue for another 12 months grants payable to industrialists who transferred to coal burn for industrial boilers.

Never have the Government looked for an expansion of markets for the British coal industry, but that does not surprise me in view of what I have read. I have in my hand an article published in *The Economist* in 1978 by the Conservative party's policy group of the nationalised industries. It was drafted by the right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley), now Secretary of State for Transport. That article mirrored exactly what has gone on in the coal mining industry in the last 12 months. It states:

"Behind the scenes, they would like a five-part strategy for countering this threat".

It speaks of a threat to Government from a strike in certain industries. It continued:

"Return on capital figures should be rigged so that an above-average wage claim can be paid to the 'vulnerable' industries".

One of these was obviously the coal industry, because that is exactly what has happened. Although last year's wage increase has still not been settled by the Coal Board, it was 5·2 per cent., just a little more than what was offered to those in the public sector such as nurses. The article added:

"The eventual battle should be on ground chosen by the Tories".

We have already been told that the Government were not hard enough in 1982 when they supposedly did a U-turn. Of course not, because they were waiting for the ground to be right before taking on the miners. That is exactly what was written by the Conservative party's policy group on nationalised industries in 1978.

The article went on:

"Every precaution should be taken against a challenge in electricity or gas. Anyway, redundancies in those industries are unlikely to be required. The group believes that the most likely battleground will be the coal industry. They would like a Thatcher government to: *(a)* build up maximum coal stocks, particularly at the power stations; *(b)* make contingency plans for the import of coal; *(c)* encourage the recruitment of non-union lorry drivers by haulage companies to help move coal where necessary; *(d)* introduce dual coal/oil firing in all power stations as quickly as possible.

The group believes that the greatest deterrent to any strike would be 'to cut off the money supply to the strikers, and make the union finance them' . . .

There should be a large, mobile squad of police equipped and prepared to uphold the law against violent picketing. 'Good non-union drivers' should be recruited to cross picket lines with police protection."

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Grantham): That is all very sensible.

Mr. Barron: It is strange that all this "sensible" action, which has now gone on for nine months, was written by the Conservative party's policy group in 1978. Yet they have the gall to stand in this Chamber and say that the NUM is intransigent and has forced the strike upon the Coal Board. If Conservative Members believe that, I feel sorry for them, because it is far from the truth.

The Government are instructing the Coal Board to have nothing to do with trying to find a rational settlement of the strike. The Coal Board has not moved one iota since 6 March. If it has, I would like the Minister to tell me about it. This afternoon, the Secretary of State for Energy told the House that the Government would have to qualify the terms for compulsory redundancy. That is not what they said two months ago.

The cost of the strike is between £3 billion and £4 billion. Conservative Members talk about public expenditure, but the Chancellor of the Exchequer said that it was money well spent. The cost of generating electricity by oil is about £35 million a week; the cost of bringing electricity from the Scottish grid is about £3 million a week. The Government will not say how much it costs to move coal by lorry rather than by rail. Millions of pounds are being spent, but that is easy to cost. What is not easy to cost is the threat to the mining communities. The policing in mining communities will affect all members of the public for years to come. It is not a cost in pounds, but a cost for which every hon. Member is responsible.

I do not accept the Government's claim that they want the dispute to be settled. The dispute is born out of Conservative party dogma. It was born in 1978 out of the policy document written by the Secretary of State for Transport. If they were honest with the British public and with themselves, they would tell the National Coal Board to sit round the table and come to a settlement that gives a guarantee to the communities that I and many other right hon. and hon. Members represent.

1.3 am

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Cannock and Burntwood): The hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) should realise that the dispute was not of the Government's making. It was born in Saltley in 1972, when the present leader of the National Union of Mineworkers made his first endeavour to bring down the Government, and succeeded. But he shall not be allowed to succeed this time. It is thanks to the determination of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and the Government that democracy in Britain will be upheld and the will of the people will be preserved against the intimidators and the men of violence.

I share the sentiments of my hon. Friends the Members for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton), for Ludlow (Mr. Cockeram) and for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) about the order that will increase funding for the Coal Board. Many of my constituents are miners; others are not. The latter believe that they have lost their jobs and do not have all the benefits which are available to the mineworkers. Therefore, it is not true to say that, even in strong mining communities, all the people are sympathetic to the pouring of money into the mining industry. Those of my mining constituents who are still working deeply appreciate what the Government have done, not only in protecting their right to work, but in investing in the industry.

I wholeheartedly welcome the redundant mineworkers payments schemes order. I support the words of my hon. Friend and neighbour, the hon. Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack), in whose constituency Littleton colliery is situated. Some of the employees there are constituents of mine. In many respects, this is a long

overdue measure, as there has been an injustice. Many of my constituents, and those of my hon. Friend, have received not a penny since they left the pit, apart from a lump sum payment which in some cases was very small. At least those men who are on strike have been receiving social security payments for their families. Those who have chosen to go on strike can also choose to go back to work as well. My constituents, and those who will be affected beneficially by the order, have in some cases received nothing, apart from the lump sum payment.

The NCB locally has a policy of releasing men who have given many years to the mines but are not in the best of health and often were not aware of the implications of what was on offer. Both parties agreed in good faith that those who were long serving and not in the best of health could be released and would be provided for.

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): What about compassion?

Mr. Howarth: Labour Members make a grave mistake when they assume that there is no compassion on the Conservative Benches. It is our compassion that enables us to take some of the tough decisions that may not be in the short-term political interest, but are in the interests of the country.

I shall quote from a letter from one of my constituents who has been affected. He writes to me:

"I started work in the mining industry in 1946 and spent my last 23 years at Littleton Colliery. Due to manpower savings scheme at the colliery the personnel manager asked me if I wanted to be considered for redundancy. Due to my age nd service at the colliery, I thought that this would be a good opportunity to finish so that my wife and myself could spend the rest of our lives together. At my interview, I was informed by the personnel manager of the benefits that I would be entitled to receive. He gave me this information in all good faith and in all good faith I accepted it."

That is why I strongly welcome this order. Many men who have not been on strike had been made an offer by their local NCB management, and they accepted that offer in good faith and on the understanding that they would receive the money.

Mr. Rogers: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Howarth: No, I shall not give way. The right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) spoke for a long time, and refused to give way to me.

My constituent continues:

"The DHSS are wrong in saying that I have been on strike. The fact is that our colliery voted to work, and I tried to get in to work each day but on 4 days they mentioned it was physcially impossible for me to get into work."

Many men, like this constituent, are being penalised for losing only a few shifts. Why is that? It is because they have been subjected to the worst intimidation in Britain since the war.

Mr. Rogers: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the attractive redundancy terms which are now available have only been made available since the strike started, and that it was at least six weeks into the strike before the present redundancy arrangements were offered? Is it not only as a result of the actions of the people who have gone out on strike that those who are scabbing and working will now have the benefits?

Mr. Howarth: As in most things, the hon. Gentleman is wrong, because the redundant mineworkers payments scheme was in operation. Since the strike, a new scheme has been introduced for men under the age of 49. My constituent is under 55.

These men have been subjected to the worst intimidation on the picket line since the war. It is not reasonable for the House to expect of these men the heroism one would expect of the SAS. These are ordinary working men, and they are entitled to feel that they can go to their place of work free from interference. South Wales miners—probably from the constituency of the right hon. appeaser, the Member for Blaenau Gwent—have been to my constituency and thrown bags of urine at my constituents to intimidate them. That, in my view, is quite disgraceful. Some of them have intimidated. Others have not gone to work because the police have said that they cannot. Until the buses were organised and the NCB and the police managed to set up a system, these men were physically unable to go to work, despite their willingness to do so.

Another constituent of mine, a fellow named Walter Janson, to whom I have spoken today, has lost only one day. He has worked in the pit for 30 years. On the first day of the strike he made two attempts to get to work. He was unsuccessful and was forced to go home. The next day, being due to report for work at 7 o'clock in the morning, he made his way to work through the woods so that he would not be seen by the pickets from south Wales. He left home at 5 o'clock in the morning, and he continued to do that so that he could represent that he was going in to work. That shows a kind of determination which these tribunals ought to recognise.

This measure will help such men, who are not entitled to unemployment benefit. I am pleased to see my hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security in his place. He has been very sympathetic to the cases that I have put to him, and I hope that his Department will consider this point with equal sympathy. It was part of the deal that these men were offered when they accepted voluntary redundancy.

Another category of men affected has not been mentioned so far. Two of my constituents, both of whom were employed in the pit and both of whom were good employees, had not voted to strike. They had sought to go to work. But, like so many others, they lost a few days because of intimidation. These two constituents, one a Mr. Pearson and the other whom I shall not name, left for other jobs. Both found that their new jobs fell through. One of them went to the United States, but the job fell through, so he came back. Neither of these two gentlemen can claim unemployment benefit. They have received nothing. Yet there is no way that they can benefit financially from the outcome of the strike. I hope that my hon. Friend will hear what I and others of my hon. Friends are saying and see whether anything can be done to assist them.

I welcome wholeheartedly my hon. Friend's endeavours. They are most timely. He has been in the Department but a few days, and we see this measure before us. I congratulate him on his alacrity. I prefer to have him as a Minister than as a Whip, though as a Whip he was equally charming to me. However, I share the grave misgivings already expressed by my hon. Friends about the bottomless pit of public expenditure. We have been through an awful time lately, with tiny amounts of public money to be saved. Great anxiety has been caused to right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House. Yet, at a stroke, late at night, we are about to put a lot of public money into the mining industry.

1.13 am

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): I rise to speak, sick at heart about the dispute. It is an unnecessary strike, brought about in an industry which has an enormous future and potential. I think that all hon. Members agree on that. The Under-Secretary of State and some of his hon. Friends have used the analogy of a private company. Although that analogy is not completely true, because we are talking about a public corporation, if we pursue it we, in essence, are representatives of the shareholders.

The Minister's hon. Friends are sore that he should ask for £2 billion in grants. They are right, but they should ask themselves why the Secretary of State can ask for £2 billion in grants when he has not been able to spend 10p in eight months on a telephone call to the NUM. On no occasion has he sought the views of the NUM.

This strike will not end easily. It will not end in a whimper. I can only speak knowing the posture of the people in my area. That is one reason why I am sick at heart. We in the comfort of the House of Commons do not know the enormous and severe privation which some families, such as those in my constituency, are suffering.

Do not howl at me the name "Arthur Scargill". Arthur Scargill did not bring the strike on. He did not harden the view of my constituents. I regret that we have not had a proper opportunity in the House to discuss the strike. In the interests of the nation the Government should provide not one, but perhaps several, days, and not at 1.30 in the morning, when we can ventilate the issues.

I want to refer to the Bogside closure in my area. I have accused Mr. MacGregor to his face and the board of industrial vandalism. If the NCB had been a private company, the management would have been sacked for what went on in that pit. That is what my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) referred to. In my area the men have seen the board's behaviour. They have seen the board use tactics which I, with my background under the old shipbuilders, where we experienced hard and difficut management, could not believe when I read about them in the report. I could not believe that management would behave in such a way. The Minister knows that I have met his predecessor on this issue, and we have not been able to get to the root of the problem and its issues.

I have been on the picket lines and have told the men from my constituency and those of other hon. Members that the people going through the picket lines are not worth getting arrested for. I realise that the only secure weapon that my folk have is their unity. The NCB has sacked men because of their behaviour on the picket lines. *[Interruption.]* My hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist) is helpful, but I am capable of making my own points. I know whose side I am on.

I have told my constituents that they must remain united, because if they do not the NCB will pick off their colleagues. That is an essential ingredient in the NUM and in any other decent trade union, and Conservative Members had better realise that. As a responsible hon. Member, I will not say to my folk, "Crawl back and be disunited." The Government, in their stupidity, might desire that, but I am trying to raise the Government from their stupidity. On occasions the Secretary of State for Energy raises himself from the stupidity. In his excellent speech to the Young Conservatives last week the right hon. Gentleman quoted John F. Kennedy:

"Let us never negotiate out of fear. But let us never fear to negotiate."

The right hon. Gentleman is not negotiating. He has a responsibility, representing the national interest, to negotiate.

Do not let the Secretary of State come back and ask for any more millions. Let him spend 10p on a telephone call and get people round the table. One of the magic things about the dispute is the way in which the women have stood behind and beside the men. If this nation has any sense, it will not humiliate and degrade such people.

I plead with sensible people inside and outside the House—the bishops, the Church of Scotland and others —to lean on the Government and to say, "This is no way to run a modern industrial nation." The damage to the nation is great in financial terms, but the damage to the self-respect of communities also has to be considered. That is a vital ingredient in enhancing industrial relations and the prestige of communities. Ministers should not be too proud to do what I have suggested.

Mr. David Hunt *rose——*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Paul Dean): Mr. David Hunt.

Mr. Lofthouse: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Many hon. Members have serious problems in their constituencies. Is it reasonable that the Front Benches should take up one hour and 20 minutes of the three hours allowed for this debate?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am afraid that I cannot help the hon. Gentleman on that matter.

Mr. Nellist: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We have had two debates on the coal industry today and there has been a geographical imbalance in the selction of speakers. One coalfield in particular—the Warwickshire area — has not been represented. Can you give an assurance that there will be a better geographical distribution of speakers in future debates, so that the imbalance is put right?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I know that the hon. Gentleman was not called to speak but a number of other hon. Members were also not called. Unfortunately, it is impossible to get a quart into a pint pot.

1.23 am

Mr. David Hunt: We have had a wide-ranging debate with contributions from hon. Members in all parts of the House who obviously care very deeply about our great coal industry. It is not just because this is the first debate that I have been privileged to wind up that I say that I found all the contributions to be of a high standard.

I much appreciated the kind remarks of the hon. Member for Midlothian (Mr. Eadie) at the start of his speech, and I will endeavour to carry on the tradition of my predecessors. I should tell the hon. Members for Pontefract and Castleford (Mr. Lofthouse) and for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist) that I endeavoured to be as brief as possible in opening the debate and I have only 11 minutes to answer a considerable number of points. I do not think that I shall have time to cover them all, but I shall write to any hon. Members who are missed out.

The hon. Members for Midlothian and for Hemsworth (Mr. Woodall) asked me about the implications of the redundant mineworkers payments scheme order for some

of their constituents. The hon. Member for Midlothian kindly said that he did not require an immediate response. I will carefully consider those cases and write to both hon. Members.

I was asked when the payments would be made. If approved, the amendment order on redundancy payments will come into operation on 7 December. Payments under the new rules will commence as quickly as possible. I have already been in touch with the agency office which administers the scheme on the Department's behalf. I have asked whether it can identify all the cases so that waiting for applications is not necessary and a direct response can be made to those who have suffered. I am assured that the agency office will move speedily and contact direct those entitled to back payments. The payments will be made before Christmas, if that is possible.

I was pressed to extend the scheme to unemployment benefit. There is no anomaly, because the rules apply to all who fall within them.

A serious accusation was made about investment. Most of the investment in Selby has been under the present Government. I have read speeches about Selby by the hon. Member for Midlothian who played a major role in the start of the project. I hope that he will acknowledge that most of the investment has come under the present Government. It is particularly unfortunate that the strike is damaging the investment programme by holding up the Selby project, for example, by cutting capital expenditure this year from about £800 million to under £500 million.

In January the Government gave approval for a major new mine at Asfordby. I do not want hon. Members to gain a wrong impression from what the hon. Member for Midlothian said. The investment level has been much higher under this Government and we have a record of which we can be proud.

The hon. Gentleman said that the NUM executive could not call a ballot at any time. I defer to the hon. Gentleman's knowledge of the rule book and I feel a slight sense of foreboding when I quote from it in his presence. The rule book states:

"A national strike shall only be entered upon as a result of a ballot vote of the members taken in pursuance of a resolution of conference."

That did not happen at the start of the dispute, but, under the same rule No. 43, there is provision for a ballot vote to be taken

"during the course of a dispute."

Rule No. 23 in the NUM rule book states:

"A special conference may be called at any time by the national executive committee."

That committee could call a conference straight away, and hold another at any time. We say that it should call another conference to discuss whether a ballot should be held at this time.

The hon. Member said that to state that the NUM had not moved an inch was a travesty of the truth. But that goes against my recollection of the "Today" programme when I heard the president of the NUM say that he agreed that he had not "budged an inch" since 6 March. That is what we heard.

The hon. Member for Midlothian accused me of massaging the figures and said that I would regret that. I listened to the NUM president on BBC Radio 4 on 12 November when he said that about 80 per cent. of his members were on strike—that is, 140,000. On "The World This Weekend" yesterday I heard him say that without question or fear of hesitation or contradiction there are 144,275 miners on strike. According to the president of the NUM, the number on strike has increased by over 4,000. When he quoted those figures on 12 November, there were 133,000 on strike. Yesterday, when he referred to over 144,000 being on strike, there were only 123,000. I think that everyone throughout the country realises that there has been a significant return to work over the past two weeks except, apparently, the president of the NUM.

Mr. Nellist: Does the Minister still support the Secretary of State for Energy, who said in the House on 2 July that more than 60,000 miners were working? The same Secretary of State says that 20,000 miners, according to NCB figures, have gone back in the past three weeks. Yet today the NCB says that only just over 60,000 miners are working. The hon. Gentleman is talking about those who cannot add up and it seems that the Secretary of State for Energy cannot. Does he still support him?

Mr. Hunt: I ask the hon. Gentleman to listen for one moment. The figure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy quoted was for all employees in the coal industry.

Mr. Nellist: Miners.

Mr. Hunt: In the NCB and other activities. There are 222,000 employees in the NCB and in other activities of the board. Of those, over 98,000 are no longer on strike. Those are the correct figures. Out of the 189,000 members of the NUM, over 65,000 are no longer on strike.

My hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack) was a strong and effective advocate on behalf of his constituents. He, together with my hon. Friends the Members for Cannock and Burntwood (Mr. Howarth) and for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart), has been the leader of the lobby which has fought for the concessions that I have introduced. His comments and those of others about unemployment benefit will be carefully considered by my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr. Whitney), the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security, and myself.

My hon. Friends the Members for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow), for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton) and for Ludlow (Mr. Cockeram) made a plea for financial sanity. I have especial respect for my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow because of his expertise in the business and commercial world. He had made it clear that he is not willing to support a bottomless pit. I remind my hon. Friend that these are difficult times. There is a strike and the Government are determined that the industry should be supported until it is able to return to viability. However, I agree with my hon. Friend that there is no security in permanent dependence on subsidy from the taxpayer, and the Government are determined to end that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cannock and Burntwood gave us some important information on what was promised in advance to men taking early retirement. I shall consider that carefully.

The right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) made some good points about NCB (Enterprise) Ltd. and the comparison with steel. I benefited from that for my constituents who worked at Shotton. I recognise the arguments advanced by the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) to the effect that the perspective should be more ambitious, but let us take one step at a time. The hon. Gentleman told the House that one of his

[Mr. Hunt]

constituents suffered loss through being abroad at the relevant time. However, the scheme was changed in April and it may be that that is no longer the position.

I do not have time to cover all the other matters that were raised in the debate, but I shall write to those involved. One feature that has greatly impressed me since I took over responsibility for our great coal industry is the sense of pride that is felt by everyone connected with it. I share that sense of pride and I am impatient to see the rebuilding process start as quickly as possible. First, the sad, damaging and unnecessary dispute must end. The one honourable way to proceed would be for the NUM to observe its great democratic tradition and put the offer to a ballot. That offer is described as having been the most generous ever made to miners since nationalisation. Those who say that the NCB has not conceded ignore the facts —a guaranteed job for every mine worker who wants to stay in the industry, no compulsory redundancies and the highest redundancy benefits in western Europe, a pay increase to keep miners well ahead of average industrial wages, continuing investment in the industry's future, and an undertaking to examine the 4 million tonnes reduction proposed in March and to consider the future of those five pits under the industry's review procedures to which is now added an enterprise scheme to help bring new jobs to mining communities. That is a very generous offer.

It being three hours after the first motion had been entered upon, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *proceeded, pursuant to the order [23 November], to put the Questions necessary to dispose of the motions relating to the coal industry.*

The House divided: Ayes 105, Noes 2.

Division No. 20] **[1.35 am**

AYES

Aitken, Jonathan
Ashby, David
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Budgen, Nick
Carttiss, Michael
Cope, John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Fenner, Mrs Peggy
Freeman, Roger
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gow, Ian
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Ground, Patrick
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harvey, Robert
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, J.
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hooson, Tom
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Jones, Robert *(W Herts)*
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
Knight, Gregory *(Derby N)*
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lester, Jim
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Peter, *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Macfarlane, Neil
MacGregor, John
Maclean, David John
Major, John
Malins, Humfrey
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mather, Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Hal *(B'grove)*
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Mitchell, David *(NW Hants)*
Moynihan, Hon C.
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Pawsey, James
Rathbone, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Spencer, Derek
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stevens, Martin *(Fulham)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, J.
Sumberg, David
Taylor, Rt Hon John David
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Tracey, Richard
Twinn, Dr Ian
Walden, George
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watson, John
Watts, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Michael
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Ian Lang and
Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd.

NOES

Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Tony Marlow and
Mr. Eric Cockeram.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Coal Industry (Limit on Deficit Grants) Order 1984, which was laid before this House on 12th November, be approved.

COAL INDUSTRY

Resolved,

That the draft Redundant Mineworkers and Concessionary Coal (Payments Schemes) (Amendment) Order 1984, which was laid before this House on 12th November, be approved.—*[Mr. Donald Thompson.]*

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

CROWN AGENTS FOR OVERSEAS GOVERNMENTS AND ADMINISTRATIONS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 79(5) (Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.)

That the draft Crown Agents Commencing Capital Debt Order 1984, which was laid before this House on 7th November, be approved.—*[Mr. Donald Thompson.]*

Question agreed to.

Sewage Treatment Sites

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Donald Thompson.]*

.46 am

Mr. Roy Galley (Halifax): The debate results from some serious problems of nuisance from odours in my constituency and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Calder Valley (Mr. Thompson). We are both deeply concerned about the continuation, and in some aspects exacerbation, of these difficult local problems. However, these local difficulties have considerable significance and impinge upon national policy.

The problems relate to the Halifax sewage works, which are a complex of sites at Salterhebble, North Dean and Copley. For many years local residents have complained about the emission of foul odours from those sewage treatment works. All such sites inevitably present problems of smell for local residents, and with modern planning controls there would perhaps normally be fewer houses in the vicinity of sewage sites, although the experience of some hon. Members may suggest that that may be an optimistic view of the situation and that the planning controls may, indeed, be inadequate. Nevertheless, the houses in the area exist and the smell persists. It is very difficult to measure smell, but I can assure my hon. Friend the Minister that it is regular and foul in varying degrees in this area of Halifax and of the Calder Valley constituency.

Initially, the odours in the Copley area were attributed to the manufacture of two humus-based products which were produced after a drying process. They were, first, Organifax, and then a slightly different product, Yorkshire Bounty.

In the mid-1970s a series of measures were taken to mask the odours, such as spraying scented chemicals in the vicinity, but those steps did not overcome the smell. In the late 1970s the production of this humus was discontinued because it was not a commercial success. Yorkshire water authority officials at the time indicated that this would overcome the worst of the odour emission, but it has proved not to be the case.

The latest suggestion is that the odours may stem from the need to treat effluents which come from several food and drink manufacturing plants in the Halifax area. It is maintained that such effluents can upset the digestion process at the sewage treatment works. However, there are many parts of the country where such effluents exist and foul odour emission does not present a problem. I understand that intermediate treatment stations can be installed, and that has been done successfully at Tadcaster, where there are three major breweries. That plant includes an odour control plant, and the problem of odour nuisance in Tadcaster has been completely eradicated. Alternatively, at Burton-on-Trent, sewage is treated by an anaerobic digestion process which, apparently, does not produce problems of smell or of slurry disposal.

Businesses pay for admitting trade effluent to sewers, and that payment is made on a sliding scale according to the strength of the effluent. It is therefore in the interests of the businesses concerned to reduce effluent strength, and indeed one such local firm, a famous brewery, has recently spent over £250,000 in an attempt to reduce effluent strengths and thus reduce its annual effluent charges. The water authority takes regular samples of effluent strength, and that brewery has shown a 35 per cent. reduction in solid content over a 12-month period. There has also been a reduction in the amount of oxygen present, which in turn makes a more balanced effluent.

Major steps have been taken by firms in the constituency to reduce the strength of odour. Nevertheless, the smell persists in the vicinity of Copley and North Dean. There is no firm evidence presented by the Yorkshire water authority that the problem results from brewery and food manufacturing waste.

In addition to that problem, which has persisted for many years in the Copley area, we also have local problems of sludge dumping and processing. The process at the sewage treatment sites in Halifax results in a pressed cake which requires disposal. It can be spread directly on farmland, but in turn it produces serious odour problems, especially when it is near residential development.

It was therefore decided by the Yorkshire water authority to compost the material centrally before spreading. The current method which it employs to deal with sewage disposal is by mechanical pressing, lime is then added, and the cake is composted after transfer to another site. Supposedly, that process reduces the smell, but there continues to be a considerable foul odour, particularly at premises near where the sewage is processed at Lowfields in Elland, in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Calder Valley. That is a relatively new problem, in addition to the problems that we have had for many years in the Copley area. That process began in the summer of 1983, and it takes place within a quarter of a mile of several residences.

Given the will by all concerned, these problems can surely be solved. In many respects the Yorkshire water authority is doing a good job for people in Calderdale at present. We have long-standing problems of water quality, about which my hon. Friend the Member for Calder valley and others have campaigned over several years. The authority, to give it credit, is making substantial progress in improving water quality by investment in new plant in Halifax and relining a large number of mains.

While the latest spate of problems has existed at Lowfields for the last 18 months, the authority has sought from time to time to ameliorate the problem. This summer there was a serious infestation of flies at Lowfields. The authority acted promptly with the use of pesticides, and the problem was resolved. It has also installed new capital equipment to ensure the adequate mixing of lime with the pressed cake, but that has not dealt with the smell with which the people of Lowfields have to cope.

Despite the number of small measures that I have outlined, both at Copley and Lowfields, the water authority has not been fully successful. It must do better, because there is an indisputable and long-standing nuisance from foul odours in those areas.

My hon. Friend the Minister is the expert in these matters. It would not be appropriate for a layman such as myself to offer solutions. I would be grateful if my hon. Friend could explain his policy on odour reduction and the processing of pressed cake. Investment in the form of intermediate treatment plants might solve the odour emission from the sewage treatment works near Copley and North Dean. Tankering to remote agricultural areas might solve the sludge disposal aspect.

Mr. Donald Thompson (Lords Commissioner to the Treasury): Hear, hear.

Mr. Galley: The installation of a digestion process where the pressed cake would be left in tanks to digest further might be preferable to the present activated sludge process operated by the Yorkshire water authority. I understand that the water authority considered such a scheme, which would have required some further capital investment, but that it has recently, for some inexplicable reason, deleted the scheme from its capital programme. My constituents and those of my hon. Friend the Member for Calder Valley have suffered the problem for far too long.

Mr. Thompson: Hear, hear.

Mr. Galley: It is not only a matter of personal suffering. We are seeking to promote our area as being suitable for further business investment. What encouragement is it to potential investors when, as they enter Calderdale from the M62, they are hit by noxious odours from our local sewage treatment sites?

I know that my hon. Friend cannot direct the Yorkshire water authority to take any particular action. Nevertheless, he should take note of the suffering of my constituents and those of my hon. Friend the Member for Calder Valley and give us some guidance in resolving the problem. Furthermore, the people of Halifax and Elland should be able to look to the water authority to take much more positive action to deal with the noxious odours once and for all.

1.57 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Neil Macfarlane): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mr. Galley) on raising a matter which is clearly of importance to his constituents in Halifax. It is, of course, of equal concern to my hon. Friend the Member for Calder Valley (Mr. Thompson), who has also raised the matter in the past. Because of his current role, my hon. Friend the Member for Calder Valley has to maintain a semi-Trappist silence on some issues, but the House will have heard his vigorous sedentary interventions this evening.

Both my hon. Friends have a considerable problem in helping their constituents to try to handle the misery which undoubtedly affects many people living in that part of the country.

I have looked into the history of the affair, and I hope that it will help my hon. Friend if I put the present problem into perspective.

The sewage treatment works at Halifax are on three sites — Copley, North Dean and Stainland road. The plant was being reconstructed and extended by the Halifax county borough council in 1974, when the Yorkshire water authority was formed and took over the works. Most of the installation has performed satisfactorily since it was commissioned, but there have been serious operational problems. Nobody should underestimate that. The intention was that the sewage sludge should be heat-dried and sold as fertiliser. But this process proved too expensive to run. There have also been problems in controlling odour from the original heat treatment unit.

Accordingly, in 1979 and 1980, the water authority shut down the heat conditioning unit and the final drying plant. This left it with a problem of disposing of the sewage sludge.

The geography of the area makes it impracticable to dispose of liquid sludge on farmland and therefore the use of anaerobic digestion to stabilise the sludge at Halifax — which produces an inoffensive liquid fertiliser — would not be economic. Early in 1982 experiments were begun to determine whether the sludge could be effectively stabilised by the addition of lime, a process which is in successful use elsewhere. Although the Halifax sludge is particularly difficult to stabilise in this way — mainly because of the brewery and confectionery wastes from which it is derived—initial results proved promising.

Full-scale use of lime mixing was introduced in the spring of 1983, after some delay caused by the strike of manual workers, and the treated sludge cake was transported to the Lowfields site for temporary storage. This has been a matter of interest to my hon. Friend the Member for Calder Valley which he has pursued with the local authority and my Department. This temporary storage is essential for several reasons. First, there is no room on the site of the sludge pressing plant and, secondly, land spreading operations have to be organised on a seasonal basis to suit farm management practice. In addition, it is recognised that for sludge to be disposed safely to grassland, it must be substantially free from pathogens. It has been found that if the limed Halifax sludge is composted by stacking in the open for several months, it is made pathogen-free and odour nuisance is further reduced.

The site at Lowfields has a long history of use for sewage disposal. It was formerly the sewage treatment works of the Elland urban district council and therefore has planning permission and is accepted for this type of use. This makes it relatively suitable as a composting area for sludge cake.

Operation of the new method of composting after lime treatment during the summer of 1983 was very ecouraging and complaints of odour nuisance where the treated cake was used on pasture land were much reduced in number. The problem was not eliminated, however, and in February this year a petition about the odours was received by the mayor of Calderdale. A subsequent visit of inspection to the Lowfields composting site by environmental health officers impressed them with its effectiveness in reducing odours.

While this method of treating the odour problem by lime dosing and composting has now been shown to be feasible. The authority has not yet completed the capital works necessary to ensure adequate mixing of the lime with the de-watered sludge. Meanwhile, the odour problem has persisted at Lowfields and, on occasion, at Copley. The hot day weather this summer exacerbated the problem and also caused a plague of flies, which, however, was quickly tackled by the use of spray pesticides, but not before it caused much misery to the constituents of my hon. Friend the Member for Calder Valley.

In summary, complaints of foul odours from the three Halifax sewage treatment works go back for 10 years or more. The water authority attempted to mask the odours in the early days. With the abandonment, in 1979 and 1980, of the drying process, which enabled it to dispose of the sewage sludge as a fertiliser, it was left with problems of sludge disposal to which the technical solution — lime treatment — has emerged only quite recently. Even now, this process is open to improvement and is being improved through the capital works which the water authority is now undertaking.

Meanwhile, there have been odour problems, particularly at the Lowfields site where the limed sludge is stored to compost, and at Copley, particularly during the hot dry weather this summer when flies also gave grounds for complaint, though the authority attacked the flies successfully with pesticides. It is to be hoped that the technical measures which the authority has taken will soon be fully effective, and forestall the odour and the repetition next year of fly nuisance.

There has been a regular dialogue between the authority and the district council about the difficult operational problems of the Halifax works. Consultation began as early as the summer of 1975, during the reconstruction work, when there were complaints about noise and smell, resulting in a public open day at the site to demonstrate what was being done. After the commissioning of the new heat treatment plant in 1976 there were further discussions to try to resolve the smell problem and work was put in hand on the development of improvements.

However, by 1980 the environmental problems had still not been satisfactorily solved and the authority decided to cease what was by then an obviously uneconomic operation. Throughout these negotiations and discussions the district council has been fully appreciative of the real difficulties facing the authority and has acted in a practical spirit of constructive co-operation. It is clear to me, too, that the authority and its chairman have been sensitive to the representations made by the Calderdale district council, the public, and Members of Parliament and are making every effort to overcome the problems which have proved to be particularly intractable. My hon. Friend hinted that there is also a longer-term issue. The Calderdale district council has expressed interest in acquiring the site at Lowfields, which was formerly the sewage treatment works of the Elland urban district council, and which, after a period of disuse, is now used for the composting of sewage sludge transported there, after lime treatment and de-watering at the Halifax sewage works.

The Yorkshire water authority has been prepared to discuss the transfer of this site to the Calderdale district council, but it could relinquish it only if an alternative site was available for the operations now undertaken at Lowfields.

The authority hopes that the district council, as planning authority, can help. I need not emphasise the importance that any site used for sewage treatment an sludge composting operations should have the necessary planning consent for that use. I know that the Yorkshire water authority is ready to discuss this matter further with the district council and others involved. But the problems that have arisen in this debate are essentially local, as my hon. Friend has hinted, and I hope that with continuing effort and good will they can be resolved between the local public bodies concerned. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has very limited powers in this matter. In the remote possibility of an appeal arising under the Town and Country Planning Acts, he is in no position to play any constructive part in resolving these issues immediately.

Nevertheless, I hope that the efforts that are now being made, and the investment that is now being put in, will abate the nuisance, and that the public bodies concerned can reach agreement on any better pattern of land ownership and use that might be found.

My hon. Friend referred to the district council's invitation to the Secretary of State, in a letter of 1 November, to be represented at a meeting with the borough council and the local Member of Parliament. Unhappily, that letter was misdirected and went astray. I am sure my hon. Friend will appreciate that as our legal advice is that we have no particular locus in an essentially local matter, we are advising the borough council that we have no part to play in resolving the issue and that it should continue to press it with the Yorkshire water authority direct.

I thank my hon. Friend for raising this important subject tonight. His constituents have every reason to be grateful to him for the efforts he is making on their behalf and on behalf of my hon. Friend the Member for Calder Valley.

I know that my hon. Friend is well aware of the division of responsibilities in this area, and, while my Department will naturally do what it can to help the Yorkshire water authority, we understand that its locus and role are paramount. I am sure that both my hon. Friends the Members for Halifax and for Calder Valley will continue to intercede with the authority on their constituents' behalf. I am certain that the resourcefulness which my hon. Friend has displayed tonight will ensure that copies of *Hansard* are sent to the Yorkshire water authority so that it can understand the depth of his feeling and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Calder Valley.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at seven minutes past Two o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 27 November 1984

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

GREATER LONDON COUNCIL (MONEY) (NO. 2) BILL
Read the Third time, and passed.

HEREFORD CITY COUNCIL BILL *[Lords]*

SURREY BILL *[Lords]*

WORCESTER CITY COUNCIL BILL *[Lords]*
Read a Second time, and committed.

Oral Answers to Questions

SOCIAL SERVICES

Drug Pricing

1. **Mr. Hunter** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what consultation he has had with the pharmaceutical industry following his statement on 8 November about drug pricing.

The Secretary of State for Social Services (Mr. Norman Fowler): As I announced on 8 November, my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister for Health will have discussions with the pharmaceutical industry about the pharmaceutical price regulation scheme. Arrangements have been made for him to meet representatives of the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry shortly.

Mr. Hunter: Can my right hon. Friend give any assurance that measures resulting from that statement will not effectively amount to denying NHS patients certain important drugs? I have in mind in particular the arthritis drug, Distalgesic.

Mr. Fowler: Branded drugs, which have been specifically developed for the relief of pain and inflammation in rheumatism and arthritis, will still be available. At present, Distalgesic is not in that category. We are committed to the limited list scheme, but the whole point of having the consultation period is to listen to the arguments on particular drugs. That is why we are having consultations.

Mr. Ashley: Is the Secretary of State aware that his first attempt to introduce a rational prescribing policy is to be very warmly welcomed, that he should strongly resist the selfish and distorted propaganda of the pharmaceutical industry, which is now screaming blue murder, and that the only advice he should accept about implementing this very good proposal is independent advice?

Mr. Fowler: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman. I think he will agree with me that there is a balance to be held in these proposals. It is in no one's interest to take measures which will damage the research-based pharmaceutical industry in this country. I believe that in the Government's proposals we are not doing that, and we are making useful savings in the Health Service budget. On those grounds I think that the proposals should, as the right hon. Gentleman says, be supported.

Dr. Mawhinney: I, too, commend my right hon. Friend on the decision that he has taken and on the consultations into which he has entered. Will he take every opportunity, with the rest of us, to make it clear to patients that they will not be medically disadvantaged by the sensible decision that he has taken and announced?

Mr. Fowler: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. That point needs to be emphasised. There will, of course, be generic alternatives to the branded drugs which will not be prescribed free on the National Health Service, so there is no question of patients being disadvantaged by the steps that we have taken. We are having consultations so that we can ensure that that does not happen.

Mr. Meadowcroft: Does the Secretary of State accept that many of us on the Liberal Benches accept the benefits of genuine generic substitution, but will he confirm that it is his intention that all drugs presently available will continue to be available either across the counter, because prescription is not required, or by reason of their generic equivalence?

Mr. Fowler: The drugs which are available across the counter will continue to be available across the counter. The vast majority of the drugs that we are talking about do not need a prescription in any event. They can be bought from chemists.

I confirm that the intention is that there should be generic alternatives to the branded drugs that they replace.

Mental Health Act Commission (Membership)

2. **Mr. Stan Thorne** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether medical members of the Mental Health Act Commission receive additional sessional fees from their employing authorities in respect of their work with the commission.

The Minister for Health (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): Consultants who are members of the Mental Health Act Commission may need to adjust their clinical commitments to accommodate their commission work. If, as a result, patient services might be reduced to an unacceptable level, health authorities should seek to make good the loss by employing a locum or in some other way. If that is not feasible, they may, at their discretion, award payment for one temporary extra session to the commission member.

Mr. Thorne: I thank the Minister for his reply. Can he state whether commissioners who are self-employed or employed by private employers receive payment in the form of fees for their work as commissioners?

Mr. Clarke: They receive expenses. At the moment we do not think that it is a good idea to put all the commissioners on a fee-paying basis. We look sympathetically at any situation in which a member might

suffer hardship or difficulty, but we have an extremely strong commission, with very good members, and they do not have to be paid a fee for their work.

Mr. Proctor: Will my right hon. and learned Friend take this opportunity to congratulate the chairman and members of the Mental Health Act Commission on their work, because the commission has been going only a short time but has become a responsible body in this area?

Mr. Clarke: I shall pass on my hon. Friend's congratulations to Lord Colville and his colleagues.

Hospital Wards, South Manchester

3. **Mr. Alfred Morris** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will take action to avert the closure of up to eight hospital wards in south Manchester.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security (Mr. John Patten): If any such proposals come to us, under well-established procedures, Ministers will decide on their merits.

Mr. Morris: Is the Minister aware of the district administrator's statement that his health authority has done everything that it can to balance its budget by efficiency savings and by reducing equipment, maintenance and building programmes, but that it may still have to close a maternity ward, a children's surgical ward, a chest ward, a chest clinic and even a cancer ward at Christie hospital at weekends? Is it not clear, as the community health council insists, that patient care is now at risk in south Manchester? In view of the Government's oft-repeated assurances that they will protect patient care, will the Minister now act urgently to correct the underfunding of this health authority?

Mr. Patten: I have been following events in south Manchester with care. What the right hon. Gentleman seems to have forgotten is the increased resources that have been put into south Manchester over the past two years — an additional £5 million of capital and an additional £1·2 million of revenue for cardiology and renal services. More patients are being treated in south Manchester than ever before. There is no truth in the assertion that patients are suffering there. No final decisions have been made about any of the wards to which the right hon. Gentleman referred, and, if they are made, Ministers will consider them carefully, as they always do, in the best interests of patients.

Mr. Mark Carlisle: As someone who was a patient in the Wythenshawe hospital for several weeks in the middle of last year, I should like to ask my hon. Friend whether he is aware of the tremendous reputation and expertise of the chest unit at Wythenshawe hospital? Does he accept that if the service is severely reduced that is bound to have an adverse effect on the facilities available not only in the district but throughout the region?

Mr. Patten: It is very good of my right hon. and learned Friend to pay that compliment to those who looked after him in that hospital. Of course, we are aware of its high reputation. No recommendations about its future, or the future of any of the wards, have yet been referred to Ministers for decision. Should that happen, we shall of course consider most carefully any suggestions that have been made by the local health authority.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: Is the Minister aware that the community services in south Manchester and the surrounding districts are already grossly overstrained and that it is almost inescapable that some cuts will have to be made because, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) said, the district has not been able to balance its books without making cuts? If ward closures take place, it will inevitably mean that the community services, which are already overstrained, will fail in their primary target of serving patient needs.

Mr. Patten: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's concern for those in the area, but he is speculating about what might happen should decisions be taken at some time in the future. The district health authority must face its present problems of overspending, and face them hard. While saying that, I applaud the approach of the district health authority in looking first to the needs of patients and not to the funding of empty or unnecessary beds, particularly with the changes in the pattern of medical care, when many people wish to go home at weekends and even more people wish to have day surgery rather than stay in hospital for many days unnecessarily.

NHS (Government Support)

4. **Mr. Sumberg** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on the level of Government support for the National Health Service in the next financial year.

Mr. Fowler: As I recently announced, the Government plan to spend next year a total of £17 billion on the National Health Service in Great Britain. This represents an increase of £700 million on the anticipated expenditure for 1984-85 and is £200 million more than that previously announced in the 1984 expenditure White Paper. The funds allocated to health authorities will be increased by 1 per cent. over and above what would be required merely to keep pace with the forecast rate of inflation. These figures demonstrate the reality of the Government's continuing commitment to the Health Service.

Mr. Sumberg: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. Is he aware that there is increasing public concern that the NHS does not have sufficient funds and resources to combat and publicise the danger of patients contracting AIDS as a result of blood transfusions? If that is so, will he assure the House that sufficient funds and resources will be made available to the NHS?

Mr. Fowler: Yes, I think that I can give that assurance. The Government are taking a number of actions. We are seeking to become self-sufficient in Factor 8 so that imports are no longer required. I very much hope that that will be done by 1986. My right hon. and learned Friend the Minister for Health has issued leaflets. Perhaps, most important of all, we are seeking ways to test blood donations. No screening test has yet been developed, but a pilot trial will be started in London in the next few weeks.

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton: However much the Minister may seek to mislead the House and the country with statistics, does he agree that his statistics presume a pay increase of only 3 per cent. for nurses and ancillary staff? Does he admit, therefore, that, despite all the

Government's protestations, those people have suffered, are suffering and will continue to suffer a substantial reduction in their standard of living?

Mr. Fowler: Untypically, the hon. Gentleman's remarks are not a fair commentary on our plans. We are providing an extra £700 million cash in Great Britain. If pay is settled at the 3 per cent. which the Government think reasonable, there will be 2 per cent. cash left for growth within the Health Service. Health authorities have cash budgets and they must plan within them. In that respect, there is no difference between the Health Service and any other service or industry.

Mrs. Jill Knight: When issuing statements and information documents about these important matters, will my right hon. Friend avoid using phrases, such as "relative technical limitations of the input volume methodology", which confuse rather than clarify and hamper the excellent story which the Government have to tell about their record in the Health Service?

Mr. Fowler: I can give my hon. Friend an absolute assurance on that. To the best of my knowledge, I have never issued anything remotely similar to that in my name, and I shall certainly see to it that none of my ministerial team does so either.

Mr. Eastham: The Minister insists on giving percentage figures. Do those assessments include the ever-increasing number of pensioners, which is currently growing by about 100,000 per year, thus adding considerably to the burden on the Health Service?

Mr. Fowler: Of course, we accept that, and that is why we are providing more cash for the Health Service. It is no use the hon. Gentleman making dismissive gestures. We are providing 5·5 per cent. more cash for the Health Service next year than was provided this year. One of our main reasons for doing that is the very argument which the hon. Gentleman put forward. His comments signally fail to undermine the Government's commitment to the Health Service.

Mr. McCrindle: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that although his proposals on generic prescribing will save the NHS money, there is no doubt about the efficacy of the alternative drugs and that those who have suggested that we are moving towards having one Health Service for the rich and another for the poor are guilty of mischievous nonsense?

Mr. Fowler: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. Although there is some laughter on the Opposition Benches, I had thought that that was the policy of the Opposition, too.

Benefits

5. **Mr. Pike** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will consider extending to all the long-term unemployed the high long-term rates of benefit as recommended by the Social Security Advisory Committee.

The Minister for Social Security (Mr. Tony Newton): As I told the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) on 12 November, the necessary resources of about £500 million are not available to implement this proposal, which in any case raises wider questions about the supplementary benefit scheme more properly considered in the current social security review.

Mr. Pike: Does the Minister accept that one of the main areas of concern connected with unemployment at present is the growth of long-term unemployment? Does he further accept that the longer that people are unemployed, the greater the expenses that they incur, because their belongings wear out? Should not the long-term unemployed be given a fair deal, should not resources be made available to meet their requirements, and should not the supplementary benefit system be changed so that assistance can be made available by way of unemployment benefit?

Mr. Newton: That view has been put forward by many who have given evidence to the supplementary benefit review, so of course it is a view that we shall consider.

Mr. Galley: In view of the present abuses, will the Government consider, in consultation with the Social Security Advisory Committee, the possibility of new arrangements for mortgage interest payments for the long-term unemployed and others to be made direct to the lender, not to the borrower?

Mr. Newton: I note what my hon Friend says. As I have said before, I am conscious of the concern expressed about the particular instance. However, I hope that, when pressing the point as a generality, my hon. Friend will accept that many people might well feel that it should not be an automatic consequence of becoming unemployed that their building society should immediately be informed by the local social security office.

Mr. Kirkwood: If cost is a reason for not extending the long-term rate of benefit to all claimants, will the Minister consider the SSAC's compromise arrangement of introducing it first to those claimants with dependent children?

Mr. Newton: That is another view that has been put forward to the supplementary benefit review. I answer with some hesitation only because those who say that this should be a priority rarely say which other matters should be given less priority in its place, which is the necessary concomitant.

Mr. Meacher: Given that the cost of extending the benefit to the long-term unemployed would be about £500 million a year, how can the Government justify refusing that benefit to the unemployed when they have this year handed out almost exactly the same sum—£520 million—to the very rich by halving stamp duty on stock exchange transactions and abolishing the unearned income surcharge? Is this not the most blatant example yet of having one law for the rich and another for the poor and the unemployed?

Mr. Newton: The most effective action that the Government can take to help the long-term unemployed is to improve the prospects for employment. *[Interruption.]* It seems extraordinary to me that the Labour party should apparently believe that unemployment problems do not involve increasing the prospects for employment, but it may explain some of the strange remarks made by Opposition Members.

Mr. Wareing: The Government are not doing it.

Mr. Newton: Our aim is to improve prospects for employment. Part of that policy is to stimulate and encourage investment, and we are doing that with considerable success.

Joint Finance Agreements

6 **Mr. O'Brien** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will consider the current financial problems facing local authorities with joint finance agreements with health authorities; and if he will consult the Association of Directors of Social Services and area health administrators on the matter.

Mr. John Patten: The working group on joint planning, which we have set up with the National Association of Health Authorities and the local authority associations, will be looking at the arrangements for transferring resources between health and local authorities. The group is expected to complete work next spring and we shall consult health and local authority interests on its findings.

Mr. O'Brien: Will the Minister take into consideration the serious circumstances facing local authorities whose resources are being cut while there are demands for extra resources for the elderly, the mentally ill and the disabled? Will he examine the tapering system and ensure that services that are in being will not be lost to communities because of penalties imposed on local authorities by the Department of the Environment?

Mr. Patten: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's constructive attitude. By saying that, I do not wish to do him any personal political harm. However, some of the problems facing local authorities are of their own making. One has only to consider the high disparity of unit costs in, for example, the provision of local authority accommodation for elderly people to see that. Of course, we shall consider the points that the hon. Gentleman has made. We are looking forward to receiving advice in the spring from the body to which I have referred.

Mr. Sims: I know that my hon. Friend will welcome schemes, such as that in my constituency, by which mentally handicapped people are being moved from institutions to small homes. Will he bear in mind that, if the scheme is successful, the next step will be for those people to go into individual accommodation, but that they will still need the services of, for example, social workers? Will he therefore persuade our right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment to ensure that local authorities have the funds to maintain an adequate number of social workers to continue the process?

Mr. Patten: We greatly admire the work being done in my hon. Friend's constituency involving the movement of those who suffer mental handicap back into the community and, we hope soon, into flats and sheltered accommodation of their own. Local authorities have the power to protect the especially vulnerable. Many local authorities, Labour as much as Conservative, have done exactly that recently by good and prudent housekeeping within the substantial sums of money that they already get.

Mr. Carter-Jones: Will the Minister confirm, or deny, the hardship caused by his joint financing alteration to the local authority, the health authority and the mentally ill and severely frail people who live in Salford?

Mr. Patten: As we have increased expenditure on joint finance by 50 per cent. in real terms since 1979, I do not know how anyone can speak of hardship.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: My hon. Friend is well aware of the policy pursued by successive Governments of transferring mentally ill and handicapped people from hospitals into the community. Will he assure the House that the Government will provide adequate funds to ensure that the facilities, the services and the care that were available to such people while they were in hospital are available to them when they move into the community?

Mr. Patten: We are already providing at least £100 million this year for joint finance schemes. In addition, we are making it possible for health authorities, with patients who go back into the community, to transfer permanently money which will not count against targets for local authorities. We also have several centrally funded initiatives, such as the care and community initiative, at a cost of £16·5 million, and the helping carers to care initiative, which costs £10 million.

Mr. Madden: Will the Minister confirm, or deny, that his Department issued guidance to regional health authorities, including that in Yorkshire, to alter the rules in calculating bed norms, thus substituting commercial criteria for technically derived criteria, with the result that there is a serious under-estimation of the need for beds in future, especially for the elderly?

Mr. Patten: The modern Health Service does not have bed norms. It is concerned not with beds but with treating patients. We are treating more patients than have ever been treated in the history of the National Health Service. The hon. Gentleman could play a constructive role in his area where, I am told by local people, joint planning between health authorities and the social services department is not going well. He should do all that he can to smooth the growth of an effective joint planning procedure such as we have in several authorities elsewhere in his area.

Mr. Meadowcroft: I accept that partial abatement from penalty during the period of joint financing has helped, but does the Minister agree that there is a growing reluctance among local authorities to embark on joint financing because of the improbability of being able to cope with it under rate-capping when the taper is finished? That is especially so in local authority areas where the need is greatest, as the possibility of rate-capping there is highest.

Mr. Patten: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his characteristic courtesy in welcoming what we have been able to do, which he thinks has helped. Of course I appreciate the tapering problems which some authorities face, but we have no evidence that joint finance is not being taken up, because a record sum of money is being taken up—about 95 per cent. of the money available to local authorities.

Maternity Services Advisory Committee

7. **Mr. Galley** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he expects the publication of the third report from the Maternity Services Advisory Committee.

Mr. John Patten: The committee's report should be ready early in the new year.

Mr. Galley: I acknowledge the valuable work of the MSAC and the growing improvements in maternity services, particularly in perinatal mortality rates, but does my hon. Friend agree that further research needs to be done into cot deaths? What steps is he prepared to take to monitor the situation more closely and to arrange more research into this harrowing topic?

Mr. Patten: I thank my hon. Friend for his remarks about the MSAC, which has so far produced two excellent reports. We are looking forward to its third report in the new year. A considerable amount of work is going on at present into the problems of cot deaths, and Professor Knoweloen from the University of Sheffield will shortly be reporting on the results of a trial examination of these problems that has been going on for the last seven years. We look forward to receiving that shortly in the new year.

Mrs. Renée Short: Assuming that the advisory committee will reinforce the demands of the Select Committee for better standards of care for the distressed newborn, does the Minister accept that his Department's responsibility is to ensure that those standards are enforced? That is different from recommending. Is that not particularly so, given that in social class 4 in the west midlands the perinatal death rate of distressed babies rose from 13·1 in 1981 to 13·3 in 1982, which is way above the national average?

Mr. Patten: We have drawn the attention of all regional and district health authorities to the recommendations of the MSAC. I know that the hon. Lady shares my pleasure that we have seen recent record reductions in perinatal mortality in this country.

National Insurance Contributions

8. **Mr. Tim Smith** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what recent representations he has received about the level of the lower earnings limit for national insurance contributions.

Mr. Fowler: Since 1 August 1984, eight letters have been received about the lower earnings limit for national insurance contributions.

Mr. Smith: Is it right that anyone earning as little as £35·50 a week should suffer any deductions from pay? Is my hon. Friend aware of the bunching that is now taking place below the earnings limit and the gap that is opening up between this and the income tax threshold? As part of his social security reviews, will he look at ways in which the limit might be increased?

Mr. Fowler: I can give my hon. Friend that assurance. We are already looking at the structure of national insurance, including the lower and upper earnings limits. Like him, I am concerned about the cliff-edge effect of national insurance, where just below £34 one pays no national insurance and just above £34 one pays £3 contributions. We are examining that and shall certainly try to improve it.

Mrs. Beckett: Does the Secretary of State accept that apart from the concern which he has expressed—and I welcome his words—the Opposition are also concerned that the upper earnings limit is so low? That makes it a regressive tax, as, the wealthier one is, once one gets beyond the upper earnings limit there is no contribution at all. Will he therefore confirm that perhaps in this respect the Government will be at least as harsh to the rich as to the poor?

Mr. Fowler: I have just told my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) that we are looking at both the lower and upper earnings limits. That is part of the work of the reviews, and when they are published I shall seek to respond to the hon. Lady.

"Another Story"

9. **Mr. Dalyell** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what study he has made of the book "Another Story," by Mrs. Jean Carr, a copy of which has been sent to him, relating to his Department's treatment of relatives of service men killed in the Falkland Islands and of service men maimed in the conflict, and their families.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security (Mr. Ray Whitney): I read the book with interest and duly noted its comments.

Mr. Dalyell: Does the Minister accept as fact the description by Mrs. Jean Carr of his Department's handling of the case of Mrs. Jane Keoghane, a pregnant widow of a Welsh guardsman, which is described on page 53? If so, what will he do about it?

Mr. Whitney: I do not accept that description as fair in the case of Mrs. Keoghane, or in any of the other cases. A total of 225 cases were dealt with as a result of the Falklands war, and there was reason for some improvement in some of them. However, I believe that overall the Department's conduct was exemplary.

Mr. Dickens: How was my hon. Friend able to take seriously the sincerity behind the question asked by the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), who time and time again has pointed his finger at the British task force with regard to the sinking of the Belgrano, which undoubtedly saved hundreds of British lives?

Mr. Speaker: Order. The question relates to Mrs. Jean Carr's book.

Mr. Alfred Morris: Is the Minister aware that there is strong feeling that the widow to whom my hon. Friend referred was shabbily treated? Is he satisfied that service men who must leave the forces because of a deterioration in their medical condition are fully informed of the benefits available to them when they leave?

Mr. Whitney: I do not believe that there is any justification for the view that Mrs. Keoghane has been shabbily treated. At one stage she was in receipt of double benefit, but there was no question of asking her to repay it—quite justifiably. All the benefits available to service men as a result of the Falklands war are well known, and the Ministry of Defence and my Department have taken action to ensure that that knowledge is widespread.

Later—

Mr. Dalyell: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. It will be within your recollection that on Question No. 9 you intervened in the supplementary question of the hon. Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth (Mr. Dickens). Would it be in order for me to say that I have never criticised service men? My criticisms have been related to politicians. Am I to understand that you asked the hon. Member to withdraw the remark? In the hubbub that followed, did he do so?

Mr. Speaker: I do not recollect that there was any particular problem with that question. I think that the integrity of the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) is beyond dispute in this House.

National Health Service

10. **Mr. Knox** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what percentage of the gross domestic product was spent on the National Health Service in the most recent year for which figures are available; and how this compares with the percentage in 1978.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The United Kingdom spent 5·6 per cent. of the gross domestic product on the National Health Service in 1983. The corresponding figure for 1978 was 4·8 per cent.

Mr. Knox: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that those figures show clearly that the Government are giving the National Health Service a higher priority than did the Labour Government?

Mr. Clarke: They certainly do. They show where it counts most. Last year, hospitals treated 3·5 million more cases than were treated during the last year of the Labour Government.

Mr. Latham: In making these financial decisions, is my right hon. and learned Friend trying to persuade his Department away from the idea that all mothers-to-be must have their babies born in central areas? Maternity units are extremely important in rural areas.

Mr. Clarke: A great deal of clinical advice is that it is safer to have babies born where there is ready access to emergency provisions. However, the atmosphere in many small maternity units is much preferred by mothers-to-be and their families. Therefore, we try to balance those two considerations when difficult cases come before Ministers.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Is the Minister aware that the most recent Health Service workers' settlement has left the West Cumberland health district with a bill of £175,000 to pay? The only way that it can find the money is by cutting back on the maintenance of hospital buildings. Does the Minister agree that that is a false economy? Is not the only solution to the problem for the Government next year to provide our health district with additional moneys to secure the future of our hospital?

Mr. Clarke: With respect, the hon. Gentleman's health district and others were provided with substantial extra funds to cover the additional cost of the pay settlement. The Government met about 80 per cent. of it by increasing cash limits. That leaves a contribution to be made in other ways. However, all local authorities are identifying cost improvement programmes and ways of increasing their efficiency, and the sums being saved by eliminating waste and improving performance easily cover any additional cost of the pay settlement and also provide for growth in patient services. I do not know enough about the details of West Cumbria, but I hope that none of our districts is resorting to false economies when real ones can be made.

Mr. Meacher: Is the Minister aware that under the Government's policy on the National Health Service, which he calls expansion, 193 hospitals have been closed and only 35 opened? If that is expansion, will he confirm that next year there will be a contraction when, for the first time, he forces health authorities to cover the full cost of pay rises above 3 per cent. for Health Service workers? Does he expect Health Service workers, who are among the lowest paid, to subsidise the NHS by taking a real pay cut when thousands of rich people are being given massive tax handouts?

Mr. Clarke: We should all bear in mind the strictures of my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Mrs. Knight) about the figures that we use. The figures for hospitals opening and closing are amongst the silliest which the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) ever uses. He knows that we close small, old hospitals and open bigger new hospitals. The total number of new beds provided under this Government is almost equal to that of the total number of beds lost from the older hospitals. What is more important—as patients' stay in hospital are shorter—is that we treat more patients. The Health Service is not in the business of conserving buildings or providing empty beds; it is for treating patients, and 3½ million more patients each year are being treated than before. I hear what the hon. Gentleman says about next year's pay settlement. We plan for a cash increase of 5½ per cent. on top of this year's health spending. Out of that, of course the Health Service has to find its pay costs, just as every other major service has to.

Computers

11. **Mr. Franks** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what initiatives are being taken by his Department to promote the greater use of computers to help general practitioners.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We are evaluating the use of microcomputers by 140 GPs in a scheme funded by my hon. Friend the Minister for Information Technology. The study is looking at the benefits of computers in patient care and practice management, and its results — to be published late next year — will show how useful computers really are to GPs. We are also preparing a factual report on about 20 different GP computer systems to help GPs who are interested in computers to make an informed choice.

Mr. Franks: I am grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend for his reply. Does he accept that the pooling of computerised information about patients suffering from diseases such as cancer and multiple sclerosis will speed up tremendously the research into a cure for those diseases? Will he consider making capital grants available for that specific purpose?

Mr. Clarke: I agree with my hon. Friend that that is one of the great potential advantages of computerising general practice. We are not, of course, inhibiting GPs' choice of computers, but it would be helpful if all the systems were compatible so that we could examine the choice. We have already made substantial capital funds available to the scheme which I described — the so-called "Micros for GPs Scheme" funded by the Department of Trade and Industry. We shall consider further ways of encouraging the worthwhile spread of computers.

Mr. Dobson: All that said, will the Minister confirm that the DHSS reimburses GPs for work on manual card index systems but does not reimburse them if they want to buy a computer?

Mr. Clarke: That is an extremely simplified version of the system, and I shall not give a long and elaborate one. GPs are partly reimbursed through the present expenses system for buying computers. We do not reimburse them in full. We must leave the GPs to make some judgments of their own about how much a computer is worth to their practices.

Death Grant

12. **Mr. Skinner** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will introduce measures to raise the death grant to at least £300; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: We have been continuing to give consideration to our policy towards the death grant in the light of the response to the consultative document published in March 1982, which revealed no clear public consensus. This consideration will now be carried forward within the context of the wider re-examination of social security which my right hon. Friend has set in hand.

Mr. Skinner: Is it not a fact that if the £30 death grant had been uprated in the same way as the Government are keen to uprate supplementary benefits to attack strikers, it would have gone up to something well over £300 in real terms? Will he also bear in mind that on 5 February 1982 when my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross) brought in a Bill which was talked out by the Government, one of those hon. Members who took part in the campaign was made a Whip for his services in talking out the Bill? No consultation of any kind has been taken into account. If the Government can find £4,500 million to smash the NUM, why can they not find sufficient money to pay for a decent funeral?

Mr. Newton: I cannot understand how the hon. Gentleman has the nerve to accuse the rest of us of trying to talk out his question. To increase the death grant to the level that the hon. Gentleman suggests would take almost exactly the amount of money that would be required to do what one of his hon. Friends was urging earlier—to extend the long-term rate of supplementary benefit to the long-term unemployed with children. I know what my priority would be.

Mr. Yeo: Is my hon. Friend aware that there is widespread support for a substantial increase in the death grant to restore its real value, but that it would be acceptable to have it means-tested so that those who died leaving even a relatively small capital sum would not be eligible for it?

Mr. Newton: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. He will not expect me to pre-empt the result of my hon. Friend's review in this respect any more than in any others, but he has made a sensible point.

Wrightington Hospital (Children's Ward)

13. **Mr. Robert Atkins** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he expects to be able to make a further statement about the proposed closure of the children's ward at Wrightington hospital.

Mr. John Patten: As my hon. Friend knows, I have written to the regional health authority seeking certain assurances following his earlier representations. I shall write to him again shortly.

Mr. Atkins: I thank my hon. Friend for his answer. Does he recognise that the decision about the proposed closure has taken a great deal of time, and that many people around the area are concerned about the future of this children's ward? Does he also recognise the importance of retaining the team together, so that the facility for treating children suffering from arthritis is maintained in the area?

Mr. Patten: My hon. Friend has been a powerful advocate of this cause, as has my hon. Friend the Member for Chorley (Mr. Dover). I hope that my hon. Friend recognises, by the care that we have shown for this small group of children, that we care very much for those, however small in number, who are disadvantaged.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Alan Howarth** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 27 November.

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher): This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House, I shall be having further meetings later today. This evening I hope to have an audience of Her Majesty the Queen.

Mr. Howarth: Is my right hon. Friend aware that miners in Yorkshire are returning to work because, in their own words, they are ashamed of intimidation and sickened by violence? Should not that unequivocal condemnation of violence be endorsed by every hon. Member? Is not the refusal by the president of the National Union of Mineworkers to call off the violence a sign of the unscrupulous means which the Left is willing to use to get its own way?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I agree with my hon. Friend, and it would be as well if violence were condemned by every member of the NUM and every member of the TUC, but the acid test——

Mr. Skinner: Acid test?

The Prime Minister: The acid test is whether the violence will be stopped. It could be stopped by the leadership of the NUM if it chose to do so. The other acid test is whether the TUC guidelines will be followed.

Mr. Hattersley: Has the Prime Minister had any discussion today about those Swiss and American bankers and brokers who are buying forward to obtain British Telecom shares, and offering 40 per cent. above the part issue price, even before the issue is closed? Can she give an estimate of how much will be lost to the Exchequer by this most recent example of the bungling of a flotation by her Government?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman will be aware that the Exchequer will have its money by virtue of the underwriting. The right hon. Gentleman cannot stand the success of the British Telecom flotation.

Mr. Hattersley: The right hon. Lady either does not understand the law or is careless of its application. The practice that I have described is illegal, or would be illegal if it were operated by British speculators. Why does she condone, and even boast about, the practice, which would be illegal were it operated within the ambit of the British courts?

The Prime Minister: If a practice is illegal in the British courts it is dealt with totally and utterly impartially, as the right hon. Gentleman is aware. I return to what I said. The right hon. Gentleman does not want more extensive share ownership and therefore he condemns the privatisation of BT.

Q2. **Mr. Nicholls** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 27 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Nicholls: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the fact that disarmament talks are to be resumed is a complete vindication of the defence policies of the West? Is she therefore surprised that CND, at its latest annual conference, responded by refusing even to criticise the USSR, and in that way was simply pursuing policies which bring aid and comfort to this country's potential enemies?

The Prime Minister: I believe that the Soviet Union has been brought back to the negotiating table by NATO's firmness in implementing its dual track decision. I welcome the agreement to go back to the negotiating table and I hope that it will be successful. It would not be successful had we all gone for unilateral disarmament. I well remember Mr. Andropov's statement:

"Let no one expect unilateral disarmament from us. We are not a naive people."

Dr. Owen: Does the Prime Minister recall the 1950 election manifesto on which she first fought? Does she remember the words:

"We regard the maintenance of full employment as the first aim of a Conservative Government."?

Does she still subscribe to those words? If she did, would she not be better placed to speak for the majority of the British people?

The Prime Minister: Governments should do everything that they possibly can to achieve the financial framework to maximise employment in Britain. At the same time, they must see that industries keep abreast of technological advance, as this Government are doing, and not extinguish the very enterprise from which jobs will come. I should have thought that the right hon. Gentleman would have the same policy. He usually tries to imitate Conservative Governments.

Q3. **Mr. Allen McKay** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her offical engagements for Tuesday 27 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. McKay: Does the Prime Minister realise that her utterances and those of her right hon. and hon. Friends on the coal industry dispute, this most damaging of disputes, are, to say the least, less helpful than they could be? Does she not realise that instead of dividing and being divisive she should now use her power and influence to bring the people to the negotiating table? In addition, in the interests of the mining communities, will she set in motion a public inquiry into events on the picket lines? In short, will she act like a Prime Minister and a leader, or does she just not care?

The Prime Minister: I think that I probably care more about the future of the coal industry than many of those in the leadership of the NUM. There are very good jobs available for miners if they wish to return to work. It is the leadership of the NUM which, without consulting the miners, is deliberately making them suffer privations, and making some of them suffer violence and intimidation, which has totally and utterly split the NUM. That is the fault of the leadership of the NUM.

Viscount Cranborne: During the course of her busy day, will my right hon. Friend take time to consider the proposition that to cut the overseas services of the BBC is as short-sighted as the threat to cut the Endurance before the Falklands war?

The Prime Minister: No, Mr. Speaker. I believe that all organisations, including the external services of the BBC, have a duty to get full value for money and to run their services efficiently. I believe that that is what my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary has seen to it will happen.

Mr. Winnick: In view of the attack on the Government's economic policies last week by the Secretary of State for Energy, is it not surprising that he should wish to remain one of her Ministers? Or does the Prime Minister believe, as many hon. Members do, that the right hon. Gentleman likes office far too much to act on his supposed convictions over the misery of mass unemployment?

The Prime Minister: I have my right hon. Friend's speech with me. Will the hon. Gentleman say precisely what he regards as an attack on the Government? I do not think that the hon. Gentleman can have read the speech.

Q4. **Mr. Marlow** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 27 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

4. **Mr. Marlow:** Will my right hon. Friend scotch the silly rumour which has appeared in today's press and elsewhere that the Government are intent on attacking Conservative families by in some way taxing or means-testing child benefit? Does she not agree that, though it may be well merited to give more money to the poorest families in society, the best source of those funds is not the remainder of the family sector?

The Prime Minister: There are many rumours about. I cannot say what will be the result of the four inquiries which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services is conducting. There are many rumours about, directed at trying to stop the very things that those inquiries are trying to consider, to ensure justice both for the taxpayer and for those in receipt of social security benefit. We are determined to conduct those inquiries well and thoroughly, and the results will be brought before the House in due time.

Mr. Maginnis: In the light of the tragic death today of Deputy High Commissioner Norris in Bombay and the all-too-frequent acts of terrorism from which we all suffer,

would it not be intolerable if Yasser Arafat were allowed to visit the United Kingdom? Will the Prime Minister give an assurance that he will not be granted a visa to do so?

The Prime Minister: As the hon. Gentleman knows, there will be a statement after Question Time on the assassination in Bombay. However, I am sure that all hon. Members will join me in expressing our deepest sympathy for the widow and family of Mr. Percy Norris, our deputy high commissioner, who died as a result of this morning's tragedy.

As far as I am aware, no application for a visa for Mr. Arafat has yet been received, but if one is received it will be considered in the normal way.

5. **Mr. Janner** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 27 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. and learned Gentlemen to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Janner: Will the Prime Minister please consider the anxiety and problems caused to local authorities by the transport of Chevaline and other nuclear missiles through their areas without prior warning having been given to the police or fire authorities? In view of the persistent refusal of Ministers to give the House any reassurances whatever, will she personally inquire into the matter, with particular regard to what would happen in the horrific event of an accident?

The Prime Minister: The hon. and learned Gentleman will be aware that the decision to go ahead with the Chevaline modernisation of Polaris was confirmed by the Labour Government, so he cannot be against the modernisation of Polaris. From his question, I understand that he is not against necessary movements, but only against them being made without warning having been given to the local police. I shall inquire about the matter that he has raised.

6. **Mr. George Gardiner** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 27 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Gardiner: Will my right hon. Friend accept the congratulations of her colleagues on her perceptive analysis last night of the danger facing democracy in this country? When she is able to return to her theme of the Fascist Left, will she point out that the vicious intimidation of miners, their wives and children has seen no equal since Oswald Mosley's blackshirts brought fear to the homes of Jews throughout the East End?

The Prime Minister: I agree that the intimidation and violence that we have seen is a blot on the face of Britain and has done our reputation abroad and our trade untold damage. I sometimes wonder whether that is the object of the Labour party, which supports the strike.

Q7. **Mr. Ashton** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 27 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Ashton: Will the Prime Minister find time today to tell us when she last visited Moscow and negotiated a nuclear arms reduction with the Russians?

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to what Mr. Andropov said—I would not be so naive.

Portsoy

Q10. **Mr. McQuarrie** asked the Pime Minister if she will pay an official visit to Portsoy.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

Mr. McQuarrie: I am sure that my right hon. Friend will join the rest of the House in agreeing that the communiqué issued this morning in Brussels with regard to the lifting of restrictions against the people of Gibraltar —*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think that the hon. Gentleman has asked the wrong supplementary question, as his main question refers to Portsoy.

Engagements

Q15. **Mr. Bill Walker** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 27 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Walker: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that it is naive indeed to imagine that because people say that their missiles are not targeted on a certain country they cannot then be retargeted at short notice? Consequently, is not an agreement on such lines meaningless and worthless?

The Prime Minister: I agree that such an agreement is totally worthless. I understand that a similar offer was made in 1978.

Mr. Frank Cook: In her recent statement at the Guildhall the Prime Minister said clearly that the good work, loyalty and allegiance of the miners would not be forgotten. Will she take the opportunity this afternoon to give a similar assurance about the good work, loyalty and allegiance displayed by those men and women who, 30 or 35 years ago, offered good work, loyalty and allegiance on Monte Bello, Maralinga, Christmas and Malden Islands? If she will give that assurance, will she tell us clearly in what way it will be manifested?

The Prime Minister: I hope that this Government never forget the good work of those who have served their country well and truly. I cannot be more specific than that.

Deputy High Commissioner, Bombay (Assassination)

3.32 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Richard Luce): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I will make a statement on the murder of our Deputy High Commissioner in Bombay.

Shortly before 0800 local time, or 0230 GMT, three shots were fired at our Deputy High Commissioner in Bombay, Percy Norris, on his way to his office. He was hit in the temple and the heart, and died in hospital at about 0845 local time. I am sure that the whole House will wish to register its deepest sympathy for and condolences to Mrs. Norris and her family.

We understand that no one has yet claimed responsibility for this cowardly and senseless murder. The House will be aware of reports that a man of European appearance was observed on the scene at the time of the killing, but I must emphasise that it is premature to speculate on who may have been responsible or what their motive may have been. The Indian police are making every effort to capture the assailant and are co-operating closely with our High Commission.

Upon learning of the assassination, the Indian Government immediately provided extra security for British diplomatic premises, including British Council offices. The Indian Prime Minister, Mr. Rajiv Gandhi, has expressed his deep distress at the tragedy and his condolences to Mr. Norris's family in a message to the Prime Minister.

Security arrangements for British officials serving overseas are a high priority and are kept under constant review in the light of the known threat. We take this matter very seriously. The House will forgive me if I cannot go into details, for obvious reasons. I can, however, say that the security of our Deputy High Commission in Bombay was inspected last year, and the recommendations have been carried out. More recently, the Indian authorities agreed to provide additional measures of their own. But I emphasise that it is not possible for diplomats, any more than politicians, to carry out their functions properly and to be assured of absolute security at all times.

As my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary has said, this appalling crime demonstrates once again the danger faced by members of the Diplomatic Service, along with others in public life, from acts of terrorism around the world, which we all strongly condemn.

Mr. George Robertson (Hamilton): The whole House shares the sense of horror and outrage at the brutal and senseless assassination of Mr. Percy Norris. I associate the Opposition with the sincere condolences expressed to Mrs. Norris and her family. This desperate murder underlines the increasing dangers faced by our diplomats, even in friendly countries. It should remind us all that security for our missions and representatives overseas must be appropriately tight.

It is suggested that there might be a connection between the murder and the press coverage in Britain of celebrations in Southall after Mrs. Gandhi's death. Have the Indian people been made sufficiently aware of the fact that such reports are the sign of a free press and not an endorsement of such behaviour by the British people?

Is the Minister satisfied that the protection of our missions from possible terrorist threats will not be in any way compromised by any cut in the Foreign Office budget? Will the Minister make it clear that no terrorists, whether here in Britain or abroad, will persuade this country and its Parliament to alter their friendship and long-standing links with the people of India?

Mr. Luce: I am sure that Mr. Norris's family will be extremely grateful to the hon. Gentleman for the condolences he has expressed. Whatever the adjustments in the expenditure of the Foreign Office, which were announced last week, security remains the highest possible priority. Expenditure on security for the protection of diplomats in various parts of the world has increased considerably during the past few months and years, and, as far as we can see, that expenditure will continue to increase, because there are special dangers to diplomats in various parts of the world.

On the question of the views on Mrs. Gandhi's assassination which have been expressed in this country both in the press and by, I think, a tiny minority of Sikhs, I believe that the Government and people of India will be in no doubt of the views expressed by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. I am sure that her statements echo the views of the majority of people in this country. Those who have been rejoicing at Mrs. Gandhi's death are only a tiny minority. We utterly and totally condemn those views.

There was at Mrs. Gandhi's funeral the strongest possible demonstration on behalf of all hon. Members of the great friendship between this country and the people of India. The Indian authorities have reacted solidly and sharply to the serious incident that took place this morning.

Sir Peter Blaker (Blackpool, South): Conservative Members wish to be associated with my hon. Friend's expressions of sympathy to Mr. Norris's family and his tribute to the foreign service in the risks its officers run in carrying out their duties. Is the House right in interpreting my hon. Friend's answer to the questions asked by the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) as an assurance that, whatever the security measures deemed to be necessary, they will not be constrained by cost considerations anywhere in the world where they are required?

Mr. Luce: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his opening remarks. I give him a strong assurance that the highest possible priority will be given to the security of our diplomats in whatever part of the world they may be.

Mr. James Callaghan (Cardiff, South and Penarth): I wish to associate myself with the expressions of shock at the criminal murder of Mr. Percy Norris. Only three weeks ago, on the day of Mrs. Gandhi's assassination, I arrived in Bombay to be met by Mr. Percy Norris and his wife. They assured me and took immediate care of my security and safety. They regarded themselves as being responsible for my safety until the time I left. Mr. Norris was a most unassuming and capable officer. Mr. and Mrs. Norris had arrived in Bombay shortly before my visit. They were both looking forward eagerly to serving this country in India, as they did. Mrs. Norris especially told me of her enthusiasm for her new task. I and I am sure the whole House would like to express our deep regret and sorrow to Mrs. Norris. I hope that she will be given strength during this period of trial.

I should like also to express our sympathy to Mr. Norris's driver, who had driven Mr. Norris and his predecessors for 20 years. I express also sympathy to the staff of the Deputy High Commissioner to whom Mr. Norris's death must have come as a great shock.

Mr. Luce: I am sure that Mrs. Norris and her family and the whole Diplomatic Service will be moved by the right hon. Gentleman's tribute and will be grateful to him.

Sir Anthony Kershaw (Stroud): I associate myself with the tributes paid to the Norris family. Does not this sad episode illustrate the dangers to which the foreign service officials are exposed and give the lie to the stories of diplomatic lassitude and luxury which some newspapers attempt to spread? Was Bombay considered to be a dangerous posting?

Mr. Luce: People are becoming increasingly aware of the difficulties and dangers that many diplomats face in some parts of the world. We remember the recent serious incident involving the British ambassador in Beirut.

The Indian authorities and ourselves have kept in close touch about any security threat. We believe that we were as aware as we could be, following the regular assessments, and I can add nothing more about that.

Dr. David Owen (Plymouth, Devonport): Liberal and SDP Members extend their sympathy to the wife of Mr. Norris and to the Diplomatic Service, which must be grieving at the loss of a dedicated servant. Does the Minister agree that, despite that loss and the feelings aroused in the House, nothing must be said or done to call into question or doubt the capacity of India to pull together and to survive the shattering blow that it has recently experienced? Above all, nothing should be said in this country to cause any suspicion in India that we have anything but confidence in the Indian Government and people to overcome the problems of sectarian violence and religious and other rivalries and disputes. Despite our loss, that must be the main feeling coming out of the House.

Mr. Luce: I am sure that the views expressed by the right hon. Gentleman are those of the vast majority of hon. Members and of the British people. After this morning's tragedy, the Indian authorities extended to us the utmost co-operation in seeking out the assailants.

Mr. Eldon Griffiths (Bury St. Edmunds): As one who, like you, Mr. Speaker, holds Indo-British relations dear, may I be associated with the sentiments that have been expressed? Will my hon. Friend take pains to ensure that no inflammatory statements are made by members of Indian minorities in this country, because if such statements are relayed to India they may cause grievous problems and perhaps put British lives at risk? I accept what my hon. Friend said about security, but does he agree that, although expenditure on security has been increased, the nature of the threat has increased many times more?

Mr. Luce: I assure my hon. Friend that we constantly review and monitor the threat to our diplomats in all parts of the world, and will continue to do so.

On my hon. Friend's first question, all that I can do is to express the hope that no members of the British community will express views that will exacerbate the tensions that exist following the assassination of Mrs. Gandhi and this morning's tragic murder. I am sure that what my hon. Friend has said is an appeal which can go out from the House to the British people.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): In the light of the tragic and ghastly murder this morning, and in view of the understandable need to increase expenditure on security measures in defence of our staffs abroad, was not the Foreign Secretary's statement on the Foreign Office budget the other day all the more deplorable?

Mr. Luce: No. I have already made it plain in answer to an earlier question that the adjustments to the budget that were announced last week will have no effect on the priority that we give to security. I stress again that expenditure on security has increased, is increasing and, as long as we think it necessary, will continue to increase.

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): Is my hon. Friend aware that a Commonwealth Parliamentary Association delegation from this country was received in Bombay two years ago with tremendous warmth and friendship? We should be in no doubt that this shocking and dreadful atrocity does not reflect the views of most people in Bombay or in the rest of India.

Mr. Luce: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I am sure that the horror that has occurred is as shocking for the people of Bombay and India as it is for us.

Mr. Mark Hughes (City of Durham): We welcome the fact that security is to be extended to British Council activities in India, but how is it to be paid for when the budget has been reduced?

Mr. Luce: The security of British Council and, obviously, of diplomatic premises is the responsibility of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. That remains the case.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I must have regard to the succeeding business. It is an Opposition Day and I have a large number of applications to take part in the debate.

HMS Conqueror (Officer's Diary)

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I seek your help in relation to the somewhat surprising referral to the Director of Public Prosecutions of the publication in *The Observer* of the diary of a naval officer of HMS Conqueror. As I have here a copy of that same diary, which I have used in relation to questions in the House and public statements, can you advise me whether I am also liable to be referred to the DPP, or whether I am immune as a Member of the House?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member knows that it has never been the practice of the Chair to give advice to hon. Members from the Chair. If the hon. Member will write to me about the matter, I shall look into it and see what I can do to help him.

Mr. Foulkes: Further to the point of order, Mr. Speaker. My question relates to the responsibility, which you take very seriously, of protecting the interests of Members. As the diary was published some months ago in *The Guardian* and elsewhere, there is a suspicion that the action has been taken now deliberately to gag Members of this House. Can you help us in relation to that?

Mr. Speaker: This is the first that I have heard about the hon. Member having a copy of the diary. As I have just said to him, if he will write to me and let me have a look at this, I shall gladly do so and see what I can do to help him.

SUPPLY

[4TH ALLOTTED DAY]—*considered*

Natural Environment and National Heritage

3.47 pm

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): I beg to move,

That this House recognises the widespread concern about the alarming deterioration of the natural environment; supports the conclusions of the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution, the Nature Conservancy Council, the Countryside Commission, and the National Heritage Memorial Fund, together with numerous voluntary organisations, which call for urgent legislation, greater government involvement and funding in order to protect the natural environment and national heritage; and calls upon Her Majesty's Government to respond immediately with action and legislation.

The motion is based not simply on the views and conclusions of the Labour party but on a wide-ranging collection of views and conclusions of statutory bodies, Select Committees of this House and of another place, non-governmental organisations and interest groups which reflect and represent the views of millions of people in Britain. Their conclusions, like ours, are based on a massive burden of well-documented evidence which has been accumulated in some cases in spite of official commercial and industrial attempts to prevent its disclosure.

We have provided time for the debate because of the seriousness of the many threats to our environment and heritage and because of the continued feet-dragging reluctance of the Government to respond adequately to the scale and nature of those threats.

The Government are failing at national and international level to match up to the challenge. While it is clear and agreed that only co-ordinated international action can succeed in tackling, for example, questions of world poverty, acid rain and the law of the sea, the Conservative Government display mean-minded narrowness of vision in the face of mounting criticism and pressure for action.

In 1983 alone, 15 million children died in the developing world as a consequence of hunger and malnutrition. It was as if the combined under-five populations of Britain, France, Italy, Spain and the Federal Republic of Germany had been wiped out in a single year. Yet, faced with a crisis in Ethiopia, likely to be repeated in Chad and elsewhere, the Government cut overseas aid.

After years of negotiation, discussion and debate on the law of the sea at the United Nations, Britain displays a dog-in-the-manger attitude to overwhelming international opinion, and hangs on to the coat-tails of President Reagan and American industrial lobbies. Will the Minister tell the House of the Government's intentions with respect to the convention? We believe that Britain should sign for a variety of well documented and very important reasons. The closing date is 9 December 1984, and the House is entitled to know what the Governmen intend to do.

Mr. T. H. H. Skeet (Bedfordshire, North): What has this to do with the motion?

Dr. Cunningham: We in the Labour party want action on national and international levels: that is what it has to do with the motion, if the hon. Gentleman is interested.

We want policy initiatives and action to be taken through five general areas. National and international intervention in development is essential. A free market economy does not work to protect the environment. We must tackle the institutions, Government Departments and public bodies and establish a freedom of information Act. A major review of the operations and environmental impact of all energy industries, particularly the nuclear industry, is essential. We must act with more urgency and vigour to protect the countryside from the increasingly malign impact of agriculture. The Government should review the industrial opportunities arising from environmental protection policies and devise a strategy to protect British industry and create jobs.

Of course, action to protect, sustain and enhance the environment poses a fundamental dilemma for Conservatives, particularly those who have nailed their reputations to a market forces view of the world. Environmental protection, conservation and pollution prevention and control demand intervention. This is a major difference between the Conservative Government and the Labour party. We believe that without intervention in economic and industrial development, without proper systematic planning and control over the use of resources, land, water, energy and the marine environment, the problems of environmental and ecological damage are unlikely to be arrested, let alone eliminated.

For us in the Labour party, that argument has always been a tenet of our approach at national and international level. It is nowhere more apposite than in dealing with environmental policy. The very history of industrialisation should be the only lesson from which we need to learn, that market forces are no respecters of resource use or the environment. Surely it is ironic, particularly for Conservative Members, that the common agricultural policy, responsible as it is for such major threats to the countryside, should benefit from massive intervention while the pan-European problems of acidification do not apparently qualify for such an approach.

The development of ecology as a science of man and nature has done and will continue to do us all a massive service if we heed the lessons and note the warnings. However, I do not agree, nor does the Labour party accept, that we can or should abandon development either for ourselves or for the developing world. Improved economic performance is, on the contrary, a prerequisite to the solution of the problems that we face. To argue otherwise is simply to betray millions of people, to condemn them to squalor, poverty, disease, malnutrition, ignorance, illiteracy and death.

The Labour party in government would bring new urgency to the problems of urban renewal, especially in the inner cities and conurbations, new housing, refurbishment programmes, clearance of dereliction and, most important, the freedom for local authorities to get on with the job. That would ease pressures on land and help to protect the green belt. We are committed to greater support for public transport, the development of which would make a significant contribution to reducing pollution and congestion.

Energy conservation policy should be upgraded and given a new sense of purpose. The energy industries are massive consumers of land, financial resources and raw materials. On taking office, the Government abandoned energy conservation policy, and energy supply industries continue to dominate thinking about energy policy and its pollution consequences. Energy consumption must be systematically examined and, where possible, reduced so as to conserve resources and to improve energy productivity in order to reduce consumer costs.

I believe that opposition to a new environment policy is institutionalised in this country in Government Departments, public bodies, business and commerce. We must tackle the institutions and public bodies. Every aspect of public policy should have a planned environmental conservation input from the outset. In conjunction with this, we require a freedom of information Act in the public interest so that the fullest possible debate on the facts can take place.

The Department of the Environment should be strengthened. I take this opportunity to express our great regret at the Secretary of State's unfortunate accident and to wish him a speedy and complete recovery. The Department should be strengthened in terms of personnel and upgraded in terms of governmental influence. The damage caused by staff cuts in the Department must be reversed. The Department of the Environment seems to have become entirely defensive about its role and responsibilities in environmental protection and is being driven by EEC legislation. We want Britain to take initiatives and to lead the case for improved environment policies, but the Department of the Environment seems singularly unable to deal with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on anything like equal terms. The closing of the National Water Council and the exclusion of the public and press from the meetings of regional water authorities were retrograde and regrettable actions by the Conservative Administration. There is also scope for major improvements in the operations of the National Coal Board, the Central Electricity Generating Board and the oil and nuclear industries.

The Government have been laggard in their approach to the problems of acid rain so seriously spotlighted by the tenth report of the Royal Commission on environmental pollution. It is not good enough to hide behind research and the need for concentrated international action, important though that is. It is estimated that 80 per cent. of acid precipitation in Britain is generated here, so it is a self-inflicted wound. We support the commissioning of a full national survey of the impact of this, more promotion of fluidised bed combustion systems, more action on the scrubbing of flue gases and a target date for significant real reductions in emissions rather than reductions resulting from the decline of our industrial economy.

In the civil nuclear industry we call for the abandonment of the operation of the Official Secrets Acts so as to facilitate more open debate. We also require a target date for an end to nuclear discharges into the marine environment with a step-by-step reduction in discharge authorisation until that target is reached. I have asked Ministers about this before, but it is clear that they cannot define in any sensible terms what the principle of ALARA is supposed to be. The Department has declined to give me a definition in the House. In reality, the principle is meaningless.

We also want a restriction of the personnel involved in NIREX and in the Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee and the inclusion of more representation of trade unions, elected local authority members and environmental organisations. We seek a complete review of their proposals and a reconsideration of the financing of major national public inquiries on this

[Dr. Cunningham]

and other issues of contention. In addition, the boards of all public bodies involved in civil nuclear power should be strengthened by the inclusion of a director with specific responsibilities for environmental policy matters.

I represent an area in which the nuclear industry operates and I well understand the public concern about that industry. I believe that our proposals are the minimum required to ensure that the development of nuclear power does not outstrip public acceptance and understanding of what is involved.

In addition, the Government should abandon the NIREX proposals to store waste at Billingham and Elston, and institute a complete review of waste disposal policy, including dumping at sea, about which I understand the Holliday committee is shortly to report. We should return to the policy of the Labour Government's 1977 White Paper on nuclear power and the environment, and ensure that the creation of wastes from nuclear activity is minimised — great pressure should be brought on the industry to bring that about — that waste management problems are resolved before any major expansion of nuclear power is undertaken, and that the handling and treatment of waste should be carried out with due regard to environmental circumstances. However, I have no doubt, nor does the Labour party conference, that the nuclear generation of electricity is here to stay and will always form part of any national energy policy.

The Government suffered an embarrasing defeat on their green belt proposals and are now trying to circumvent their promises to the House and to many of their own supporters. That is evident from the approach to the county of Avon's structure plan, where the Secretary of State proposes housing expansion in areas expressly rejected by the council, in its planning strategy. That is a serious example of an attempt by the Government to get out of their promises to the House.

By comparison with the energy industries, and historically, agriculture has always been presented environmentally as a benign industry. That is not true in the modern world. We must take action to halt the over-use and abuse of pesticides and fetilisers. Damage being done to flora and fauna, topsoil and water courses is serious and increasing.

The physical destruction of heaths, moorland, marshes, meadows, wetlands, deciduous woods, hedgerows and sites of special scientific interest should simply be halted. To quote the 1983 annual report of the Nature Conservancy Council again:

"There is just about enough habitat left to ensure continuity of Britain's wild plants and animals—if it is conserved. The danger is that, if it is not wholeheartedly protected now, in ten years time it will be too late."

The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 has failed and cannot combat the massive and often malign impact of the common agricultural policy of the British countryside. We regret and condemn the Government's failure to take advantage of our repeated offers to facilitate a Bill to amend that Act, and to provide Government time to do so. A private Member's Bill is simply not an adequate substitute for proper Government action.

On the protection of the landscape, the Wildlife and Countryside Act never really got off the ground, because it was grafted on to a system of Government policies and financial instruments working in the opposite direction —against conservation rather than for it. The Government's proposed conservation amendment to the EEC's agriculture structures regulations would cover, at most, only 4 per cent. of the countryside. It is an insufficient response to the call of environmentalists of all parties for integration of environmental considerations into agriculture policy across the board.

First, the Act cannot succeed unless it forms part of a wider reform of agriculture policy, as well as being fundamentally amended itself. In the latter respect, the Government's intention to close the three-month loophole is not sufficient.

Secondly, another serious weakness in the arrangements to protect landscapes and the wider countryside is the absence of any requirement for farmers outside national parks and sites of special scientific interest to get prior approval for operations subsidised by the Ministry of Agriculture. The Act should be amended now so that the pre-notification arrangements currently applying in national parks should be extended to cover the country as a whole, and especially areas designated as areas of outstanding natural beauty.

Thirdly, if conservation policies are to have any effect in the countryside, there must be a realistic system of reserve back-up controls and order-making powers to be operated by local authorities. The most damning indictment of the Act's failure is that at least 245 SSIs have been damaged or destroyed since the Act was passed. Although the Government have offered to close the loopholes in sections 28 and 29, the fact remains that a maximum of 15 SSIs and proposed sites have been damaged or destroyed because of those loopholes. In other words, 230 sites have had their conservation interest damaged, diminished or wiped out because of other weaknesses in the Act. Similar losses will be prevented only if the emphasis on voluntary restraint is replaced by effective control. The Nature Conservancy Council and the national park authorities must have some effective stop order allowing them to prevent damaging developments from occurring on nationally important sites.

Mr. W. Benyon (Milton Keynes): On what information does the hon. Gentleman base the charge about the number of SSSIs being destroyed? The figure is questioned strongly in certain quarters, where it is believed that it is totally inaccurate.

Dr. Cunningham: My figure is based on published information.

The compensation system on which the Act's protective mechanisms are based has rightly come in for a great deal of criticism from many quarters, including the Back Benches on both sides of the House. While some form of compensation is necessary, and the idea is supported by most parties, it cannot be right that there is no discretionary element in payment, that agricultural subsidies are included in the payments for profits lost, and that landowners can get compensation simply by threatening to destroy a site. It would be perfectly possible to make compensation payments discretionary in the same way as agricultural capital grants are discretionary now, and for the agricultural subsidy element to be removed from compensation calculations.

For effective conservation in the countryside, it is essential to encourage farmers to look after the natural features of their land. We therefore advocate the changes

in the compensation system that I have outlined. Money should go to farmers who need it rather than to those who are in a position to demand it, and the Ministry of Agriculture capital grant aid rules should be changed so that payments are available for farmers who carry out positive conservation work such as coppicing broadleaved woodlands, clearing bracken and scrub, managing water courses with conservation in mind, dry stone walling—all these are matters with which I am familiar in Copeland —maintaining hedgerows with conservation in mind, and fencing in order to allow natural regeneration.

The land drainage activities undertaken by water authorities and internal drainage boards have been among the most controversial conservation issues of the past five years, for four reasons. Land drainage operations threaten some of England's finest remaining wetland landscapes, including Halvergate marshes and other marshes throughout the Norfolk broads and the Somerset levels. The principal justification for the operations is agricultural production—usually of cereals, which are in surplus anyway.

The economic justifications used in support of these schemes for obtaining grant aid from the Ministry of up to 50 per cent. of the cost have never been disclosed, despite repeated requests by conservationists and hon. Members to see any cost-benefit analyses supporting the schemes. The water authorities and the Ministry have always refused to publish the information.

The new duty laid on water authorities and internal drainage boards by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 to

"further conservation of landscapes and wildlife in their drainage operations"

has made no noticeable difference in the number and type of schemes being brought forward. What precisely did the Government mean or intend when they referred in the Act to "further conservation"?

These are specific criticisms of the Government's record on these issues and two further points are worth making. The Government announced in 1982 their intention to undertake a review of land drainage. The interdepartmental review was referred to extensively in the House of Lords debate on 8 March 1983 which is reported in *Hansard* from column 131. At column 139 Lord Skelmersdale said on behalf of the Government that the discussion paper would be published "shortly." That was 20 months ago and we are still waiting. In June 1984, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food gave assurances that the review would be published in the summer of 1984. That was recorded in *Hansard* for 7 June at column 429. The review has still not appeared. The delay in its publication has not been explained and meanwhile precious wetland landscapes and wildlife sites are being threatened.

The Government's Food and Environment Protection Bill has been strongly criticised as avoiding key issues such as the disclosure of information, control of spray drift in aerial spraying and warning labels on food. Again the proposals lack bite and determination to control the abuse of pesticides which is crucial to wildlife and plant life.

At most, sites of special scientific interest will protect less than 10 per cent. of the British countryside. Much wildlife lives outside them and, even in the latter, maintenance of populations of many birds depends on there being healthy populations elsewhere. For most people, contact with wildlife and enjoyment of the countryside depend not on designated sites but on ordinary countryside areas. Agriculture and forestry occupy 89 per cent. of Britain and are the two most significant activities that affect the countryside and its wildlife. Their postwar impact has been enormous and, for some habitats and species, simply catastrophic. "Nature Conservation in Britain", which is published by the Nature Conservancy Council, quantifies the losses—95 per cent. of lowland herb-rich hay meadows, 80 per cent. of chalk and limestone grassland, 40 per cent. of lowland heath, 30 to 50 per cent. of ancient woods and about 50 per cent. of marshland. Unquantified but equally tragic has been the loss of wildlife from farms and woodland due not to the destruction of habitat but to the use of pesticides and cropping systems that are inimical to their survival.

There are many other important issues. The Royal Commission was right to have doubts about the Government's intentions about implementation by 1986 of part II of the Control of Pollution Act 1974. As I have said before, the Minister should make a clear statement of intent on this matter. The cost of acting to control pollution is often raised, but such investment frequently results in economic gain, market opportunities and creation of jobs, as NEI Engineering has recently made clear in a note which was sent to hon. Members. The dumping of waste at sea, the slow-down in public investment in sewage treatment and the transport across national boundaries of toxic wastes all need urgent attention. A new working relationship between the Government, local government and voluntary bodies should be established to develop momentum on environmental protection. Ironically, in this as in other matters, abolition of the metropolitan counties will be a backward step because they have taken a lead on issues such as green belt policy, land reclamation and archaeology, to name but three important topics in the conservation debate.

The impact of people on their environment is increasing and will continue to increase as mobility and demand for sport, recreation and leisure increase. They will continue to grow, as will pressure on the countryside in and outside national parks. Government funding of the development of sport and leisure facilities must be increased to take account of that and to prevent the over-use and damage that result from too many people having too little access to the areas and facilities that they require.

Mr. Tim Rathbone (Lewes): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Cunningham: No., I am coming to the end of my speech.

I should like to quote from the Nature Conservancy Council's 1980 annual report. It says:

"The next 18 months could well determine the future for nature conservation in many parts of the country. There are at least some glimmers of hope in the greater public awareness and an Act of Parliament which with minor amendment must bring great benefits. The greatest imponderable of all, however, remains whether the financial structures of agriculture can be reformed in a way that befriends nature conservation. Until this happens we remain gravely concerned and there is little time to set matters right."

There is no evidence that the Government have the will, the sense of urgency or the determination to tackle, let alone resolve, these problems. That is why we shall be voting on these issues tonight.

Mr. Speaker: I have selected the amendment standing in the name of the Prime Minister.

4.16 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. William Waldegrave): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

"recognises the care and attention paid by Her Majesty's Government to the natural environment and the national heritage; pays tribute to the good progress made by the Nature Conservancy Council, the Countryside Commission, the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission and the National Heritage Memorial Fund; approves of the encouragement given to the many voluntary agencies in these areas; and notes the increased resources Her Majesty's Government propose to devote to protecting the environment and the heritage in 1985-86."

We wholeheartedly welcome the debate. The Opposition have rather helpfully allowed us half of one of their days to focus on two areas of policy on which the Government's record is excellent and to which the Labour party's contribution, with, of course, some honourable exceptions in the case of a handful of Back Benchers, is rather pitiful. It was the late Anthony Crosland who said that Labour was:

"glaringly weak on the environment, in which the National Executive Committee appears to take no interest".

Nothing has changed and I can only sympathise with the view of the poor old Bury, North constituency Labour party that

"Conference views with concern the public ignorance of the ecological commitment of the Labour Party".

I am afraid that, in spite of the eloquent speech made by the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham), the public will be none the wiser. All we have heard today is an ancient and familiar political sound—the noise of a skilful politician climbing on a bandwagon. The Opposition motion is one of the worst drafted that I have ever seen put before the House.

Dr. Cunningham *rose*——

Mr. Waldegrave: You have had your speech, Jack.

Hon. Members: Disgraceful.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I associate Christian names with friendliness.

Dr. Cunningham *rose*——

Mr. Waldegrave: I apologise, Mr. Speaker. I give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Dr. Cunningham: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way, as he has reduced the debate to a personal level and says that we are trying to climb on a bandwagon. Perhaps I might refer him to a letter that is being circulated by two Conservative Members and which was sent to Opposition Members today. It concerns a bypass in Devon and says:

"We believe this attempt to gag environmental organisations could do damage to our future relations with such groups and could certainly affect our attempt to strengthen the green image which our Party has been at pains to develop."

Who is jumping on bandwagons?

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. Gentleman's intervention explains why I shall not give way to him again—it was rather feeble. The motion is badly drafted. There is nothing in common between the various reports that have been produced by all of these bodies. The motion is simply a list of everyone the Labour party could think of.

None the less, it would be churlish not to welcome the hon. Gentleman aboard. I am grateful for what he said about my right hon. Friend, who I am sure would have been happy to welcome the hon. Gentleman on board in person. I extend that welcome to the small number of his colleagues who are present. The hon. Gentleman has reasonably good support on the Opposition Front Bench —the rival Front Bench has since departed—but the Government have attracted twice as many of their Back Benchers as the Labour party. That should not obscure the different approaches that our two parties adopt to this area of policy, as to others.

The hon. Member for Copeland was perfectly fair when he said that the Labour party has a completely different approach. Our approach, both to the natural environment and to our artistic and cultural heritage—of which the hon. Gentleman said not a word — starts from the assumption that the role of the state, vital though it is, is in the end ancillary to that of the private citizen.

Our beautiful countryside was the product not of state planners in the first place but of the million-fold decisions of private owners. The state certainly has a vital role as a moderator of change, conciliator and sometimes arbitrator of conflicting interests, and sometimes, in critical situations, as the deployer of long-stop powers. This is so in the two huge areas of the nation's life which we are now discussing. As much in the arts and the man-made heritage as in the natural environment, it is not state committees and bureaucracies that create things, but recalcitrant artists and individuals. The state must tread warily if it is not to extinguish the very pluralism and diversity that a healthy artistic culture needs.

Labour is bound to start from the opposite position. Even from so moderate a spokesman as the hon. Member for Copeland, we cannot miss the wishful hankerings for even more state planning, state control, ministeries of culture, and all the rest. Therefore, the debate is timely if it reminds us that a Conservative Government are not, and should not be, simply in the business of an endless competition with the Opposition to see who can create the biggest and best state bureaucracies. Where the state should act, it should do so efficiently. It should deploy the right resources and listen to the best advice. These things we have done and will continue to do, but all that will be as nothing if the basic framework within which farmers and landowners in the countryside, and artists, architects, patrons and owners in our cultural life, go about their business is wrong.

That is why our fundamental approach to countryside matters is based on a twofold reform of the framework within which farmers and conservationists live together. In fact, they are often the same people, as the huge growth of the farming and wildlife advisory groups show.

First, the Wildlife and Countryside Act establishes for the first time a system whereby we can show farmers and others that we are willing to put resources into conservation in the countryside and to accept that in certain important areas conservation is a valid objective of public policy alongside farming. Those who do not believe that any policy is sufficiently virile unless it deploys compulsion in all directions hope that the approach embodied in the Act will fail. Unfortunately, events have proved them wrong.

Since the Act was passed we have seen the growth of a new consensus among farmers and conservationists, issuing in welcome policy statements from the National Farmers Union, and the Country Landowners Association as well as from the Nature Conservancy Council, the

Countryside Commission and others. The atmosphere has been transformed, and no one involved in conservation doubts it. The reason is crucially to do with the way in which it has been shown that, under the Act, conflicts can be resolved and agreement sought. It is absurd to hail the newly-emerging consensus on countryside matters and then deny that the most important Act for decades on the subject has not played a crucial role in the growth of that consensus. Of course it has.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): My right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Small Heath (Mr. Howell) and my hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy), as well as some of the Minister's hon. Friends such as the hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro), spent 100 hours or more in Committee on the Wildlife and Countryside Act. Many of those on hours were spent discussing MAFF money in relation to conservation. After the time which has elapsed, will the Minister identify the amount of MAFF money that has gone into conservation, or is no such figure available?

Mr. Waldegrave: The principal budgetary burden remains with my Department. It is right that it should do so. I shall shortly come on to ways in which we should seek to divert and direct CAP money into conservation objectives. I think the hon. Gentleman will agree that that is an important objective.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth) *rose*——

Mr. Waldegrave: I appreciate that the hon. Gentleman is an expert in these matters, but I must continue. The hon. Member for Copeland made quite a long speech and I do not want to take as long.

Our critics said that we would not provide the resources or that they would be absurdly large or impossible to provide. To their irritation we have provided the money. There has been £7 million more this year for the Nature Conservancy Council, an increase of 45 per cent., and a 75 per cent. real increase since 1979. There will be a further £2 million for the Countryside Commission next year, a 23 per cent. increase since 1982-83. Here I pay tribute to William Wilkinson of the NCC and Sir Derek Barber of the Countryside Commission and their staffs who are making a reality of the policy we all want. I do not believe that sums such as this—£38 million between the two bodies — are absurdly large, given that they represent the commitment of this House and the Government to the conservation of the countryside and our natural habitats.

I said that the Government's approach to the reconciliation of interests in the countryside had two aspects. The first is the Wildlife and Countryside Act. The second is the explicit attempt for the first time to put into EC law, with the agricultural structure directive amendment, powers to use CAP money for conservation objectives. My right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has taken this initiative in Brussels, and it has been widely welcomed by conservationists and farmers.

The House might like to know that in support of this initiative I have raised the subject of the interaction of agriculture and the environment with Commissioner Narjes of the Environment Council, and I shall be tabling a memorandum at the next Council of Ministers meeting on 6 December to follow this through.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon) *rose*——

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. Gentleman will appreciate my wishing to continue. The danger of such wide-ranging debates is that Ministers speak for far too long. My Department has so many relevant programmmes, domestic and international, about which I would be delighted to tell the House, but the patience of the House might not necessarily match my enthusiasm. I shall, for example, leave the general subject of water pollution to my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Construction, who has the whole matter well under control.

Before I turn to the other great subject of the debate, which unfortunately slipped the attention of the hon. Member for Copeland, I should like to answer some of the specific points he raised. He asked about the law of the sea convention and rightly said that we must come to a decision by 9 December. That is so. We shall come to a decision, but I cannot announce it today. He was right to say that the deadline has not yet been reached.

I was glad to hear his important reaffirmation of bipartisan support for nuclear power generation. This is another area of good sense in which the hon. Gentleman is increasingly a lone figure in his party. We shall study the Holliday report carefully. At first glance it is an interesting and useful report, and we shall come back to the House in due course.

The hon. Gentleman also asked about immediate prospects of amendment to the Wildlife and Countryside Act. He rightly referred to the Nature Conservancy Council, which considers that only minor amendment is needed. I believe that there is a consensus in the House for a limited change—principally to block the three-month loophole — but for no more at present. As the hon. Gentleman knows, we are considering whether the original route proposed—a private Member's Bill—can meet this need.

Air pollution and endangered species also come within my responsibility. On air pollution, acid deposition and motor car exhaust pollution dominate the current debate. But this debate is not timely for setting out the Government's position. It would be discourteous to the Select Committee if we tried to pre-empt our response to it. That should be given in a very few days, most likely next week. There is no secret in the fact that the Government see great problems for Britain in any further dramatic diminution of the 40 per cent. drop in sulphur emissions that has already been achieved. We are studying carefully the European Community Commission's two stage approach to car exhausts, and see some hope for progress. We must not allow any slippage in the recently agreed date for the removal of lead from petrol. We shall, therefore, seek to keep progress on lead separate from that on other vehicle pollutants. That will minimise the danger of slippage.

However, I take this opportunity to say that the Government's concern about endangered species, which is represented by our vigorous action when we had the presidency of the European Council, has not diminished. On the contrary, where we think there is illegal trade, we shall pursue it rigorously. My Department is convening an action seminar of international enforcement officers in Bristol in two weeks' time to devise ways of making enforcement even more effective.

I am especially worried about the illegal trade in birds of prey, through which large profits can be made and which has possible connections with the international drug trade. I have already placed a moratorium on imports and

[Mr. Waldegrave]

exports of gyr falcons and peregrines. We are imposing a moratorium on all movements of all diurnal birds of prey between the United Kingdom and Germany on the advice of our enforcement team.

Many hon. Members will have received letters urging more action regarding swans, which die from the ingestion of fishermen's lead weights. Swans are not an endangered species, but we take the matter exceedingly seriously and have made it clear that if an effective voluntary agreement cannot be reached we shall consider legislation.

Our fundamental approach to the arts and built heritage is not philosophically dissimilar from our approach to the natural environment. There is a proper role for the state, but state domination would be death. That is why the independence of the Arts Council in specious arguments over accountability is so vital, and why the independence, made real by the method of its funding, of the National Heritage Memorial Fund is so important.

As usual, critics call for more compulsion, for example to ban the export of pictures, which in most cases would not be here except for the existence of free trade in the past. It is interesting to see what the NHMF says in its annual report. It states:

"This country had never benefited from trade protectionism . . . our export control system is an enlightened one which steers a careful course between the desire to retain in this country what we most cherish and unwillingness to interfere with the rights of owners."

That is exactly the balance that we seek.

Earlier this year we established two further arm's length agencies, the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission under Lord Montagu, and the Trustees of the Tower of London Armouries under Lord De L'Isle, to reinvigorate our management and presentation of some of the best monuments, historic houses and some of the world's oldest collection of arms and armour. They have started well and we have made the necessary money available — more than £50 million next year for the HBMC.

The last word on the provision of resources for the conservation of our cultural heritage should lie with the independent NHMF's annual report. It states:

"We have good reason for confidence, not only in this Government's commitment to the objectives of conservation, but in their willingness to provide adequate funds to achieve these objectives."

We are grateful for that tribute, which is certainly the truth.

I am aware that in the past there has been some disappointment about the Government's response to the report of the Select Committee on Education, Science and Arts, some of which is relevant to the debate. During our last debate on this subject, some Select Committee members underestimated their effect on policy-making. It is certainly true that the recommendation about revised ministerial responsibility was not accepted. However, an important step was taken in the direction urged by the Committee through the return of the Arts Minister to the Cabinet. I am sure that that is right.

I will not list all the items where we accepted the Select Committee's advice, for example, business sponsorship, information, trading activities of museums and galleries. However, on one important matter where the Government have not immediately accepted the recommendations—tax changes—it does not mean that the subject is dead and buried. Work will continue to see whether present measures can be further improved.

The Government have a fine record and will work hard to improve it further. We have passed Acts, set up institutions and provided money to back them, where necessary. Plenty more remains to be done in future, and, as our record shows, we shall do it.

4.33 pm

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): The Minister welcomed the debate but provided little evidence to justify the claim that the Conservative party deserves respect from those interested in conservation and related subjects. He seemed to excuse the Government's pathetic record by suggesting that they must tread warily to avoid reducing the advantage which may accrue from individual endeavour. That sort of advantage has brought some of our rural areas in the past 30 years near to desolation. If there is desolation as a result of the people whom the Minister wishes to protect, in future many individuals will never get the inspiration which past generations of Britons have enjoyed.

The Minister prayed in aid the developing consensus between the forester, the farmer and the conservationist. I welcome that consensus, and I may have made a small contribution to achieving it. The Minister must realise that those who do not approve and are not part of the consensus do not care for their colleagues' views and wreak havoc. While the Government fail to take action, those havoc wreakers continue to destroy our countryside and the heritage which we have an obligation to treasure. Those havoc wreakers will applaud the Government. They are imbued with the Government's monetarist policies and may continue to be protected by them.

It is no good the Minister paying well-deserved tribute to Mr. Wilkinson and his colleagues in public agencies with responsibility. The Minister did not respond to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham), who said that the Nature Conservancy Council's report clearly stated that the next 18 months would be critical for many areas of British conservation. There has been no firm commitment from the Government; merely a gesture and a welcome ban on exports of diurnal birds. That is welcome, but the position is far more critical than the Government's complacency seems to suggest.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle (Lincoln): How does the hon. Gentleman square the circle when he considers that the Government have given an additional £7 million to the Nature Conservancy Council just for those purposes?

Mr. Hardy: For some years, the hon. Gentleman has claimed a commitment to and interest in conservation. If he believes that the £7 million screwed from the Government as a contribution to conservation will allow people to respect the Conservative party's commitment to the cause, he is greatly mistaken.

My hon. Friend the Member for Copeland was right to start the debate with a broad approach. Conservation must be based not on a local, ecological evaluation, but on the planet as a whole. We see the topsoil of the globe, which is its principal resource, being destroyed, deserts extending by millions of acres a year, the world's fresh water polluted and the seas overfished. Quite rightly,

Opposition Members and hon. Members to the Left of the Conservative party are beginning to marvel at the way that the Conservative party is sticking its head into the increasing areas of sand.

The topsoil is being removed in Africa. That has enormous implications for western Europe. We are determined to ensure that the Government, in serving a proper international commitment, recognise the need for action in this country. At the moment, it is fair to describe the Conservative party's position as niggardly in provision and lethargic in response. It is no good the Minister saying that there will be one amendment to the three-month loophole. He could have closed it last year. He will recall that in the spring I presented a Bill which was found to be technically deficient only two days before I hoped it would be passed on the nod in July. It would have closed that loophole, and important areas which have been destroyed and disfigured since then would have continued to benefit future generations.

Too many areas of great importance have been destroyed or disfigured. Too many areas which are not classified as sites of special scientific interest, but which are of enormous local importance and which have given pleasure to many people throughout the length and breadth of our island, are being destroyed. That is especially true of hedgerows.

The Minister will recall that the Government blocked a Bill that I introduced designed to protect important and significant hedgerows in Great Britain, despite the fact that it was supported by the consensus to which the Minister has referred. We then discovered that thousands of miles of hedgerows had been uprooted and destroyed with public support by the use of millions of pounds of taxpayers' money. That money was devoted to destroying the hedgerows which the law said should remain in perpetuity. But the Government's response then showed some slight imagination. They decided to cancel the remaining grants for the destruction of hedgerows and to give people grants to establish new ones.

There are many farmers on the Conservative Benches. A few of them, who are in the House at the moment, will recognise that a newly-planted hedgerow, whilst welcome, is of far less ecological benefit than one which may have taken 2,000 years to develop. Thousands of miles of hedgerow, some of which is 2,000 years old, have been destroyed and the taxpayer has funded that destruction, and this imaginative, conservation-caring Government blocked an initiative supported by Members of all parties to resolve the problem.

I want to make a brief plea for hardwoods. The Forestry Commission seems to be suggesting that we have just as much hardwood in this country as we had 30 or 40 years ago, but the Minister will recall that the definition of hardwood being used today is different from that which was used in the 1940s.

I believe that the Forestry Commission is inaccurate and that the NCC's assessment, as quoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland, that since the war we have lost between 30 and 50 per cent. of our traditional woodland is more accurate. It is essential that something be done. For example, we must ensure the proper management of our woodlands. We need to ensure that small woodlands, which are increasingly vulnerable, are protected. At present, people can take 30 cu m of timber from a wood every quarter. That is all right in a large wood, but it could destroy a small copse within a relatively short time. We need to see a greater degree of imagination used in the management of our woodland resources than the Minister and his colleagues currently show.

There is the issue of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. I am glad that the hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir Hector Monro) is in the Chamber, because he was present in Berne when the Berne convention was signed. I was present as chairman of the relevant Council of Europe Sub-Committee. I welcomed his comments at Berne when he said that the Government would be first and foremost in their response to and implementation of this convention of wildlife and the habitat. They were not the first, and they may be the most niggardly in western Europe.

Part I is admirable, although I want to see some improvement in the protection of the badger. The conservation world has demonstrated that that is necessary. On the whole, part I is good because it does not cost the Government anything, but when we come to protect not the wild creatures but the habitat upon which they depend, we are far more parsimonious. The Government seem to want to take the credit for that which they can do without spending money. They are not prepared, even with the gesture of the extra £7 million referred to by the hon. Member for Lincoln (Mr. Carlisle), to spend more. The Minister cannot claim that that is a satisfactory way to protect the habitat which the Government are committed to preserve.

We do not trust the Government far. I hope that within the next few months the Council of Europe — I still maintain the chairmanship of the necessary committee— will monitor the position. It will study every member state to see how each one has implemented the commitment into which it entered under the Berne convention.

The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 was supposed to enshrine and embody that commitment. We are disappointed with it. If the Minister wishes to see some credit accrue to the United Kingdom, I trust that he will ensure that when my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) presents his Wildlife and Countryside (Amendment) Bill, he will be allowed to embody within it those matters which will be reasonable and consistent with achieving what the hon. Member for Dumfries claimed.

The Government are inflicting large-scale unemployment on the country. At the same time as creating enforced leisure, they must provide for that leisure which will otherwise accrue. They will fail dismally unless they recognise that a major part of the meaning and wealth of leisure for our country lies in the countryside. The millions of people who are unemployed and the millions who are retired or work shorter hours are entitled to demand that the countryside which they wish to enjoy should remain worth enjoying.

The Government's record is deplorable. I hope that the Minister's commitment, and his claim that the Conservative party deserves a green mantle, will be fulfilled. At the moment, the claim is preposterous.

4.45 pm

Sir Hector Monro (Dumfries): I welcome the debate. I should declare an interest as a member of the Nature Conservancy Council, the council of the National Trust for Scotland and a number of other conservation bodies. I am somewhat involved at the sharp end but I speak for myself.

[Sir Hector Monro]

I am astonished by the motion. We all have a common objective and it is out of place to cause acrimony when conservation cries out for harmony.

We need a constructive approach to evolution in the countryside and to the whole of the heritage. We have an excellent record, and I support my hon. Friend the Minister. The Opposition must have had a few twinges of conscience when they put down this motion. I have been 20 years in the House and I have the record of the legislation relating to conservation. The Opposition have produced only one significant piece of legislation other than a private Member's Bill, which was presented by the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy). The legislation set up the Countryside Commission in 1969. I speak about Scotland as well as England and Wales, and the Countryside Commission has been the most splendid organisation with an especially gifted chairman. He has the feel of the countryside and the experience to understand economic problems. He will need all his skills as the demand for leisure space places more and more pressure upon the countryside.

The Countryside Commission publication, "A Better Future for the Uplands", was a notable contribution to conservation. The only other piece of Government legislation tabled by the Labour party during those 20 years was the ill-fated Countryside Bill of January 1979. We were mercifully saved from its provisions by the 1979 general election. The Bill had it all wrong, and I am delighted that our policy of voluntary agreement has successfully overtaken the Labour idea of compulsion for Exmoor which is what the Bill dealt with. That is all that the Labour party did in the period of maximum destruction of the countryside during the 1970s, with the corn explosion and its repercussions on hedgerows, trees and wetlands. During all that time the Labour party did nothing and yet here it is putting forward a singularly inappropriate motion.

The Government have had a different approach. To touch for a moment on the heritage, when I was in the Department of the Environment I was involved with the setting up of the National Heritage Memorial Fund, which has been a great success. The Government have made fiscal changes. There have been changes in capital taxation, income tax concessions, zero-rated VAT. The Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission has been set up and, of course, the National Heritage (Scotland) Bill is presently going through the House.

Our policies are going well. Of course, all historic houses are expensive to maintain and one should never underestimate owners' problems and we should give them the help that they need. I pay tribute to the Government and to the National Trust for the part that they play in maintaining the heritage of our great country houses that mean so much to the people of this country and the tourists who visit it.

The hon. Member for Wentworth referred to the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. We started from scratch in 1979 with a major environmental Bill, bringing in, as he mentioned, part I, dealing with wildlife, of the important European directive. The Bill's proceedings were long and contentious and if we had had a little more time, we might have been able to pick up the incorrect emphasis, or even an omission in sections 28 and 29 in part II, dealing with management agreements and SSSIs. I should be happier if we were rectifying these important points through a Government Bill, because so much can happen to a private Member's Bill, even if there is good will on both sides of the House to see it through to enactment.

It would have been easy today to have got the measure through the House with the corrections to which I have referred, because opinion has changed so dramatically during the past few years, partly, as my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary said, because of the Wildlife and Countryside Act. There has been a notable swing towards conservation, not only through the National Farmers Union and the farmers themselves but through bodies such as the Country Landowners Association, and the Scottish Landowners Federation and because of the distinct change in the attitude of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food towards conservation. It now has an adviser, and one can see in the recent press release on capital grants how it is thinking all the time in terms of conservation. That is a major step forward and one that is most important.

It is a basic argument in dealing with conservation and the countryside that agriculture is profitable, and consequently the rural economy comes into consideration when we are dealing with conservation. We must look after the things that matter in the countryside, such as the rural schools, the village halls, the buses and so on. They should all be developed within a proper economic attitude to the countryside, as this helps conservation. I am glad that the Ministry is now looking towards supporting conservation and helping with the farm and wildlife advisory groups and through assistance from the Agricultural Development and Advisory Service which now has a distinctive conservation role.

Meanwhile, the Nature Conservancy Council has pressed on with its notification and renotification procedures for SSSIs and with making management agreements. It is learning all the time through experience and welcomes the addition of £7 million announced by the Government. That must not be underestimated by Labour Members. It is specifically to help with the SSSIs and management agreements, and comes on top of the significant budget that the NCC has in the first place. All organisations such as the NCC would welcome more money, but, within the constraints of public expenditure, the Government's recent response was most significant.

The relationship between the NCC, the farmers and the landowners is getting closer, although there is some way to go. The farmers now see management agreements not as negative but as positive arrangements that give them advice and assistance and can produce something valuable for conservation. There is no wish in the NCC to see SSSIs as areas of sterilised land. Far from it. There is a great deal that can be done in the SSSIs about which agricultural interests need have no fear.

We have a common purpose, and thousands of SSSIs are under no threat. We need some give and take in the countryside, and an acceptance that sometimes country folk see things a little differently from those who come from the town. It is no more so than in the world of country sports. We have to give credit to the British Association for Shooting and Conservation, the Game Conservancy and the British Field Sports Society for what they do for habitat and wildlife conservation. They have a right to pursue their interests without interference. We must watch out for EEC directives that may not necessarily be in the best interests of the country.

Many conservation groups do an excellent job, while others sometimes leave me in despair. Some appear to judge their success by outrageous headlines and sometimes, sadly, by illegal action. As the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) said, one often sees headlines saying things like, "Failure of the Wildlife and Countryside Act." That is an inaccurate and foolish statement. The Act has not failed, but all Acts on the scale of this one need time to show their full results. For instance, we have made singularly little progress over marine nature reserves. It will take time to bring to fruition all the things that we set out to do a few years ago.

The countryside is what it is largely because man made it that way. Man provided the frame and the gilding for a beautiful picture, and although we may lose a few SSSIs, new areas of conservation are developing every day. I sometimes wish that those who criticise what is happening in the countryside so much would get into a light aeroplane and fly around England, Scotland and Wales at about 1,000 feet, and look down at the ground to see what lovely countryside we have. It is far from being the desolate area described by the hon. Member for Wentworth and his friends.

I sometimes have a wry smile about bulls on footpaths. I was heavily criticised about that at the time the Bill was being debated but the results that were predicted have not materialised.

I stress again the importance of the NCC. It has published its policy in "Nature Conservation in Great Britain". That contains an analysis of the problems and a statement for action, plus plans for its development under the new corporate plan. The Government have made money available and I know of no case where lack of funds has been a limiting factor in dealing with conservation. That does not mean to say that those who have land that is possibly under threat should think that they can pull wool over the eyes of the NCC and get money from a soft touch. They will not.

The Act was a catalyst for action. It made people think about conservation, and much that has happened in conservation has happened since the Act's arrival. There is no doubt that attitudes have changed. Of course the Act's provisions can be improved, but so can the NCC, the Countryside Commission, and organisations such as the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, which can improve and develop their policies year by year.

The countryside has taken a millenium to evolve. Change cannot take place overnight. It takes time and constructive discussion, but we should never be complacent. Nevertheless, we are going the right way. The pace towards conservation is accelerating every day. There is room for everybody to enjoy the countryside, its facilities and its beauties in happiness, but let us all work together and not in the disharmony proposed by the Opposition.

4.58 pm

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): Like other hon. Members, I welcome the opportunity to debate these important subjects. Earlier, there was some discussion about who was climbing on to whose bandwagon. It will no doubt be recognised that many of the issues raised in a debate such as this have been campaigned for by my right hon. and hon. Friends for many years, particularly when it was much less fashionable to do so. We have recognised that over many years, national success can be measured not only by quantifying terms such as the GNP, but by the increasing importance of the quality of our lives, of the air, of the purity of the waterways and the way in which we exercise the stewardship of our national resources and heritage.

We welcome a wide-ranging debate which allows us to discuss issues as wide as the delays experienced in protecting and establishing rights of way and the transport of radioactive waste by land and sea. I endorse what the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) said about the law of the sea convention. He said that in the remaining time available to us we should sign that convention as an act of faith towards those in the developing nations, with particular reference to the mineral resources referred to in that convention.

If the hallmark of the motion is breadth, the feature of the Government's amendment is complacency. There are some signs that the Government are becoming a little more responsive to environmental issues—slightly green at the edges—but they have a long way to go before they merit the self-congratulatory plaudits of the amendment.

Let me give the Government a practical suggestion. They may take advice from the Royal Commission if they wish. If adopted, it would show that the Government had some willingness to take environmental matters seriously. I see no reason why, when Bills are published, there should not be an environmental impact statement attached to it, if it is appropriate. For example, the Local Government Bill has a statement on its financial consequences and its effect on public service manpower. The Government should give guidance to highlight those issues of significance to our heritage and environment.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): Local government legislation may not appear to have environmental consequences, but I hope that hon. Members will accept that the proposed abolition of the GLC, with its historic buildings department which has an enormously good reputation, and its replacement by a quango will have such consequences. We should ensure that such Bills take into account the consequences to the environment, of which people may not otherwise be aware.

Mr. Wallace: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. It is not immediately apparent from the Local Government Bill that there are such consequences. For example, the body which puts up blue plaques around London may lose the coherent approach which enables it to identify worthwhile items of heritage in London.

The amendment omits any reference to the Royal Commission on environmental pollution. That is regrettable when one has regard to the complex volume of work which the Royal Commission has undertaken during the 13 years that it has been in existence.

To some reports of the Royal Commission the Government have given a speedy response, but, regrettably, to others, such as the fifth report, the Government took seven years to respond. Although it is nine months since the most recent report of the Royal Commission, which reviews much of its previous activity and looks towards the future, we have not yet had any response from the Government. I hope that the Minister will say when we can expect a response to that tenth report.

The Royal Commission is omitted, but the Countryside Commission is mentioned in the amendment.

[Mr. Wallace]

Unfortunately, it does not appear to have fared better in achieving a Government response. The recent report "A Better Future for the Uplands" and the related report by the RSPB, "Hill Farming and Birds", are both important and serious contributions to current discussions on agriculture and conservation. One may not necessarily agree with all the recommendations and views; none the less they merit a serious Government response. It would be welcome if the Government would say when they intend to publish a full response to those two major reports.

In his speech the Minister referred to the draft regulations which have been submitted to the EC on efficiency in agricultural structures. He said that they have friends in the farming community and in the environmental lobby. However, he did not say whether they have friends in the EC. One or two bodies have expressed some concern about the Government's position if they do not succeed in persuading our European colleagues about the merits of the draft regulations. Again, it would be helpful if the Minister would say something about the Government's fallback position.

Much has been said about the Wildlife and Countryside Act. That legislation came under attack from all sides before it found its feet. There is widespread agreement in the House that it has some serious shortcomings, such as the three-month gap between the notification and confirmation of SSSIs when, if the owner chooses to be irresponsible, he can easily destroy the special site. Section 29 contains the problem of the possible gap between the end of the three-month period for negotiation of a management agreement if no such agreement is forthcoming and the time that it takes to make a conservation order.

I think that all hon. Members recognise that the measure introduced in the previous Session by the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) commanded widespread support. It is the view of the House that such a measure should be on the statute book. But it would appear that the Government are not now disposed to introduce legislation and would rather leave it to a private Member. Perhaps the situation is worse than that. I have no doubt that the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) has a great interest in the matter, but if the contents of his Bill were such that they did not entirely meet with the Government's approval, I fear that the Bill might not necessarily be given the fair wind that it would require to reach the statute book. We shall not be impressed, and I do not think that many outside the Chamber will be impressed, if parliamentary games and tactics stop worthwhile legislation getting on to the statute book.

If there are to be differences of opinion—as there are—on what is needed to improve and amend the Act, surely the proper place to debate that is on the Floor of the House or in Committee in the context of a Bill. We need a Bill, preferably sponsored by the Government in Government time, so that the issue can have the full airing that it deserves.

In that context I would have constituency viewpoints to put forward. I can safely say that the Act has not been the most welcome legislation in my constituency. The farmers and crofters in Orkney and Shetland are not particularly anti-conservation. The fact that birds, such as the hen harrier and the whimbrel, which are rare in the United Kingdom, remain there evidences the conservationist attitude of my constituents over many years.

The key to the Act is clearly the co-operation and trust between farmers and conservationists. I regret that that co-operation has been put under considerable strain in Orkney and Shetland. There have been considerable feelings of bureaucratic imposition on the traditional sturdy independence of the crofters and farmers. At times it is felt that too large an area has been designated and that the appeal procedure is limited. Indeed, it is felt that the NCC is judge and jury in its own cause.

When the farmer receives his list of notifiable operations, too often he assumes them to be prohibitions. That has led to a breakdown in trust and confidence. That highlights a slightly wider problem. If we are to notify and re-notify the many thousands of owner-occupiers whose land is covered by SSSIs, that must clearly be done properly so that trust and confidence can be built up. To do that, the NCC requires far more staff than it has. The staff must not only possess the necessary nature conservation expertise but understand the farming way of life, particularly of farmers living in marginal areas. The NCC clearly lacks staff. When the House passed the Wildlife and Countryside Act it imposed duties on the NCC, and we have an equal duty to provide the NCC with the resources to carry out those duties.

Reference has also been made to the level of compensation. Clearly, the Act is open to abuse. People have threatened to develop land on which they previously had no intention of undertaking development. One reads of the possibility of between £50,000 and £100,000 per annum being given not to drain Elmley marshes. Everyone recognises that there should be a tightening up on such abuses and that we should not be paying out vast sums to prospective speculators or maverick farmers. But at the same time the regulations should ensure adequate finance to compensate the marginal farmer who has to forgo some expanded production in the interests of conservation.

It is possible to accommodate both agricultural and conservation interests. But we need to find ways in which management agreements are seen not solely in restricted and negative terms, but as containing a strong and very positive component. They should be sensitive to the particular needs of rural communities. For example, I think of my constituency and of islands, such as Fetlar and Eday, where almost all of the economic activity relates to agriculture. To adopt a negative, restrictive approach to conservation in such areas threatens one species, in particular—man himself.

There is, therefore, a need for positive management. We must always keep before us the thought that the countryside should not be turned into a museum or a place to which only tourists or weekenders go. Moreover, it should not be turned into a place to which only botanists or ornithologists go to do their research. The countryside should be a living place in which people have their homes and work in harmony with their environment.

In recent months two major environmental issues have illustrated the close connection between the environment and energy. I refer to the major issues of acid rain and radioactive waste. It is clear that hon. Members cannot do justice to a subject like acid rain during such a wide-ranging debate as this. It deserves a debate of its own. I think that the Government were once disposed to hold such a debate, but they have had a change of heart. That fuels

the suspicion that they are not taking the problem seriously enough and are bowing to some pressure from the Central Electricity Generating Board.

The figure of how much sulphur dioxide is put into the atmosphere has already been given. We believe that the time has come for a more positive response to be made, involving programmes of desulphurisation. Such programmes would help to clean up the environment and go a long way towards stimulating jobs in many parts of the country. I endorse what the hon. Member for Copeland said about radioactive waste. As I said during our debate in March on the tenth report, I agree that there is a need to reconstitute NIREX and the Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee to include a wider range of people, such as those from interested environmental bodies.

The fears about Sellafield have not gone away. Indeed, they are extending up the west coast of Scotland. Notwithstanding the Black report, we believe that the Secretary of State for Scotland should undertake independent monitoring and establish an inquiry into the position of the Scottish coastline. The hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mr. MacKay), the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, shakes his head. I can understand him thinking that there is no need to raise unnecessary fears. Unfortunately, those fears already exist. I receive letters in my postbag on the subject, as, no doubt, he does. Indeed, if the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) were present, I am sure that he would tell us that he receives similar letters. Those fears exist. There should be an inquiry into the matter.

I wrote, I believe, to the hon. Member for Bristol, West (Mr. Waldegrave), the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, on a matter relating to proposals by a company called ENSEC to place radioactive waste under the seabed. As far as I know, those proposals have received little support from the radioactive waste industry. Indeed, I believe that any attempt to dump it—as has been suggested—under Stormy Bank in the Pentland firth would meet with downright opposition from my constituents. However, I have written to the Minister on that subject, and perhaps he will write to me telling me what the present status of those proposals is.

There is clearly an inter-relationship between energy policy and the environment. Energy conservation has obvious consequences for the environment. The Severn barrage and even windmills have consequences for the environment. That is why we believe that there is a need to resuscitate the commission on energy and the environment and to give it wider terms of reference, as recommended by the tenth report of the Royal Commission. Although the Government put the commission into suspended animation, they did not kill it off. In February 1983, a Government spokesman said that it would and should be revived if there was a pressing need.

We can clearly identify issues such as radioactive waste and acid rain as providing urgent need to take social and environmental factors into account when deciding on an energy strategy. At the end of the debate I hope that the Minister will let us know what the Government's intentions are with regard to the commission on energy and the environment. If he cannot do so, then perhaps he will write to me and let me know the situation.

I now wish to draw my remarks to a close—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] Those hon. Members who say that should realise that, if more alliance Members were called, I would not need to deal with every subject. I have tried to cover a wide spectrum.

It is clear that the environment is important to our well-being. Sometimes decisions have to be taken at international level if they are to be effective, but often our environment is best shaped by those who live locally and can respond best to what is going on. That is why I believe that many decisions may well be taken wrongly if they are taken by a remote Secretary of State or quango. We believe that local involvement, sensitivity to local needs, and, wherever possible, local decision-making are the keys to a successful environmental policy.

5.15 pm

Mr. Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): I too welcome this debate on environmental matters. However, I do not accept the terms of the motion and deplore the tenor of some of the speeches made by Opposition Members. I have a particular regard for the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) and applaud the initiative that he has taken on so many environmental issues, but the strictures that he showered on the Government and on Conservative Members were not only unfair but counter-productive. Those who care about the environment—and they exist in all parts of the House—know perfectly well that if we can obtain a consensus about the sensible and practical policies that should be undertaken, we are far more likely to be effective with Governments of whatever hue.

Mr. Hardy: Although I recognise that there are Conservative Members who share the view that there should be a consensus, they seem to be very thinly represented on the Treasury Bench. Indeed, when they have made a clear case, the Government have rejected it.

Mr. Chapman: I am sorry, but I do not accept that. In the past decade, Conservative Governments have done many good things. One thinks, for example, of the setting up of the Department of the Environment by the drawing together of some of the chief Ministries that had a great influence on environmental matters. I think also of the Control of Pollution Bill, which was introduced in the dying days of the Conservative Government of 1970 to 1974. There is also the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and the planned elimination of lead in petrol. Moreover, 2·5 million acres of interim green belt land have been added to the millions of acres of established green belt land, and there have been recent initiatives to promote and maintain our architectural heritage.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Sir H. Rossi) is Chairman of the Environment Committee, but is away attending an important international conference on the environment. He asked me, as acting Chairman of that Committee, to say that it would be unwise to comment on the Wildlife and Countryside Act, or at least on part II of it, which relates to sites of special scientific interest. The reason for that is that the Committee is shortly to make some recommendations to the Government.

It would also be wrong of me to talk about the recently published report on acid rain. It represented a most comprehensive examination of the problems, but my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House has promised a debate upon publication of the Government's response to that

[Mr. Chapman]

report. However, I shall say one thing about part II of the Wildlife and Countryside Act. It mainly concerns itself with more than 4,000 sites of special scientific interest, covering about 1·5 million acres. But that represents less than 5 per cent. of the total countryside. Therefore, I shall address a few remarks to the wider countryside issues that have been raised.

It is estimated that in the past 35 years over half our lowland heaths have been lost, half our fenlands drained, over one third of our ancient woodlands felled and over one quarter of our upland heaths and grasslands destroyed. A dramatic change has taken place in our countryside. I use the word "fenlands" because it might be imprudent for an aspiring Tory Back Bencher to use the word "wetlands".

The dramatic change is principally the result of the intensification of agriculture but that is not the farmer's fault. It is the fault of successive Governments who have wished for and willed — for good reasons or bad — maximum food production. That has been achieved by a system of agriculture subsidies.

The loss of and damage to our natural habitat is not principally the farmers' fault. They have acted quite properly by taking the opportunities offered. In any case, the countryside should not be preserved in aspic. The worrying factor is the scale of the change. At the least, we must supplement financial support for agriculture with a more coherent and comprehensive structure of grants for conservation.

I take particularly to heart what the hon. Member for Wentworth said about the grubbing up of so many hedgerows — the seedbeds of much of our rural tree stock. The scale of the loss of hedgerows has been reduced, but the problem is still worrying. I declare an interest as the president of the Aboricultural Association.

In England alone there are over 5,000 conservation areas and over 300,000 buildings listed as being of architectural or historical interest. Yet, year after year, hundreds, if not thousands, of buildings — our architectural inheritance — are either damaged or demolished. I suggest it might now be time to give organisations and planning authorities another two years to decide which further buildings should be listed, and then impose a moratorium for at least five years, or possibly 10 years, when no further buildings could be listed. Then we could concentrate modestly increasing resources on trying to prop up, repair and truly preserve buildings already listed. We should concentrate on the conservation of excellence rather than the preservation of mediocrity.

I hope that I am not complacent, but I believe that this Government's record deserves commendation, not condemnation. It is sometimes difficult to reconcile the nation's economic needs and the conservation of the environment. We have to ensure a balance between commerce and conservation. This Government can take some credit for elevating the environment to the higher political status that it now justifiably enjoys. I ask the House to reject the motion and to vote for the amendment.

5.25 pm

Mr. Lewis Carter-Jones (Eccles): People living in urban areas have environmental rights. My constituents have suffered severe hardship. The Clifton valley in my constituency has suffered total degradation. It has been spoilt by industrial abuse. The Greater Manchester council decided to sump waste at Lumn's lane in the valley. Local people were prepared to accept that further degradation, because they hoped that the land could be converted to a recreation area. That possibility gave the people great joy. That was the great hope—the dream. Then along came the vandals from the Department of the Environment. After all their suffering, the Department decided to worry my constituents even further by suggesting that the area be used as a dump for low-level radioactive waste. We protested, but failed.

The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) was right when he said that an environmental impact statement should be made in such circumstances. He also said that local authorities should be consulted. That makes sense. The people who live in an area should have a say about what happens there. That is reasonable and fair. The local authority, which is responsible for the disposal of rubbish, should also have a say.

The Greater Manchester council said, "We will not place low-level radioactive waste in the area." The Salford city council said that it did not want the waste in its area, but the wise boys in London said "Yes, you will have it." What an example of democracy. I am reminded of the line in the song,

"Everybody wants to go to heaven, but nobody wants to die."

Everyone says that low-level radioactive waste is safe, but nobody wants it. The final test is whether the inspectors would accept it in their back yards. They ensure that it is transported in metal containers, but then it is dumped in plastic bags. I am not exaggerating. It is causing fear and terror among my constituents. Anyone can organise a petition, but hundreds upon hundreds of people in the area are organising petitions. They are deeply concerned and affronted.

The Minister must reconsider. Low-level radioactive waste disperses quickly, but it must be guarded. To dump such waste in plastic bags 1·5 m below ground is madness. I do not see why my constituents should have to put up with it.

The Manchester ship canal has served this country well. It is not a canal in the accepted sense of the word; it is a canalised river—a river turned into a canal. It was used from Salford to the sea when it was prosperous. The canal is not as prosperous now. Its prosperity seems to have stopped half way down. The Manchester Ship Canal Company is anxious to cease its obligations on the landward side. The canal has become part of the water table. It is a natural environment in the area, even though it is man–made. I urge the Minister, in deciding the future of the Ship Canal Company, to take account not only of environmental but of commercial interests.

5.30 pm

Mr. Nicholas Baker (Dorset, North): I shall not follow the remarks of the hon. Member for Eccles (Mr. Carter-Jones) who spoke with passion.

I welcome the debate, but I resent some of the attacks on farmers and landowners that we heard at the beginning. In my experience, numbered among them are the best conservers and preservers of the environment that I have come across. We should be careful before accepting the figures given by pressure groups, albeit important, respectable and responsible ones such as the Nature Conservancy Council. I believe that the figures cited for the loss of SSSIs and traditional woodlands have been

shown to be inaccurate. It was, therefore, unwise of the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) to rely upon them in presenting the motion. The Government's conservation record is good.

In my first speech in the House I expressed my concern and, I believe, the concern of many for the environment. I advised the House of the dangers from mass tourism. I compared the effect of mass tourism upon the centre of London with the effect on Badbury rings near my Dorset home. Today, we read of the effects of mass tourism on Hadrian's wall. If anything, that small example should show us the threat to our heritage and environment.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): Is not the answer to give access to far more of our countryside so that tourists are spread more thinly and particular honey spots are not damaged in that way? It is important to have more access.

Mr. Baker: It might be the answer, if that were the result. Unfortunately, I do not believe that it is. What must be done is much more complicated. We certainly should not encourage the development of mass tourism.

I want to make four points. First, I hope that, in the spirit of co-operation to which many hon. Members have referred, there will no longer be a debate about the place of the private landowner and private owner of heritage assets. Undoubtedly, the National Trust does a good job, but the trust and the Government can only be a weapon of last resort. Inevitably, we will depend upon individual owners of heritage houses and assets. The individuals who own beautiful houses work harder, invest and care more for their houses and possessions than any statutory or public body could ever do. In my experience, those individuals are just as prepared to share those houses and possessions with the public as any public body.

I look to those who are becoming, have become and will become—if our economy succeeds in the way we hope—the newly rich. It is shocking to mention the newly rich, but I hope that they will see that one way of applying their wealth for the benefit of the general public is to acquire those heritage houses and assets so that they can look after them and share them with the rest of us. If we accept that idea, we must look at ways of encouraging individuals. I believe that there are ways in the taxation system—in capital and income taxes—to encourage individuals to apply their wealth in that way.

Secondly, I would like the Government to play a more positive part in encouraging museums and galleries to charge those who wish to see the beautiful exhibits. Undoubtedly, that is a good way of improving the facilities of museums and galleries and of making them more attractive. It is a way also of financing the purchase of the heritage assets that the museums and galleries wish to acquire. There are easy ways of making exceptions for those who are out of work and for schoolchildren who cannot afford to pay the charges.

My third point concerns the environment. When I was being lobbied by a helicopter company I had the opportunity of doing what my hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) suggested—flying at 1,000 ft over the south of England. I was struck by the disappearance of wild countryside and the way in which the country had been neatly parcelled out. I noted also the pressure of development in the south of England. We all talk about what farmers do in the course of earning their living. Of course, farmers must earn their living, and we should support that. We do not, however, mention the pressures applied to those who live and work in the countryside. The pressure from development in the south of England is greater today than it has ever been.

Mr. Robert Adley (Christchurch): Particularly in Dorset.

Mr. Baker: I heard my hon. Friend say, "Particularly in Dorset". He has anticipated my next remark.

Dorset's population and rate of development are well above its structure plan level and greater than the levels in many other parts of the country. I believe for environmental reasons, apart from any others, that the development of planning in that part of the south of England must be restricted. I hope that Ministers in the Department of the Environment will do much more than they have done in past years to uphold local planning decisions. The way in which those decisions are overturned is giving cause for great concern.

I want more development in our inner cities. The people of Liverpool who may wish to enjoy the environment in Dorset and the people of Dorset are concerned that the centre of Liverpool should remain a place in which people want to live and work so that the environment in Dorset, which is different, can be maintained.

I decided to mention my fourth point after noting the presence of my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Construction. I hope that he will comment on any encouragement he may give to the private rented sector. This aspect is not irrelevant to the subject we are discussing, and my hon. Friend will not be surprised to learn that. If we intend to develop the inner urban areas and at the same time to provide for job mobility, while not allowing areas such as Dorset to provide the bulk of new houses, we must look much harder at developing the private rented sector. There is a great opportunity for my hon. Friend to undertake the radical and, ultimately, successful reforms to which I believe he is sympathetic.

I hope that this spirit of co-operation in discussing our heritage and the environment will continue, because that is the right attitude for preserving what we value.

5.39 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On 14 January there will be a trial of two men, one from Solihull and one from Ashby-de-la-Zouche, who are accused of uprooting a water soldier—stratiotes aloides—at Ludham marshes.

As far as we can gather, that will be the first time that there has been any prosecution under the Wildlife and Countryside Act. After all the many hours some of us spent in Committee, deciding what was to be notified and the various categories to be included in the Bill, we have to wonder whether that is a sensible way for Parliament to proceed. If we are only now to have the first prosecution, what were we doing, spending all that time on the Bill? That is a genuine question.

Is it a surprise to the Ministers that this should be the first prosecution? Are they worried that the legal authorities have little detailed knowledge of this type of Act and therefore find it difficult to prosecute?

The Minister for Housing and Construction (Mr. Ian Gow): The hon. Gentleman, with his long experience in the House, will know that although we may describe the principles, I cannot get involved—and I should have

[Mr. Ian Gow]

thought that the hon. Gentleman would not want to get involved—in the details of a case in which he says a prosecution has been brought.

Mr. Dalyell: I leave the matter by saying that this is the first time that a prosecution will have been brought. My general question is whether it is sensible for us to proceed by supposing that the authorities can prosecute in such detailed and possibly arcane matters.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: We also spent a long time in Committee dealing with marine nature reserves. They are clearly the Government's responsibility, but the Government have done even less about them.

Mr. Dalyell: I was intending to ask about that, but the question has been properly asked for me, so we can save time.

Hon. Members on both sides of the Committee spent a long time arguing about whether Ministry of Agriculture money should be used for conservation purposes. The Sandford amendments are relevant here. Is it possible to identify the amount of Ministry money devoted to conservation purposes since the passing of the Act? The answer may be zero.

We spent a long time in Committee on pre-notification arrangements. Why have the arrangements for pre-notification by farmers been curtailed? Is it because of the shortage of personnel or is it a matter of policy? Some of us thought that the pre-notification obligation on farmers was a civilised way of getting their co-operation and a sensible way to proceed.

My hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) mentioned the serious weakness in the arrangements to protect landscapes and the wider countryside in the absence of any requirement for farmers, outside national parks and SSSIs, to get prior approval for operations subsidised by the Ministry of Agriculture. My hon. Friend said that the Act should be amended so that the pre-notification arrangements that apply in national parks were extended to cover the whole countryside. That is an important and reasonable request. Will the Minister who is to reply at least comment on it?

Lord Belstead wrote to me on 21 November about Halvergate, saying that some of the legal arrangements had been sorted out. I suspect that the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment is familiar with the letter that raised the question of European money. What have the Government learnt from the Halvergate experience? In the cooler light of day, with winter coming on, what will be done to stop such situations arising in the future?

We could talk for hours about the resources available to the Nature Conservancy Council and the Natural Environmental Research Council, but we have only minutes available. The broad question is whether the Government are satisfied with the resources made available to the NCC for its day-to-day work and to the NERC for making grants, particularly to universities. Should the NERC be given more money? Is it as desperately short of money as it claims?

The chairman of the National Heritage Memorial Fund, Lord Charteris, has asked for more Government funds. I do not think that any response has been made. I do not ask that much more money should be given to the fund, because I am not sure that it is a top priority. As my hon. Friend the Member for Eccles (Mr. Carter-Jones) made clear, the urban environment has many pressing problems.

I ask a different question. In giving money to the fund, is any account taken of the employment opportunities provided by labour-intensive work? Some of us think that heritage funds should be given more willingly if that money can be used, particularly in repair work, to create jobs, especially in areas where there is a desperate shortage of employment. Is account taken of the number of skilled jobs, albeit in crafts and possibly old-fashioned work, such as lead-working or stonemasonry, that can be provided through money given to the National Heritage Memorial Fund?

5.46 pm

Mr. Christopher Murphy (Welwyn Hatfield): To talk about the failures of Government policies to safeguard the natural environment and national heritage of Britain is to be, in the current phrase, gratuitously offensive. The emphasis laid on those matters by the Wildlife and Countryside Act and by the National Heritage Act is surely evidence of the falseness of that claim. Many of my hon. Friends have shown that clearly.

However, that is not to say that further action is not urgently needed in some respects. I should like to direct the attention of the House not so much to the wide scope of the debate as to the "scape" of the land and to consider not so much areas "beyond the fringe" as the fringe itself. In land use terms, there are three "scapes"—townscape, farmscape and wildscape. Between those "scapes" are the fringes—"rurban" fringe and marginal fringe.

The consequence of the derelict inner city has been the invasion of the green field site by urban dwellers and urban companies alike, thus turning farmscape into the "rurban" fringe. Some measure of that can be seen from the fact that recent surveys estimate that "rurban" fringe now occupies twice the area of townscape, and consists of a chaotic mixture of rural and urban land uses in mutual conflict. There is an inevitable knock-on effect of such a change to the farmscape, resulting from the diminution of properly utilised townscape. The effect is on the wildscape, often heath or moorland.

Now there is a marginal fringe, where the farmscape is encroaching on the wildscape, thus creating an uneasy mixture of farmland and woods or rough grazings. Therefore, no longer do we have the traditional benefit of a compact, busy, well-functioning, built environment, with well-used parks making up the townscape, and uninterrupted, food-producing land with scenic attractions, giving us the farmscape. Instead, we are diminishing those assets in favour of uncomfortable fringes that are less appropriate for our requirements, both economic and pleasurable.

Government action has rightly been concentrated, during the life of the last Parliament, and continuing into this one, on overcoming urban deprivation by utilising innovations such as the urban development corporations and enterprise zones, and has correctly laid emphasis on the private sector. Now is the time to be considering the ways of tackling most successfully the rehabilitation of land in the "rurban" fringe, and then, for the future, to ensure that the adverse consequences of the marginal fringe are overcome.

I am especially conscious of the growth of the "rurban" fringe, and its effect on the farmscape, representing as I

do a constituency in Hertfordshire which almost borders Greater London. In addition, having two new towns on what were green field sites enhances one's appreciation of the importance of successful land use.

To overcome such problems, it is necessary to seek a well-founded and operational conservation partnership. Government, both national and local, is one partner which sets the economic and social conditions in which nature conservation must operate. Farmers and land owners are another, as custodians of much of the national heritage. Conservationists, together with interested scientists and concerned members of the public, provide a further element of that partnership. The future success of Government policies to safeguard the natural environment and national heritage of Britain will be greatly enhanced if such a triumvirate of partners can be bound together, both in conservation decisions and in conservation actions.

5.51 pm

Mr. Ron Davies (Caerphilly): I am privileged to follow the hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Murphy), who made an interesting and intriguing speech.

The offence that the hon. Gentleman seems to have taken when Opposition Members criticised the Government because of their policy towards the environment should be taken at face value, because he supports a Government who support the common agricultural policy, which in turn supports an economic system which places a higher value on profit than on anything else. It is those pressures which require farmers and food producers to act in a way that is detrimental to the environment.

The hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Mr. Chapman) recognised that Government economic and agricultural policy have been forcing farmers, in pursuance of profit, to do things which are damaging to the environment. The hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield should not take offence when Opposition Members criticise the Government for adopting those policies.

I am prepared to accept that Conservative Members are genuinely concerned about the environment and are sincere in their expressions of concern for it, but if they are to be meaningful in their expressions of concern they must recognise the economic systems which are causing the problems.

Viscount Cranborne (Dorset, South) *rose*——

Mr. Davies: I shall not give way, because I have not yet had time to develop my speech. If the opportunity arises, I shall be prepared to give way later to the hon. Gentleman, although I recall that when I last did so there was some disagreement between us.

I am concerned with the problem of the operations of the Forestry Commission, and particularly its impact on the environment in my native country, Wales. In July this year the commission announced that it would be closing the conservancy office in Cardiff, with a loss of 45 jobs. It also meant that the commission had lost an opportunity. The commission has as its primary purpose the production of timber. It does not at present have a responsibility for wider conservation issues. Following a reorganisation, the commission lost an opportunity to branch out and to use its resources, staff and expertise, in a much more constructive way to enhance our natural environment. Unfortunately, instead of taking that opportunity the commission ignored it, and decided that it would merely follow the requirement placed on it by the Government, in pursuance of its charter, for timber production, and to be efficient in economic terms. It closed down the office without any thought of the consequences for the local community. That is an example of the way in which the commission is failing to adapt to changed circumstances.

I am sure that hon. Members in all parts of the House understand why the Forestry Commission was established. We understand the strategic argument for timber production and the need to be self–sufficient in times of war, although I do not know what we shall be able to do with 1 million hectares of coniferous timber when the next war breaks out. We are aware of the economic argument and the need, for economic reasons, to be as self-sufficient as possible in timber production, although, despite all the efforts of the Government and the support given to the Forestry Commission and the private sector, we are still producing only 9 per cent. of our national timber needs, and 10 per cent. of that timber is of such little value that it has to be exported for pulp purposes.

We have not realised that the responsibility that was placed on the Forestry Commission no longer exists; at least, successive Governments appear not to have noticed it. In 1972 the Treasury did a cost-benefit analysis of the operations of the commission, and said that it

> "could find no reason for increasing the area under timber and even had difficulty in justifying investment in maintaining the existing area and stock."

The analysis went on to say:

> "There are no strategic considerations — defence or commercial—relevant to new afforestation."

That was 12 years ago. Since then the Forestry Commission has done very little other than to follow the well-trodden path of allowing mature, historic, ancient woodlands to be destroyed, and to allow or encourage the march of coniferous plantations across some of the most attractive and valuable parts of our natural landscape, at an increasing cost to the public. That is what has happened over the past 12 years since the Treasury report was published. It shows, to say the least, a considerable lack of imagination on the part of the Forestry Commission. It has not realised that there are changed circumstances, and now has no strategy for dealing with the problems of the environment and of conservation which are increasingly coming to the fore in the 1980s.

I should like to mention two consequences of the operations of the Forestry Commission. First, there is the loss of our upland areas. They are the areas which maps now designate as the less favoured areas — broadly above 500 metres. The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, in a survey, calculated that since 1946 about 197,000 hectares of moorland have been lost. In my native south Wales, about 50 per cent. of the total upland areas has been lost since 1946. Between 1976 and 1983, we have lost 11,300 hectares of upland area to afforestation. That is worrying, because it means that we have lost a valuable and precious habitat in terms of flora and fauna. In particular, we have lost the bird life which can flourish on upland areas. The Forestry Commission has at least been party to destroying employment in agriculture and associated industries. The employment that the commission itself has provided has proved to be transient, to say the least.

[Mr. Davies]

A report in *The Guardian* of 24 September 1984 mentions present Government policies towards the Forestry Commission, requiring it to dispose of assets. The report says:

"Communities are also threatened. Probably the most extreme example is the recent sale of the 1,500-acre Brycheniog Forest in Brecon, South Wales, for more than £2·5 million to a private forestry group. Ten workers were made redundant and Llanegiwys, the hamlet dependent on the forest, is threatened. Its houses were built by the commission in the 1930s and the local agricultural workers' district secretary, Mr. Stuart Neale, fears that the community could die."

Therefore, in addition to the destruction of the employment that existed before the Forestry Commission's operations, we now find that because of its operations the employment that it generated is also being destroyed. We know the cost to the Exchequer and to the environment. Studies have shown the contributory effect of afforestation to acid rain. No benefit is accruing to the Treasury or the environment as a result of the commission's operations.

Secondly, there has been the loss of broadleaved woodland habitat. That ancient woodland is valuable as a resource in economic terms and in terms of its habitat and landscape value, and its use to the people for recreation and associated purposes. A report by the Council for the Protection of Rural England, endorsed by the Nature Conservancy Council, showed that since 1947 between 30 and 50 per cent. of that ancient and semi-natural woodland has been destroyed. Since the war about 60,000 hectares of mature oak woodland in England alone have been destroyed by the operations of the Forestry Commission. In my own county of Gwent, since the turn of the century, we have lost about 67 per cent. of our ancient woodland. The commission is sanguine, to say the least, in its treatment of those figures. Its report entitled "Broadleaves in Britain" states:

"Contrary to popular belief there has been no appreciable change in the total area of broadleaved woodland over the past 30 years."

That view is challenged by almost everyone who is concerned with the countryside. It is challenged by the NCC, the Countryside Commission, the Council for the Protection of Rural England, Friends of the Earth and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. We all understand the way in which the censuses have been done. We understand the way in which the Forestry Commission has been interpreting the figures that have been produced. We know that the commission is conning the British public when it says that there is no loss in the total standing area of native woodland.

A new approach is needed. New policies are needed. My colleagues on the Front Bench have made it clear that if the Government are prepared to introduce policies that will provide protection to existing SSSIs they will receive support from the Opposition. The Government know that if they introduce policies requiring the Forestry Commission to have a broader remit and to look at the demands of other users, they will receive support from the Opposition. If the Government develop new policies for environmental conservation and impose them on the Forestry Commission, they will receive support from the Opposition. Above all, if the Government require the commission to achieve greater co-operation and more meaningful consultation with other public bodies such as the water authorities, local authorities and conservation organisations, they will have greater support from the Opposition.

The Government may argue that legislation will be needed. If so, they will find that there is broad agreement. Agreement now stretches even as far as the National Farmers Union. In its recent publications the union has said that it understands and accepts the nature of the problem. There is now a clear responsibility on the Government to recognise that consensus and to act upon it.

6.4 pm

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle (Lincoln): I welcome this debate on the countryside. The very fact that we are holding it is not the result of a mere esoteric interest within this Parliament, but a reflection of the public's growing interest in our natural heritage and its demand that we do more to protect it.

The Opposition attack the Government on their record. They cannot be blamed for doing so, for that is their role. We heard the attack by the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies). However, I believe that the more dispassionate observer looking back at this time in years to come will see that it was this Government who presided over the most significant change of attitudes to the countryside this century. How much more effective it is to engineer a change of attitudes than to produce a plethora of words, as Opposition Members, including the Leader of the Opposition, the right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock), do.

Whatever the minor failing of the Wildlife and Countryside Act — the Government are committed to seeing that those loopholes are plugged — we must accept it as a landmark for conservation and the protection of special sites. The Government can take much credit for it. However, as with many such advances, the Act has also helped to illuminate the path ahead. Above all, it has made us aware that conservation in the wider countryside, not just in the special sites, is also crucial, and we must do more about that.

Bodies normally in controversy agree on moves needed to protect the wider countryside. For example, we might expect the voluntary bodies and their 3 million members to spring to the defence of our natural heritage in the wider countryside. We might even understand that the Countryside Commission should support them. However, in addition, the Country Landowners Association and even the National Farmers Union have said that we must seek a better balance between farming and conservation in the countryside. One is amazed and delighted that the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food admits that the goal of agricultural production is not the only one to be pursued, but that conservation is also important. That is a bandwagon indeed, partly created by Government action and partly a reaction to what the public want. We are witnessing a significant change in attitude.

However, it is clear that the Government must respond even more than they have responded so far. The countryside needs greater protection; the public want action; and the time is ripe and correct to do that. I welcome several signs that more is to be done, particularly the substantial extra resources going to the Nature Conservancy Council, but more action is needed. In pursuit of progress, I should like to recommend action in four areas.

First, the Government must enshrine as a principle the reality that no more habitat should be destroyed to increase agricultural production. It is one thing to farm existing land well—we must do that—but it is quite another to destroy valuable habitat with taxpayers' money simply to add to farming surpluses. All grants for that purpose must cease, and the money saved must be put back into conservation—into the countryside. In that respect I also welcomed the decision by the Ministry not to give grants for drainage on the Derwent Ings. I await with anticipation the paper on the future of drainage.

Secondly, we must draw a distinction between the prosperous farming areas in the east and the tougher conditions in the west. We must sustain the fabric of agricultural and rustic life in the most difficult farming regions. Recently the Countryside Commission called for an integrated approach to farming in the uplands. Why should not a 60-acre farm in Wales, for example, have 10 acres or more as productive woodland and be sustained as a viable farming unit using grants saved from other parts of the agriculture budget? We must welcome the Ministry's initiative to get Common Market funds and an integrated and balanced approach to farming in the less favoured areas.

Thirdly, I should like to refer to agricultural sprays. As a farmer, I now spray my wheat crop four or five times, or more, per year. I have to do that if I am to have an economic yield. Yet, as a naturalist, I am absolutely convinced that spraying causes the destruction of much insect life and is having a profound and damaging effect on wildlife on my farm. If we could make sprays with a specific effect and precise application, we would do more for wildlife than almost any other measure would achieve. Therefore, I urge more research on the use of sprays in agriculture.

Fourthly, I must mention acid rain. One has only to visit Scandinavia to recognise the calamity that haunts those countries. There are dead rivers and dead forests, becoming ever larger in extent. It is beyond doubt that sulphur dioxide emissions from this country are partly to blame. I support the Select Committee's call for direct action now. We must join the 30 per cent. club and start a programme of emission control. To do that would not just be to accept our responsibility and to regain much good will. To ignore the crisis now will lead not just to further damage to the environment but to an ignominious U-turn in the future. In general, I support the Government's action in encouraging the right trends to protect our environment, but I cannot do so on acid rain.

I have spoken specifically about the protection of our remaining habitats, the need to support an integrated approach to farming, to find a solution to the damage caused by agricultural sprays and to act rather than bluster on acid rain. Nevertheless, I believe that in general the Government understand the steps that need to be taken to protect our natural heritage. They must now spell out their programme. Indeed, they must go further in the education of the public and of farmers. After all, the best protection of all for the wider countryside to which I have mainly referred is for the farmers themselves, who are the custodians of the land, to understand how best to manage their hedgerows, look after their woodlands, dig out and protect their ponds and encourage their marshes. Ultimately it is the farmer who, with understanding, can do all those things for the benefit and health of our natural heritage.

6.11 pm

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): I support the Opposition motion. I do so as an unashamed advocate of the care of our natural heritage and countryside not just as an especially precious part of our national heritage but as an aspect of our life and culture which is a solace for the hearts, the eyes and imagination not just of those who live and work in the countryside but of people like my constituents who are encased in the inner cities in areas of high unemployment and deprivation. Those people need and desire the escape and solace provided by the natural environment, and it behoves this House to remember that and to cherish our heritage.

Press reports suggest that the Government wish to be seen as a Government who care for the environment and for green issues. Like their sister party in West Germany, they wish to outgreen the greens. They are constantly telling us of their concern about these issues. The Under-Secretary of State claimed today that the Government had a fine record on the issues involved in this debate, but I wish to look behind the words at what the Government have actually achieved, because the reality is very different.

The hon. Member for Lincoln (Mr. Carlisle) dealt excellently with the subject of acid rain. So far, the Government have refused to endorse the 30 per cent. reduction declaration made in Ottawa by most European nations. The Government have expressed sympathy and concern about the problem, but they have accepted the line constantly peddled by the Central Electricity Generating Board that more time and research are needed before action can be taken. That is not good enough. The damage is not confined to Scandinavia and Germany. In Galloway, in Wales and in the Lake District, this country is beginning to see the effects of sulphur dioxide and nitrogen oxide pollution. Emissions from our power stations and motor vehicles are a prime cause of that pollution. If the Government do not take immediate action, they will be storing up a great deal of trouble for the future. I hope that the Minister, when winding up the debate, will give us a great deal more hope than we have been given so far about the Government's determination to reduce the emissions of pollutants, especially from power stations, and to ensure that our air is cleaner, clearer and safer for the benefit of the environment and all of us.

Again, in their attempts to handle the difficult balance between agricultural and conservation interests the Government have so far failed to appreciate the problems now besetting us. Some aspects of the Wildlife and Countryside Act have rightly been applauded, but it has failed to deal with other problems. Both sides now agree that the three-month loophole on designation of SSSIs must be plugged. The Act is defective in other ways. I hope that the forthcoming report of the Select Committee on the Environment, of which I have honour to be a member, will show clearly the areas requiring amendment. So far, the Government have not introduced their own legislation to improve the Act, but they have made it widely known that they would welcome a private Member's Bill to do their work for them. I believe that in taking that attitude they are shirking their responsibilities in relation to the Act, but, if they decide to persevere with that course, I hope that they will give a warm welcome to the Bill likely to be proposed by my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark).

[Mr. Chris Smith]

Many Conservative Members have pointed out that a major problem of the Wildlife and Countryside Act is that it relies purely on the voluntary principle in relation to conservation in areas other than SSSIs. I do not believe that that principle is sufficient. However great or welcome the change of attitude of the National Farmers Union and the Country Landowners Association in the past two years, that does not mean that in each and every instance farmers and developers of agricultural land will concern themselves, as they rightly should, with the conservation interest.

Looking beyond the operation of the Wildlife and Countryside Act and the Government's pathetic record on acid rain, there are other aspects of environmental concern. Selling off Forestry Commission sites to private commercial interests involves untold potential dangers for the way in which those sites are used and developed. The Government have consistently refused to make available the information about pollution by private enterprise. The proceedings of water authorities take place entirely in secret. Grants are available from central Government to enable national park authorities to enter into management agreements. Central Government provide 90 per cent. for Dartmoor. Why do not other national parks benefit to the same extent? The Government's record on the environment, across the board, is very disappointing.

We should remind ourselves again of the overall picture. We should remember the losses that the country has experienced since the second world war—losses of lowland heaths, limestone pavements, ancient woodlands, lowland fens, uplands, grasslands and heath. We should remember that a quarter of the moorland on Dartmoor has been ploughed up for agricultural development since the second world war, and that in the Northumberland national park vast areas are still reserved for the use of the Ministry of Defence and are not open for the public to wander over.

We should remember that there are many faults in our countryside and in the way in which the Government fail to protect and preserve that countryside. That should not surprise us very much. The Parliamentary Under-Secretary, who has primary responsibility for these matters, made a revealing comment in his speech. He said that the countryside as we know it today is the product of a millionfold decision by private citizens. That may well have been true in the past. However, it is not private citizens who proposed to plant forests across the lower slopes of Creag Meaghaidh; who are buying up the land being sold by the Forestry Commission; and who are engaged on the agri-business development of farmland and prairie around the country. It is not private citizens who sit in the CEGB and refuse to acknowledge that they are the largest producers of sulphur dioxide in western Europe. Such matters are determined by the operation of large-scale commercial enterprises which have no concern whatsoever for the countryside and the environment.

We must demand of the Government — as the representative of our community—to be concerned, to take an interest and to take action before it is too late to preserve those items of our environment which are so precious a part of our heritage and which are far too valuable for us to lose.

6.23 pm

Mr. Esmond Bulmer (Wyre Forest): I declare an interest as a member of the executive committee of the National Trust, a position that I share with the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark), which suggests that some of the divisions between us are more apparent than real. I propose to speak briefly, drawing on that experience. The trust is responsible for some of our greatest houses and gardens, miles of our most beautiful and vulnerable coastline, large areas of the Lake District and many acres of farmland, moorland and woodland.

Many people from overseas visit the houses, which are increasingly centres for a wide variety of recreational activities. They are also, thanks to co-operation with the Manpower Services Commission, providing much useful work for those who have left school and not yet found a job.

The House will realise that a great house is not simply a museum. The house is a living entity and, with its surrounding park, provides scope for a great deal of leisure activity.

The Government's first great contribution is in reducing inflation to tolerable levels. In the 1970s, as hon. Members will remember, labour, building and energy costs rose so steeply that it was impossible for the National Trust to accept houses with confidence that any endowment would be sufficient.

The House will understand that preserving such houses cost effectively demands that, so far as possible, the original family should stay there. The Government have therefore made a further contribution by reducing rates of taxation and, through the maintenance fund, in trading tax concessions for access for the public. We can begin to feel that the prevention which is so much better than the cure has been advanced.

We must still expect casualties, and there was one recently with Caulke. The Conservatives pledged themselves to drawing the teeth of capital transfer tax, but that tax still has teeth, and the sums involved were so large that the trustees of the National Heritage Memorial Fund were not able to provide all that was necessary. The Minister has shown some expertise in getting the Treasury to change its mind, and I believe appreciate that greater flexibility is desirable. The fact that the Treasury would not accept the Hardwick route, allowing land not of heritage quality to be accepted as an endowment, was a retrograde step.

Those who served on the Committee which considered the National Heritage Bill know that the claims made on the trustees of the fund are very great, are increasing, and are likely to be more than the Treasury will give. When three great houses are all concerned at the same time—Caulke, Belton and perhaps Keddlestone — the sums involved are greater than the resources currently available to the National Heritage Memorial Fund. It would also be sensible for the Government to consider whether they could reduce one area of demand by moving towards the American system of providing tax incentives to people prepared to buy pictures and give them to galleries after their time. The potential call on the fund is enormous, given the increasing value of pictures in private hands.

I turn my hon. Friend's mind to two other factors. First, there is an opportunity which has already been mentioned today. As it has become clear that farm productivity has reached the point when subsidy must be cut, some of the

money which previously was devoted to the subsidies should be directed towards conservation in one form or another. The Achilles heal of the Wildlife and Countryside Act is lack of funds.

I hope, too, that more research can be undertaken into the technology of low-input, low-output farming. Any hon. Member who visits the Lake District will understand that small is beautiful and that the pattern of that landscape demands that it should be economically possible for people to stay there.

I hope that my hon. Friend will also address himself —if not today, then later on—to a problem created by the phasing out of the metropolitan counties. Speke hall in Liverpool and Lyme park in Manchester are both, under the proposals which are currently in hand, to pass to district councils. There is every reason to fear that those councils will not have the resources to meet the financial demands of the full repairing leases under which those properties are held from the National Trust at the moment.

I believe that we all share a dedication towards the idea of preserving for future generations the best of what exists in the country today. It is difficult to recreate the confidence which characterised those who laid out the parks in the 18th century, but we can at least ensure that the landscapes which came to fruition years after they were planned are preserved, and that all the opportunities for recreation are developed in a constructive way. We can ensure that our children value all that is good in our past because it is in their determination and that of all of us to preserve what is best that the hope lies. It is an issue which I believe is above party.

6.29 pm

Mr. T. H. H. Skeet (Bedfordshire, North): I understand that I have three minutes——

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I have your guidance about what an hon. Member has to do to get called? I was in for the opening speeches and unavoidably had to go to chair a Statutory Instruments Committee, providing a quorum for that Committee so that at least one Conservative Member could be in here trying to catch your eye. I returned as soon as that Committee's proceedings had finished. I have sat here and listened to rather more of the debate than many hon. Members who were called earlier and left almost as soon as they had finished their speeches.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Bedfordshire, North (Mr. Skeet) has been here throughout the debate. I was not aware of the reason why the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) left the Chamber, but I knew that he was not present for part of the debate. I think that the hon. Gentleman will understand me if I say that he is a Front Bench spokesman and has other opportunities to speak in the Chamber. It is part of my responsibilities to look after the interests of Back Benchers who have rather fewer chances.

Mr. Skeet: I now have two minutes.

Hon. Members on both sides of the House agree that conservation and the integrity of the environment is probably one of the most important aspects of life. However, I recollect the groundnuts scheme being formulated for east Africa in 1948. The British Government threw away £36 million in a great project that, unfortunately, did not conserve the countryside. I use that as an illustration in only one respect.

I have read from cover to cover the report of the Select Committee which considered the question of acid rain. I am glad that my hon. Friend the Minister has not made any observations in response to that report. Perhaps I may make a few observations. First, there are multiple causes of the problem. There is not just one component—sulphur dioxide. Power stations are not solely responsible for the devastation of the forests in Germany. Ozone and aluminium leached from the soil may also be responsible. I wonder whether the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), who spoke to me outside the House a moment ago, is aware that only 2 per cent. of the sulphur dioxide produced in the United Kingdom travels to Norway. Secondly, there is little to be gained from throwing money at the problem as the solution is likely to be extremely expensive and may not result in the blessings that we all seek.

Unfortunately, my time is now up and I cannot make the remarks that I intended to make.

6.32 pm

Dr. David Clark (South Shields): The short speech of the hon. Member for Bedfordshire, North (Mr. Skeet)—I should have liked to have heard it develop, and perhaps he will have another opportunity to do that—and the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) highlight the difference between the two sides of the House.

Today's debate clearly illustrates the general disquiet at the Government's policy and their handling of environmental matters. Such matters affect the quality of life of millions of people and the surroundings in which they live. I do not need to declare my views on the environment. Since I came here in 1970 with my hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) and some Conservative Members, some people have been prepared to declare their faith in environmental issues, even when it was not fashionable to do so. That is part and parcel of our Socialist philosophy and why we are prepared at times to say unfashionable things.

It has been a great disappointment to the Opposition for the past 12 months—I do not wish to dwell on the point but it must be put on the record again—that, while we have offered to participate with the Government in taking remedial action on the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, they have not been prepared to respond. After all, we have delivered. Last year we delivered on the Crown land legislation and would have done so again. I hope that we can remedy this and other matters in other ways. We are prepared, even at this late stage, to make common issue with the Government to apply cosmetic improvements to their policy as long as the result is less damaging to our countryside and environment. However, we disagree fundamentally with the Government's basic approach.

I was also disappointed with the presentation of the Minister's speech. His speech did not do him justice. It was thin and he failed to address himself to the key areas of conservation. However, I am prepared to give him full marks for honesty because his speech reflected the Government's environmental policy: it is one of thinness and irrelevance.

There are several reasons for our tabling the motion. The first, which my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) dealt with, has not been stated widely enough. I refer to the international effect of the environmental movement. I was especially anxious to

[Dr. David Clark]

learn that the Minister for Overseas Development has abolished the full-time post of environmental scrutineer in our Third world aid programme. Is that the case? If so, may we have an assurance that Environment Ministers will try to get a replacement for that vital role? We have only to see the terrifying pictures on television of Ethiopia and perhaps even the Sudan to realise that, while we pump aid into those countries, it is only an intermediate solution and that we need to do something about the environment.

Acid rain is another international problem. I do not want to go into detail because I hope that the Government will stand by their word and initiate a full-scale debate on the issue. The Government's stance is isolated and untenable. They should immediately sign the 30 per cent. declaration which was drawn up at Ottawa and support the EEC in the 60 per cent. reduction of sulphur dioxide and the 40 per cent. reduction of nitrous oxide.

In regard to the North sea, the Minister managed to salvage something out of the Bremen conference at the end of October. However, the British Government were again seen as the laggards of Europe. The Minister got together a face-saving formula about there being another conference in two years, but during the next two years much damage will be done to the North sea. Nothing has been done about waste dumping and nothing has been done about protection of the North sea. If the Minister talked to fishermen and seamen who ply from the north-east coast to Scandinavian countries he would hear evidence of the need for action. We believe that the Government have failed in their international obligations. That is morally wrong and to the disadvantage of British industry.

On the domestic scene, my hon. Friend the Member for Eccles (Mr. Carter-Jones) pungently made the point that the environment concerns the urban as well as the rural scene. Part of my Socialist philosophy rests on that. People from towns want to go out and enjoy the beauties of the countryside, but they also have a right to live in a pleasant environment. There is no need for urbanisation to be ugly. I should have thought that the advances of technology and planning made that unnecessary. However, there is still much work to be done to clean up our older industrial areas. Today I checked on the top four unemployment areas in England—I had better not mention Northern Ireland, Scotland or Wales. They are south Tyneside with 25·5 per cent. unemployment, Hartlepool with 24·9 per cent. unemployment, Middlesbrough with 24·5 per cent. unemployment and Sunderland with 22·4 per cent. unemployment. They are all potentially attractive areas. Each has a coastline, and with a little help and a considerable amount of public investment the environment could be greatly enhanced. But the Government's policy on the clearance of derelict land is ineffective, especially in such areas, because the partnership scheme between the private and public sectors simply does not work in areas such as the north-east, where there is no private presence. I ask the Government to look seriously at this point. I know that they will shortly receive an approach from the Tyne and Wear county council, which wishes to discuss this matter, and I hope that they will respond positively to that request.

In its report in June this year, the Nature Conservancy Council said of farming:

"Of all human activities that are damaging to nature, agriculture is overwhelmingly the most important because of the sheer scale of its impact".

As someone who tried to eke out a living on the land in the north-west, I can vouch for the veracity of that statement. I also recognise the scale of technological change and the impact of EEC policies on agriculture since I worked on the land more than 20 years ago. We now have over-production and despoliation, and the time has come for a change in policy.

Many times, farmers have said that Tom Williams, who I think came from Wentworth, was the best thing that ever happened to British agriculture. They never voted Labour, but that is what they said.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): Some have done.

Dr. Clark: I apologise to my hon. Friend. The Agriculture Act 1947, which has served this country well, was based on self-sufficiency. The time has now come when the basic tenet of that Act is no longer strictly applicable. We are not now concerned with self-sufficiency so much as with over-production. I would not mind that over-production if we had the capability of transposing it to Third world countries, but we have not. Therefore, we need a definite statement that the Government are prepared to subjugate some of their MAFF policies to the interests of the wider environment.

"There is potential within"—

the Wildlife and Countryside Act—

"for setting farmers against conservationists, in a manner which we feel to be expensive, undesirable and unnecessary, in an unequal struggle in which the conservation of our countryside and wildlife can only lose in the long run."

Those are not the words of the Labour party. They were contained in this year's annual report of the National Heritage Memorial Fund. Conservative Members have said that there is not much wrong with that Act, but it contains some basic flaws, as the Bow group paper repeatedly states. We want to try to rectify them.

I associate myself with everything that has been said about the disappearing SSSIs. I was amazed to hear the hon. Member for Dorset, North (Mr. Baker) refer to the NCC as a pressure group and to doubt and question its scientific findings. That was unworthy.

We believe that the Forestry Commission and MAFF should be subjected to the same constraints as the water boards. We should like to see prenotification extended. We desperately want to see the creation of marine nature reserves, and action is needed on drainage. Those aspects of the Wildlife and Countryside Act have been widely explored, and I support most of the criticisms that have been made.

I had the pleasure of leading for the Opposition on the National Heritage Act. We supported it because it adopted a less elitist approach to the conservation of our national heritage, which is a heritage of working people just as much as of the grandees of the past. Many of us have complained that our approach to the built environment has been far too elitist. Because of that, many people who would have wished to benefit from our cultural heritage have missed out.

Today, the Hadrian's wall advisory panel produced a report drawing the Government's attention to the problem of mass tourism. That part of Northumberland needs mass tourism simply because no jobs are available. However, may we have a Government assurance of a major

initiative towards a new approach? The Northumberland county council has bought a worn-out used quarry on the border between Northumberland and Cumbria. Will the Government give immediate assistance to develop it into an archaeological and historical park? I ask that because today there has emerged an adventurous scheme in South Shields to rebuild the eastern guard post at Hadrian's wall, the best preserved urban fort in the country. The county council has put forward an imaginative scheme, but must now go through the process of a long and expensive public inquiry.

That area is in desperate need of jobs, because 25 per cent. of the people there are out of work. Such a scheme will attract 250,000 visitors, and in no way will that harm the archaeological interpretation of that site.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Before the hon. Gentleman pleads for mass tourism, will he consider the impact on the environment, about which he cares, as is manifest from his remarks? I understand the need for jobs, but jobs in mass tourism as opposed to more selective tourism could have a devastating impact on the environment.

Dr. Clark: I fully appreciate the hon. Gentleman's point. The answer to the problem is that put forward by my hon. friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett). If people are congregating at the same narrow spot, we must try to get them to visit other places. Hadrian's wall is a good example. People visit one or two specific sites, yet there are many others which they should be encouraged to visit. However, given the restrictive access policy that is often adopted by private ownership, that is not possible. I hope that the Government will also consider the suggestion of the Hadrian's wall advisory panel that there should be a footpath along the length of the wall.

There have been declarations of surprise from Conservative Members at the ferocity of the views expressed by my hon. Friends. They should not be surprised. We feel particularly strongly that Government policies do not fully match the environmental challenges with which we are faced, and on occasions those policies are irretrievably damaging our countryside and environment.

Most of us represent areas which have suffered from the industrial ravages of the past, which has resulted in a legacy of unbridled free enterprise. Consequently, many generations have suffered immensely, and the quality of their lives has been permanently impaired. Most of us thought that we would never see such unbridled industrialisation again, but we now have a Government who are the declared proponent of the free enterprise system—the enemy of conservation and the environment. The Government's environmental policy is the most reactionary in western Europe. Compared with the Prime Minister, President Reagan appears to be a paid-up member of Greenpeace. As least he had the decency to sack his Secretary of State for the Environment when he proved to be a failure.

We tabled the motion, not because we are tired of the Government's crocodile tears on environment matters, but because the Government are damaging the environment and reducing the quality of life of many British people.

6.50 pm

The Minister for Housing and Construction (Mr Ian Gow): The hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) started and ended his speech in a way which he will live to regret. He started with the implication, which I find especially unattractive, that only Socialists can be concerned about our natural environment and the national heritage of Britain. Conservative Members indignantly resent that charge. I believe that possessions which are owned, whether by a public body or by a private individual, are held by hon. Members, who are elected as temporary custodians and trustees for future generations whom we shall not see.

The hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) made a long and rambling speech. Whatever may be said about my speech, it will not be long, because I have been left only 10 minutes. It is a tribute to the House that so many hon. Members have been able to speak during a debate which has lasted only just over three hours. We will have had 16 speeches in all.

Conservative Members have been puzzled by the choice of topic. We are greatly surprised that the Labour party chose for one of its precious Supply days a matter on which we believe the Government have an outstanding record and on which the Labour Government's record was not one of which they could be proud.

My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State reminded the House of the keen interest which he and I take in motions for the Labour party conference. I studied the motions which were before the comrades when they were in Blackpool last month. *[Interruption.]* The former Patronage Secretary, the right hon. Member for Bristol, South (Mr. Cocks), seems to make a habit of coming in and from a sedentary position interrupting Conservative Members. If he wishes to make an intervention now, I shall gladly give way. It appears that he does not.

A motion before the Labour party conference, which was submitted by the Buckingham constituency Labour party, urged the Labour party to develop its policies on the environment and to communicate them more effectively to the electorate. I expect that a similar motion will be submitted to the comrades when they meet in 11 months' time.

The hon. Member for Copeland asked about the Control of Pollution Act 1974. It was left to this Government—the announcement was made by my hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey (Mr. Shaw) in February 1981—to embark on a four-year programme to bring the Control of Pollution Act into effect. We have decided that the major provisions of the Act will come into force by July 1985 and that part II of the Act will be entirely in force by July 1986. As a result, water authorities will have full powers of control over all inland waters, estuaries, underground water and the sea along the coast. They will have the means to tackle pollution of water, the careless handling of transport and the storage of chemicals. From the end of January proposals for major discharges of water must be advertised and be open to public objection and inquiry before a decision is taken. At the same time, water authorities will institute registers showing the performance of discharges. These will be open to public inspection from next summer.

The hon. Member for Eccles (Mr. Carter-Jones) raised a constituency point which with characteristic tenacity he has pursued with my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State. He spoke with deep sincerity. When my hon. Friend met the hon. Gentleman recently, he told him that he would submit all of the papers to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment. That

[Mr Ian Gow]

was done. As a result, all the hon. Gentleman's representations about Lumn's lane have received the most careful consideration by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and by me separately. We have all reached the conclusion that, on the basis of the best and most objective scientific advice that we have received, what is proposed will be safe and will present no danger to the health of the hon. Gentleman's constituents.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) raised some specific points. I explained to him why I did not want to comment on the prosecution which he mentioned. He asked what would happen next to Halvergate. We are still considering the recommendations of the joint working group. We are aware that further steps are needed if we are to avoid next year the problems which we have faced this year. I shall write to him about the other points that he raised.

The hon. Member for Copeland spoke about the effect of farming methods on the landscape and habitat. Incredibly, he seems to have forgotten that, although the Labour Government, which he adorned for some time, had the opportunity to introduce legislation of that sort, this Government introduced the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. The House knows that the operation of that Act is being examined by the Select Committee on the Environment. I do not wish to anticipate its findings. However, there is wide agreement that the Act has done a great deal to change attitudes to conservation in the countryside. That point was made in a powerful speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro), who used to be a distinguished Minister in the Department of the Environment.

The Government's decision to provide further resources for the Nature Conservancy Council and the Countryside Commission is positive proof of our commitment to making the Act work.

Regarding our built heritage, the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England has made an excellent start. I endorse the tributes paid earlier to my noble Friend Lord Montagu. We have protected the parts of the heritage which Parliament decided should remain directly in the Government's care. The tower of London and Hampton court have seen further improvements with greater public access and an increased number of visitors.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lincoln (Mr. Carlisle) referred to an accelerated survey of listed buildings which we initiated in 1981. That is proceeding rapidly and on time. The number of listed buildings has risen from 280,000 in 1981 to 328,000 last month. By 1987 we shall have the most comprehensive, scholarly and detailed listings of historic buildings in the world.

Decisions taken now will profoundly affect the quality of the built and the natural heritage for future generations. We need to look beyond the individual cases, important though they are, which have been raised in the debate. We need to put them in the wider context of what should be our joint purpose—to preserve the built and the natural environment.

The nation has inherited a marvellous legacy of historic buildings and a wide variety of landscapes and habitats. The majority of those are looked after by private individuals or bodies such as the National Trust and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. The Government's purpose is to create conditions in which responsible and concerned attitudes can flourish. The measures that we have taken to enable the owners of historic houses to continue their stewardship and to encourage farmers to manage and conserve their lands are proving effective.

The Government understand that the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 is not perfect. The voluntary bodies do a great deal to protect our heritage. The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds has nearly 500,000 members. The National Trust has 1 million members. The Government are determined to build upon the successful initiatives that we have taken. The Government and the people are joint trustees for the next generation. The Government will discharge that trusteeship.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 190, Noes 276.

Division No. 21] **[7.00 pm**

AYES

Abse, Leo
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Bagier, Gordon A. T.
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnett, Guy
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Benn, Tony
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Anthony
Boothroyd, Miss Betty
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'rmline E)*
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Brown, R. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne N)*
Brown, Ron *(E'burgh, Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Buchan, Norman
Callaghan, Rt Hon J.
Campbell, Ian
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Carter-Jones, Lewis
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clay, Robert
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S.)*
Cohen, Harry
Concannon, Rt Hon J. D.
Conlan, Bernard
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cowans, Harry
Cox, Thomas *(Tooting)*
Crowther, Stan
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Dormand, Jack
Douglas, Dick
Dubs, Alfred
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Edwards, Bob *(W'h'mpt'n SE)*
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forrester, John
Foulkes, George
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
Garrett, W. E.
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Gould, Bryan
Gourlay, Harry
Hamilton, W. W. *(Central Fife)*
Hardy, Peter
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Haynes, Frank
Heffer, Eric S.
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Dr. Mark *(Durham)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Janner, Hon Greville
Jenkins, Rt Hon Roy *(Hillh'd)*
John, Brynmor
Johnston, Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kilroy-Silk, Robert
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Leadbitter, Ted
Lewis, Ron *(Carlisle)*
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*

Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McCartney, Hugh
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
McKelvey, William
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Maxton, John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meacher, Michael
Meadowcroft, Michael
Michie, William
Mikardo, Ian
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Nellist, David
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Penhaligon, David
Pike, Peter
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, M.
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, G. *(Coventry NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, J. W.
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Ross, Stephen *(Isle of Wight)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ryman, John
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Short, Mrs R.*(W'hampt'n NE)*
Silkin, Rt Hon J.
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C.*(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'kl'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Tinn, James
Torney, Tom
Wainwright, R.
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert
Weetch, Ken
Welsh, Michael
White, James
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Wilson, Gordon
Winnick, David
Woodall, Alec
Wrigglesworth, Ian

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Lawrence Cunliffe and
Mr. James Hamilton.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Ancram, Michael
Arnold, Tom
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Sir H.
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*
Baker, Nicholas *(N Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Sir Frederic *(T'bay)*
Benyon, William
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, John
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'to'n)*
Boyson, Dr Rhodes
Braine, Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brinton, Tim
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Bruinvels, Peter
Bryan, Sir Paul
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon A.
Bulmer, Esmond
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Hon Adam
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(N Luton)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carlisle, Rt Hon M. *(W'ton S)*
Carttiss, Michael
Chalker, Mrs Lynda
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, W. S.
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Cockeram, Eric
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Cormack, Patrick
Corrie, John
Cranborne, Viscount
Critchley, Julian
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Dover, Den
Dunn, Robert
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Edwards, Rt Hon N. *(P'broke)*
Emery, Sir Peter
Evennett, David
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Anthony
Fletcher, Alexander
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Gale, Roger
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony
Greenway, Harry
Griffiths, E. *(B'y St Edm'ds)*
Grist, Ian
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, John Selwyn
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Sir Paul *(SW N'folk)*
Hayhoe, Barney
Heddle, John
Hickmet, Richard
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(G'ldford)*
Howell, Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irving, Charles
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Robert *(W Herts)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Joseph, Rt Hon Sir Keith
Kellett-Bowman, Mrs Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knight, Gregory *(Derby N)*
Knox, David
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lewis, Sir Kenneth *(Stamf'd)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter, *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Richard
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Neil
MacGregor, John
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New F'st)*
McQuarrie, Albert
Madel, David
Major, John
Malins, Humfrey
Malone, Gerald
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Antony
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mather, Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Mills, Sir Peter *(West Devon)*
Miscampbell, Norman
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Fergus
Moore, John
Morris, M. *(N'hampton, S)*
Morrison, Hon C. *(Devizes)*
Morrison, Hon P. *(Chester)*
Moynihan, Hon C.
Mudd, David
Murphy, Christopher
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Onslow, Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Oppenheim, Rt Hon Mrs S.
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Parris, Matthew
Patten, John *(Oxford)*
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Pollock, Alexander
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Price, Sir David
Prior, Rt Hon James
Proctor, K. Harvey
Raffan, Keith
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rippon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Robinson, Mark *(N'port W)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rost, Peter
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Thomas
St. John-Stevas, Rt Hon N.
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Silvester, Fred
Sims, Roger
Skeet, T. H. H.
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speller, Tony
Spence, John
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*

Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, J.
Sumberg, David
Tapsell, Peter
Taylor, Rt Hon John David
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waddington, David
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Dennis
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watson, John
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Whitfield, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wiggin, Jerry
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Michael
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Tim Sainsbury and
Mr. Michael Neubert.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 33 (Questions on amendments), and agreed to.*

MR. SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House recognises the care and attention paid by Her Majesty's Government to the natural environment and the national heritage; pays tribute to the good progress made by the Nature Conservancy Council, the Countryside Commission, the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission and the National Heritage Memorial Fund; approves of the encouragement given to the many voluntary agencies in these areas; and notes the increased resources Her Majesty's Government propose to devote to protecting the environment and the heritage in 1985-86.

Shipbuilding Industry

Mr. Speaker: I have selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

During the previous debate, no fewer than 17 speakers were called, including those from the Front Benches. If we can do as well in this debate, I am sure that hon. Members will be pleased.

7.12 pm

Mr. John Smith (Monklands, East): I beg to move,

That this House deplores the deepening crisis in the British shipbuilding industry and the massive redundancies, already announced and in prospect; and demands urgent action by the Government to maintain this vital industry.

When the redundancies of 2,100 at Swan Hunter and 790 at Vosper Thornycroft were announced last week, the alarm felt by the Opposition at both the consequences and implications of even more job losses in British Shipbuilders was such that we rapidly initiated this debate in Opposition time. In the first instance, our concern is for the communities in both parts of Britain that have had to face yet another major addition to the relentlessly increasing total of the unemployed. I also fear that these redundancies are a further addition to the army of highly skilled unemployed. Many of those who will be thrown on the dole by these redundancies are, like so many of their predecessors, highly skilled workers whose talents we need to harness, not reject.

In a recent study on the east end of Newcastle upon Tyne, where, as the House knows, there is a heavy concentration of shipbuilding, the city council discovered that skilled workers account for 49 per cent. of the male unemployment total in that area. The effect of these redundancies will go far wider. For every person employed in shipbuilding, there are at least three in ancillary industries and services who depend on the industry.

We deplore these redundancies and their effects, but we also fear them as a sign of the deepening crisis that is affecting the whole of our shipbuilding industry, and we fear that more redundancies are likely to follow in the other shipbuilding areas unless there is an urgent change of policy by the Government. I hope that the Government will not seek to suggest that our fears and those of the shipbuilding communities of Tyneside, Wearside, Merseyside, Clydeside and elsewhere are unfounded.

It is widely, and correctly, believed that there is a level below which it is not possible to maintain a viable shipbuilding industry, and that we are perilously close to that level, if we have not already gone below it. If the Government do not believe us or those in the shipbuilding areas, I hope that they will not disregard the views of Sir Robert Atkinson, whom they appointed as chairman of British Shipbuilders. In an interview reported fully in the *Sunderland Echo*, on 23 July this year, he said that it was his belief that the industry had reached a critical point beyond which it could not survive. He went on to say—and this was in July, long before the present redundancies were announced—that any further contraction or closure would mean that the industry was no longer able to offer the range of facilities that it required for viability. The article reported him as saying:

"'The industry has reached the bare minimum needed now'. He believes the Government must be called upon to intervene to save the industry.

'I am a non-party man and a non-political man. All I care about is preserving a strong shipbuilding and engineering industry in Britain . . . and it breaks my heart to look at what has been done to shipbuilding in the past 18 months,' he said.

It is his great fear that the intention is to close yards one by one.

He said he was a great admirer of Mrs. Thatcher, but it's his belief that the Prime Minister has been badly advised 'by people who do not understand shipbuilding and its importance for the future.'"

There may be some sitting on the Treasury Bench whom he had in mind. For the Government's appointed chairman to speak in those terms about the industry that he supervised is an indictment of the Government's stewardship of the shipbuilding industry.

The Government's defence today, as we see from their amendment, is that, despite the closures, the rundowns, the redundancies and other signs of retreat, they have done well by the industry because they have

"provided over £1,000 million . . . to British Shipbuilders since 1979".

On some occasions the Government are less careful about the words. "Provide" often becomes "subsidy", although the Government know well that it is simply not true that there has been a subsidy of any such amount.

Let me once again refer to the views of the ex-chairman, Sir Robert Atkinson, on money provided to BS. He took the figure as £800 million but he may have been referring to the period up until he demitted office. The article said:

"He"—

Sir Robert Atkinson—

"said much has been made of the £800-million Government aid to shipbuilding from nationalisation to the time he left the BS Chair. But he said this was a 'half truth' — because the industry was so under-capitalised, one half of that £800-million was in fact used as working capital and in capital expenditure, not in direct subsidies."

The article went on:

"The industry had to compete with the Far East where shipbuilding was subsidised to such a degree that ships were being built for the cost of materials or less. 'Even if our men worked for nothing and we paid no rent or rates or overheads, we could not match them,' he said. But he warned that if the Far East succeeded in destroying our shipbuilding industry then their own ships would no longer be so cheap."

I want to refer to one further point in that interview with Sir Robert Atkinson. He says some things that Labour Members would not wholly approve of or agree with, but it is important that the House knows what he said. The article said:

"He said it was true that in the past the industry had had a 'strike happy' reputation and the first question asked abroad was whether delivery times would be met. But he said: 'The unions may be to blame for a lot in the past, but in my time they accepted a pay freeze and massive redundancies just to keep their industry ticking over. Their reward for that has been closure and threat of closure.'"

That is a striking thing for the former chairman of an industry to say. The article went on:

"He pointed out also that in comparing productivity rates with Europe, what was often forgotten was that the wage rates were twice as high on the Continent. He said that during his Chairmanship £40-million worth of computerised equipment had been brought in with the co-operation of the workforce, and orders had been won from abroad—including the first orders from Norway in 25 years—through aggressive marketing. But what was happening now was that owners had lost confidence in the British shipbuilding industry because they sensed a 'lack of dedication and commitment' to it on the part of the Government."

Mr. Michael Fallon (Darlington): I am grateful to the right hon. and learned Gentleman for giving way so early in Sir Robert's speech. Would he not have been more up to date to quote the present chairman of BS who, in *Shipbuilding News* for September 1984, was quoted as saying:

"I believe that had we taken some very difficult decisions in 1977-78 a more competitive industry would have been preserved than that which we have today."

Had the right hon. and learned Gentleman's Government taken the decisions that were necessary then, would we not have had a much better industry today?

Mr. Smith: I regret having given way to the hon. Gentleman who cannot rise to the level of seriousness that the debate demands. Such facile attempts at witticism are not suitable to the debate. The point is that the ex-chairman, appointed by a Conservative Government, has condemned not only what has happened in the industry but has expressed a complete lack of faith in any commitment by the Government to the industry's future.

I quoted Sir Robert Atkinson at some length because it is important that the House and the nation should realise that the crisis in the shipbuilding industry is crucial, is happening now, and is thought to be happening now by those who know and care about the industry, and it is now that urgent action is required.

The first thing that the Government can and should do is to end the nonsense of privatising the warship building yards. There is no doubt that they are and will be the most profitable section of the industry. What possible sense is there in a strategy for a beleaguered industry which involves disposing of the profit-earning part and leaving the more difficult merchant shipbuilding sector unsupported and alone in the midst of the worst shipbuilding recession that we have ever seen?

There is, as was made clear by the present chairman in evidence to the Select Committee—I hope that the hon. Gentleman will accept that what the chairman said is valid —no commercial reason for privatisation of the warship yards. The proposal did not come from BS. It came from the Government and it is they alone who must bear the responsibility for their folly.

It makes us ask the Minister—and ask very directly —whether the Government have any commitment to merchant shipbuilding in Britain. If it continues to decline, will the Government stand by and let it disappear? We know that the money raised by the sale of the warship yards will not go back to the industry; it will go to the Treasury where it will be lost among the billions of pounds spent on maintaining on minimum standards our army of unemployed. The irony will be—in this crazy world of Tory monetarist economics—that the proceeds from the sale of public assets may be used to pay for the unemployment caused by the Government's failure to support the same industry.

I do not imagine that there is one Minister who, if he were in charge of his own business and wished to stay in it, would sell the most profitable parts. Why then should they handle the nation's assets, of which they are only temporary stewards, with less care than they would bestow upon their own concerns?

Mr. Gerald Malone (Aberdeen, South) *rose*——

Mr. Smith: I have given way already. This is a short debate and I must try to allow as many hon. Members as possible to take part.

Privatisation could be halted now and if it were it would be a sign that the fight to preserve and to maintain the

[Mr. Smith]

British shipbuilding industry had started in earnest. Let there be no doubt that this maritime nation needs a shipbuilding industry. We live by trade and our Navy is crucial to our defences. If we depend on others to build our ships, we shall not be able to guarantee the security of supply which is crucial to our national survival.

Under this Government we have seen the steepest decline in our shipping industry in almost its entire history. Both those trends — the declines in shipping and in shipbuilding — need to be halted by the adoption of a maritime strategy for the nation based on the maintenance and prosperity of our shipping and shipbuilding industries. It is the Government's task to bring the industries together, as other countries do. It was the order of 125 ships by the Sanko Shipping Company in Japan which rescued the Japanese shipbuilding industry and maintained its prosperity. The British Government should put on their agenda as an item of maximum importance the devising of new means — by tax concessions or more direct Government assistance — as other Governments do, to maximise the orders for British ships in British shipyards. I am less concerned about the precise means adopted — although I deplore recent changes which go in the opposite direction — than with the establishment of this maritime strategy as a national objective. It is the will above all which is lacking and which must be found.

The Government must also resolve to halt redundancies in the shipbuilding industry. If it is true — I believe that it is — that the industry is now at a minimum level, or even below it, the line has to be drawn and it has to be held. Otherwise, we shall see a remorseless decline as yard after yard in the merchant sector declines and closes. If that means, as inevitably it does, that Government support for the industry has to increase, that must be accepted as the necessary price for maintaining a crucial industry.

Instead of allowing it to be believed that the Government have little commitment to BS after the privatisation of the warship yards, an absolute determination to maintain the industry must be acted upon. Of course, BS, in this fiercely competitive world, must be as efficient as possible and it needs the support of everyone in the industry. If the Government signalled their commitment, there would be no difficulty in creating an atmosphere of total commitment by everyone within it to its success.

A useful example of that new-found commitment would be to reverse the foolish decision to close the engine factory at British Shipbuilders' engineering works — I refer to the BS(ETS) project — and thereby to end the project to build a new slow-speed diesel engine. British industry depends crucially, in all its areas, on new product development. It is tragic to see a project of such potential, in which only recently substantial investment was made, being closed. I fear that that is yet another example of Britain's industrial retreat. We should not be abandoning such an area of economic activity. As the Institute of Marine Engineers recently proposed, the engine project should be made part of a larger project for a total machinery propulsion system that would greatly upgrade marine engineering capability in the United Kingdom.

However, I fear that the Government do not seem to be disposed towards seeking new ways forward for our shipbuilding and marine engineering industries. Above all, what is lacking about the Government's policies, their attitudes and their statements and about all their actions towards the shipbuilding industry is, as Sir Robert Atkinson so convincingly demonstrated, a commitment to the industry's success. But inside and outside the industry it is widely believed that the Government are simply indifferent about whether the merchant yards will survive. It is a serious charge, but I have to say that evidence is accumulating in favour of that view.

For this state of affairs, the Government deserve to be roundly condemned by all who care not only for the industry but for the national interest. We shall express our condemnation by voting for the motion in the Lobby.

7.31 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry (Mr. Norman Lamont): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

'recognises the efforts being made by the British shipbuilding industry to overcome its present difficulties; notes that the Government has provided over £1,000 million of taxpayers' money to British Shipbuilders since 1979; recognises that only by becoming more competitive can the British shipbuilding industry have a secure future; welcomes the efforts of the industry's management to achieve that objective; and endorses the Government's decision to return British Shipbuilders' warship building interests to the private sector as soon as possible.'.

I welcome the debate as an opportunity to set the record straight. After the speech of the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith), it certainly needs quite a bit of unbending.

I agree that there is cause for concern about the merchant order book. The right hon. and learned Gentleman spoke of the worst ever recession in shipbuilding. Of course, there must be concern about the international trading conditions that we face, and I agree that that concern is heightened by the inevitable redundancies at Swan Hunter and Vosper Thornycroft. But to listen to the right hon. and learned Gentleman, one would think that the whole world was queuing up to buy British ships and that it was only the obstinacy of a British Government that was stopping those orders. But nothing could be further from the truth. World demand for ships is deeply depressed. Even the Japanese are feeling the draught. The Ministry of Transport in Tokyo was reported the other day as having said that new building orders that were received between April and September amounted to only 3·9 million tonnes, which was 47 per cent. down on a year earlier.

The figures for our other competitors in Europe, including Italy and France, were also substantially down over the same period. But the latest figures in *Lloyds Register* show that in the 12 months to June 1984 the tonnage ordered in UK yards was up 8 per cent. over the same period. Despite the right hon. and learned Gentleman's arrival on the Opposition Front Bench to look after trade and industry for the Labour party, that party seems to get its needle stuck in the same groove. Again and again it suggests that the Government are doing nothing to support the industry. The Labour party repeats itself, so I need not be too abashed about repeating myself. The Labour party continues to peddle the myth that the Government have done nothing for the industry.

The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East quoted some of the figures of support under this Government. He referred to £1 billion since 1979 as being

designed to compensate for the under-capitalisation of British Shipbuilders. But unfortunately the truth is that a large part of that £1,170 million since 1979 has gone to pay for losses in British Shipbuilders. In the past two years it has lost £117 million and £161 million. Not all of that Government money has been to compensate for under-capitalisation. A large part of it has also gone for investment. This year, there will be support to the tune of about £217 million. Of that, £100 million is for investment for the long term.

The scale of losses seen in the recent past cannot be tolerated and would not be tolerated by—if it is possible to imagine such a thing—a Labour Government. I do not think that they would put up with it. British Shipbuilders must take steps—as it is doing—to stem the losses and to improve its performance. The half-year results will be available next month. I am confident that those for 1984-85 will be substantially better than those for the past two years. But unfortunately that does not reflect any dramatic upturn or improvement in the merchant shipbuilding business. It reflects the ending of huge losses on offshore work. Alas, British Shipbuilders has some way to go before regaining its competitiveness.

In such debates I am always accused of knocking the labour force or the performance of British Shipbuilders. But I acknowledge that British Shipbuilders is beginning to see marked improvements in throughput per man, in accordance with the corporate plan. The successful conclusion of the phase V pay agreement has opened up substantial changes in work practices. We are heartened by the return to work at Cammell Laird of the huge majority of the work force in the face of illegal and disruptive action by a small group of militants. I congratulate the back-to-work committee on its courage and on the lead that it has given. The dropping of the overtime ban by Swan Hunter and the attempts there to get the Atlantic Conveyor back on schedule have been equally welcome. But when there is concern in several yards—as the right hon. and learned Gentleman said—about new orders and the possibility of running out of work, it represents all the more encouraging evidence of the work force changing its attitude and being prepared to deliver ships on time in accordance with specifications.

Such a performance will give potential customers confidence in the yards. It is only if customers are confident about the performance, delivery and price that they will be persuaded to place orders in British yards.

Mr. Malone: It would be of great interest to the shipyard workers in my constituency who work in a very profitable yard called Hall Russell if my hon. Friend gave an undertaking tonight that, when the yard is sold, it will be sold for the purpose of shipbuilding. He has said that he is keen to reward those who are successful in the industry, and my constituents would welcome his undertaking.

Mr. Lamont: I shall come to that point later and I believe that I shall be able to go a long way towards satisfying my hon. Friend with an undertaking.

Despite recent events and improvements, British Shipbuilders has unfortunately sometimes acquired a poor reputation, which takes a long time to live down. We still have a long way to go, but we must acknowledge that if the present rate of improvement and the present optimistic developments continue British Shipbuilders will certainly deserve to overcome that reputation.

I return to developments in Brussels and in the Community. Last week, I and other EC Ministers in the Industry Council agreed to a two-year extension of the Community's fifth directive on shipbuilding aids. That provides the framework for aids in 1985 and 1986. Like its predecessor, which was accepted by the Labour Government, this directive refers to degressivity of aid, but it is able to be interpreted flexibly and will permit the Commission to respond to our proposals for an improved aid regime for the United Kingdom industry.

The House will recall that the Government told the Commission that it was their view that we needed a more generous aid regime in order to get the orders that are needed by our yards. I regret that the matter has not yet been concluded.

I saw Mr. Andriesson last week and had one of the several conversations that I have had with him. I hope to talk to him again this week. I left him in no doubt that, despite our dislike of subsidies, we believe that a higher level of intervention is justified. I left him in no doubt that the Government are not prepared to tolerate the multiple collapse of our merchant shipbuilding industry. It is unfortunate that matters have not been concluded, but in the meantime, as I have made clear to the House before, the Government are prepared to help to achieve orders on a case-by-case basis.

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): I was waiting for my hon. Friend to mention the percentage rate of grant. Currently the rate is 17 per cent. Does my hon. Friend intend to campaign for an increase to 35 per cent.?

Mr. Lamont: I do not want to quote details of individual figures and the House would be amazed if I did. That would be a remarkable step in the middle of negotiations. We have made it clear that there should be an increase in the intervention fund level.

There are grounds for concern about the order book. We need to secure orders to prevent a gap in the present work loads. For that reason the chairman of British Shipbuilders has outlined a number of potential orders that could fill the gaps.

The House will understand that because of commercial confidentiality I cannot discuss the individual orders or the terms on which such orders might be obtained. However, I can confirm that British Shipbuilders is dealing with a far higher level of inquiries than it was a year ago. It has given me a list of potential orders totalling 159,000 compensated gross registered tonnes. It remains confident that with suitable support it can secure the planned total of orders of 200,000 compensated gross registered tonnes. We remain in close touch with British Shipbuilders and we shall give all the support that we can to achieve those orders.

The Opposition may not like the principles in the EEC's fifth directive. They may not like the idea that the EEC has some say in the aid that we give to our industry. However, they accepted the principle when, in a flash of European enthusiasm, they accepted the fourth directive. With that went the principle of reducing subsidies to shipbuilding. They were right. Subsidies are not at the heart of the problem. Subsidies are not the answer.

The differing nature of aid in different countries makes it difficult to make exact comparisons. West Germany, Denmark and Belgium give smaller production subsidies than we do. The success of Finland's shipbuilding industry

[Mr. Lamont]

is much publicised here, not least after the launching of the Royal Princess. That ship was built and delivered by a private sector yard that pays high wages and receives no subsidy.

The Opposition spokesman, the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East, constantly reminds us that there is no free market in shipbuilding. That is true. We understand that, but it does not absolve us or the industry from the need to improve efficiency and productivity. It is not correct to say that the answer lies in more and more subsidy by the Government.

One of the ways in which British Shipbuilders can become more competitive is, as the right hon. and learned Gentleman hinted, in adopting a sensible product strategy. In the past British Shipbuilders, although only a small builder on a world scale, has tried to cover the whole market range. The result was a product range comparable with that of the old British Leyland. Far too many designs chased far too many orders. For that reason we welcome Graham Day's determination to implement a practical and realistic product strategy. Realistically and rightly he recognises that the United Kingdom cannot hope to compete with huge far eastern yards in building the largest ships — the very large crude carriers and the bulk carriers.

If British Shipbuilders attempts to cover all the markets it will fail to satisfy any of them adequately. For that reason the corporation is reshaping its product strategy. The emphasis will be on fewer basic designs but it will offer tailor-made packages around those designs to satisfy individual customers.

British Shipbuilders is concentrating its marketing efforts on the most promising growth areas such as vessels for offshore work in which it has substantial expertise. With the Stena ships at Sunderland it has two advanced vessels under construction.

Product development is a continuing requirement. British Shipbuilders has set up a number of product development groups to take the strategy through from conception to design, product engineering, production planning and to marketing. That is the right approach for a commercial, competitive shipbuilder in the 1980s. It demonstrates that the industry needs thought, planning and policies and not simply throwing more money at it. The corporation is adopting that approach.

Mr. John Smith: I expected the Minister to make some comment on Sir Robert Atkinson's views. Does he admit that it is a matter of serious anxiety when a former chairman of British Shipbuilders has such a low opinion of the Government's commitment to the industry and their current plans for its future?

Mr. Lamont: I totally disagree with Sir Robert Atkinson. The Government are committed to maintain the maximum competitive and efficient shipbuilding industry. However, we are not prepared to throw endless sums of money at the industry. I was not clear what the right hon. and learned Gentleman advocated, but he seemed to say that we should throw even larger sums of money at the industry.

If British Shipbuilders can win orders, the yards' work load will stretch through the best part of next year and beyond. It will be able to look forward to a more stable period during which it can continue to make the changes necessary to improve competitiveness. It will gain the orders only if it can satisfy customers' needs.

That also applies to engine building. British Shipbuilders has been forced to rationalise and to restructure facilities to bring capacity more closely into line with demand. The announcement by British Shipbuilders earlier this month about the formation of a new company, Clark Kincaid Ltd, with sites in Greenock and Wallsend, marks the culmination of the current rationalisation programme. It is important that its engine-building capacity should not get out of line with potential demand determined by the order book. The order book is as crucial for engine building as it is for the merchant yards.

Since July the Ministry of Defence has announced the award of a number of major warship orders. They include a nuclear submarine at Vickers, a replacement for the Sir Galahad at Swan Hunter and the first of the new type 23 frigates at Yarrow. A total of 32 ships are under construction in British yards — at British Shipbuilders and the private sector. They have a total value at today's prices of £2,800 million.

In addition, a number of other potential orders are in the pipeline to meet the Navy's requirements under the defence programme. The most imminent is the order for the type 22 frigates, for which the Ministry is currently evaluating tenders from three yards. I appreciate the keen interest and anxiety at the length of time that this is taking. The Secretary of State for Defence hopes to be able to announce his decisions before the end of the year.

Sir David Price (Eastleigh): The tenders were originally required by last October. When I took a deputation to the Minister I was told that they should be in by last Christmas. It is now nearly a year later and I received a written reply today which merely says that the time elapsed merely because the Minister allowed it to.

Mr. Lamont: I suggest that my hon. Friend addresses his remarks to the Secretary of State. I appreciate his anxiety, but I have given the best information that I have.

British Shipbuilders has already told the unions, when warning them of the present redundancies, that they clearly need to keep the numbers employed at the warship yards under review in the light of developments in the order book. There clearly remains some uncertainty about the precise levels of demand in different yards, but the picture for the warship yards is far from discouraging.

I turn to the question of privatisation.

Mr. Robert C. Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, North) *rose*——

Mr. Lamont: I shall not give way.

British Shipbuilders is making progress on privatisation. It has already issued the offer for sale document for Brooke Marine. It intends to do the same for Hall Russell and Yarrow before the end of the year. We hope that the other yards will follow early in the new year. The Government's intention, wherever possible, is to sell the yards to purchasers who intend to continue shipbuilding and who can demonstrate that they have the necessary skills and finance.

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Lamont: I shall not give way.

Mr. Robert Hughes: The Minister gave way to the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Malone). Why will he not give way to the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North?

Mr. Lamont: This is a short debate, and I have given way several times.

Mr. Robert Hughes: On that point——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ernest Armstrong): Order. The Minister is obviously not giving way.

Mr. Lamont: That would be a good policy to follow.

Mr. Robert C. Brown *rose*——

Mr. Lamont: I give way even to Tories on the other side. *[Interruption.]* I am sure that the whole House will listen to what I have to say about privatisation. It may, in some instances, be possible to have management by buy-outs. We are also attracted to the idea of an element of employee participation, just as happened in the National Freight Corporation. That amounts to real public ownership. We do not intend, however, that that should be an obligation.

Final decisions will be made on an examination of the skills, the finance and the terms of the contract between British Shipbuilders and the purchasers. We shall hold in reserve the possibility of a flotation for either some or all of the yards, if necessary. We believe that privatisation holds out the hope of a more efficient industry, just as privatisation has helped to make ship repair more efficient. A number of ship repair yards which have come out of British Shipbuilders have improved their order books. They are not yet out of the wood but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Mr. Fallon) will know, they have a remarkably improved prospect. We believe that privatisation holds out the hope of a better future both in wages and jobs for those who work in the industry.

We expect that British Shipbuilders will be able to adhere to the timetable we have set and to complete privatisation by the end of March 1986. It should now be clear to the whole House that the Opposition's motion is misconceived and has no basis. The motion refers to shipbuilding as a whole—warship building as well as merchant shipbuilding—and to recent redundancies. The most recent redundancies have been those to which the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East referred—in the warship building side. It is wrong to talk of a crisis in warship building. Warship builders earn their living by meeting the needs of the Royal Navy and by exporting naval craft. The recent redundancies reflect the sad fact that we have more capacity than is needed for the naval programme. We have been unable to fill that gap by export orders, as we used to do when those companies were in private ownership. Perhaps, when the yards are returned to private ownership, we shall manage again to recapture some of those export orders.

The position of the merchant yards in Britain is more difficult, as it is all over the world.

> "Shipbuilding industries all over the world from Japan to Sweden are accepting the inevitability of contraction, and Britain cannot be insulated from this world trend."—[*Official Report*, 24 February 1977; Vol. 926, c. 1652-53.]

Those are not my words; they are the words of the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman). Events from the Opposition Benches are better seen in perspective when standing on their heads. The Opposition are not only standing on their heads in what they say in this debate but are a little late in demanding action. We are already taking action. We are continuing to provide the essential support which the industry needs. We have appointed a chairman who is prepared at long last to tackle the problems of inefficiency and uncompetitiveness. We are seeking agreement from the Commission for improved intervention fund support. We are backing the industry to win new orders.

British Shipbuilders needs the recognition and support of the House for what it is doing to make the industry more competitive. The House should welcome the support that the Government are giving to the industry. The House should welcome also the Government's decision to return the warship yards to the private sector. Above all, we do not need the motion tabled by the Opposition. I invite my right hon. and hon. Friends to reject it and to support the amendment in the name of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and my hon. Friends.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I reinforce Mr. Speaker's appeal for brief speeches, because a number of hon. Members with strong constituency interests are anxious to catch my eye.

7.55 pm

Mr. Gordon A. T. Bagier (Sunderland, South): As an example of complacency, the Minister of State has surpassed himself in talking about the extremely difficult position of the shipbuilding industry. His only solution appears to be privatisation. The hon. Gentleman rounded off his speech with a statement about how privatisation will save the industry. I remind him of a bit of history. When Court Lines collapsed and Sunderland Shipbuilders almost went down, it took a Labour Government to nationalise the yard way ahead of nationalisation and to save the yard from the private sector. That is a piece of history which shows how that yard was saved. The Minister's complacency in referring to privatisation saving the industry is rubbish.

I hoped that the Minister would come forward with more factual information to help the House and the industry with something a little more practical, but the hon. Gentleman failed dismally. We do not need a lecture about the state of shipbuilding throughout the world. One need only look at order books around the world to see that the Japanese and Koreans are cornering the market and that British Shipbuilders is not the only body to suffer. All the European yards are suffering at the same time. We need to make up our minds whether we want a shipbuilding industry, and that is the question that the Minister should be posing to himself. Can we, as an island trading nation, afford to go down that nick? Frankly, I suggest that we cannot go down that line.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) spoke of a maritime policy, and I hoped that the Minister would say something about that. Unless we have some sort of maritime policy which does not leave shipbuilding on its own to market forces without considering shipping as well, the shipbuilding industry is doomed, especially if it looks to the Government for help. During the past nine years, British shipbuilding has more than halved. Some European countries are in an even worse position. The yards in Norway and Holland have few orders on their books. Some yards have no orders.

We can examine the operations in other countries which are not, by any stretch of the imagination, well off. Most

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of the orders in the Italian shipyards are from Italian shipowners; most of the orders in the French shipyards are from French shipowners; most of the orders in the German shipyards are from German shipowners; and most of those in the Dutch shipyards are from Dutch shipowners. With the exception of three CEGB colliers, which are being built at Govan Shipbuilders, not one ship order has been placed in British shipyards. The only exceptions are those connected with oil exploration.

I accept that the Minister faces problems involving the confidentiality of the order books of British Shipbuilders which limits how much he can tell the House. British Shipbuilders is doing a first-class job. I agree with the first part of the Government amendment. British Shipbuilders is stumping the world looking for orders, but it needs backing from the Government. I am glad that the Minister is fighting for a larger intervention fund, but there are other sources of finance available for building ships. We have been stumping the Third world, and it is not easy to get orders there, because of difficulties over prices, credit, and so on. The Government could take immediate action to help the shipbuilding industry.

I should like to be able to take the Minister of State on trust. He said that there were a number of orders in the pipeline for British Shipbuilders, but that he could not tell us what they were and that we ought to trust him. The work force at Austin and Pickersgill does not have time to trust the hon. Gentleman. Lay-offs and redundancies at the yard will be announced this weekend because the order book is practically empty. That is one of the finest yards in Britain —enclosed, modernised and with a work force which has gone along with all the things that the Minister talked about, has agreed to the removal of almost all lines of demarcation and delivers ships on time.

There are orders in the pipeline, wating for the Government to give the go-ahead. We have recently built two ships for Ethiopia, which requires two more. Those orders are there for the taking. The first ship went into service in Ethiopia this week, and the purchasers are highly satisfied with it. Ethiopia is paying thousands of dollars a day for six charter ships. It wants to replace them with its own ships. It has had two from Austin and Pickersgill and two from Italy. Two more are wanted from Austin and Pickersgill.

The Minister knows that there is a section 2 grant application on his desk. Is it being blocked? If the Ethiopian orders are placed now, the Austin and Pickersgill work force will not have to be laid off and there need be no talk of redundancies. That is a positive way in which the Government could help.

I advised the Department of Trade and Industry that I would raise these matters in the debate, and I hoped that the Minister of State would mention at least the Ethiopian orders. They are vital to Sunderland, where we have 24 per cent. unemployment. It is essential that we do not add to that unemployment.

There is another order in the pipeline. I understand—I put it no higher than that, though I have checked with the Overseas Development Administration — that another ship could be ordered by the Government—the order is wholly in the Government's gift — for overseas development and that only Austin and Pickersgill could fit out that ship. It is an SD14 that is to be modified for the St. Helena shipping company to include facilities for passenger travel. I am told that the order has to be looked at by a project committee that will have to consider what sort of cabins to install and so on. Someone ought to get his finger out. This is an urgent matter, because that order could keep the work force in my constituency in work. There are ships that could be ordered now.

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Bristol, East): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bagier: No. This is a short debate and I am challenging the Minister of State. If he wishes to reply, I shall gladly give way to him.

I know that some of my hon. Friends, especially from Tyneside, will want to discuss the ridiculous suggestion that the naval yards should be privatised.

The Minister's speech was extremely complacent. I want to hear from the Government at the earliest opportunity what will be done about orders for Sunderland and when the Government will plan a maritime policy that covers not only shipbuilding, but shipping, so that we can have British ships built in British yards.

8.4 pm

Mr. Neville Trotter (Tynemouth): We are indeed facing a worldwide problem, but that does not make it any less serious for those of us in the north-east who are facing a crisis. If we do not get orders within weeks, there will be more redundancies in the region. Our debate takes place against that short-term background.

In the longer term, it is important to remember the commitment to the industry made tonight by my hon. Friend the Minister of State. That commitment has been made before, but it needs to be repeated, because it is inevitable that people faced with a short-term crisis will have doubts about future support for the industry. I do not believe that the Government can be faulted in the financial help that they have given—£1,130 million. The industry has had great support from the Government and we have a continuing commitment for the future. I believe that the Government will honour that commitment, but that does not prevent short-term fears and worries, particularly in the north-east.

Like the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Bagier), I have heard it suggested that there may be an SD14 order coming from St. Helena. If so, it should be brought forward within the next few weeks. It would be ridiculous to get the order next year when we are facing redundancies now that could be avoided.

Mr. Sayeed: The point that I wanted to put to the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Bagier) was that the hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) and I went to St. Helena and recommended to the Overseas Development Administration that option 2B of the ECL report should be taken up. That option proposes an SD14 with accommodation for 150 to 200 passengers. The order is in the gift of the Government, it is needed for shipbuilding in this country and it is the right option for St. Helena.

Mr. Trotter: I also understand that the ship that has been running the service is out of action following a fire on board. Perhaps the owners need a new ship as urgently as the builders need one.

In the short term, there is also the continuing problem of who is to get the order for the type 22 frigates. The Minister of State reminded us that the matter has been kicked around for well over a year. If we are to have a

force of about 50 frigates, which seems to be the figure to which we are committed, and if we do not intend to spend two or three years modernising each of them in the naval dockyards, we shall need to order about three frigates in a year so that we can maintain the number in operation. Therefore, it is high time that we placed the orders for the type 22. Let us have them before the end of the year. If we do not have an announcement by then, there will be more redundancies in the warship building yards. There is a short-term crisis for jobs in the north-east and the Government can and must take action to help with that problem.

We need to speed up the consideration given to the matching of financial terms. In the present state of the world market, our overseas competitors often offer good bargains, and, although the Export Credits Guarantee Department may agree to match those bargains, orders can be lost because the ECGD does not take its decision quickly enough. It is no good eventually matching a competitor's terms if it is too late. I do not know the details, but perhaps such considerations apply in the case of the ships for Ethiopia and some for Mexico which may also be available.

The problems of the immediate future are extremely serious, but I believe that answers will be found within the next few weeks. In the longer term, there is no doubt that we shall retain a warship building industry, but we must also have a hard core of merchant shipbuilding capability. I believe that we are now close to that hard core and it is time, after all that our industry has gone through—in common with the other shipbuilding industries in Europe —that we developed a long-term plan for merchant shipbuilding in this country.

One of the problems is the intervention fund. I congratulate my hon. Friend on his sterling efforts in fighting against the people in Europe who do not agree with us on the subject. They have perhaps other ways of financing their shipbuilders. I understand my hon. Friend's not wanting to commit himself on the suggested figure of 35 per cent. mentioned earlier in the debate, but it is a simple statement of arithmetic. Unless there is that percentage of aid, there will be hardly any orders. That seems to be the level of assistance that is needed if we in Britain and the rest of Europe are to match the competition from the far east.

We cannot be optimistic about far east competition. In my judgment, it will get worse. China is looming on the horizon in the longer term as a builder of ships. In debates in this House a few years ago, when the main problem was competition from Japan, I suggested that there would soon be a problem with competition from Korea. That has proved correct. Sadly I now prophesy that China will soon be a serious competitor, with very low labour costs. That will make it very difficult for western shipbuilders to compete without maximum efficiency and a proper degree of public support.

In talking of Britain's strategic interests in shipbuilding, it is fair to mention that it is not simply the shipyards that are involved but the suppliers of pieces of ships all over Britain. The House is well aware of my interests in the marine equipment industry. There is no doubt that for every person engaged in assembling a ship in our shipyards there are three more people in factories making the parts. The firms concerned have done reasonably well in the export market because they are able to export parts of ships to foreign builders, especially in the far east, but they need a home base. If there is no hard core of shipbuilding in Britain, the marine equipment industry will have a very hard future.

I should like to say a word or two on behalf of the small shipbuilder. I am sure that British Shipbuilders, through its contacts with Ministry officials, has close contact with those handling the Community rules, but small shipbuilders do not have that ready access. They cannot sort out their problems by picking up the telephone. It is especially difficult for the small shipbuilders if we are still tied officially to the 15 per cent. or 17 per cent. intervention fund limit. It is very hard for them to obtain orders if they cannot give quotations to their customers in the knowledge that they are assured of reasonable assistance.

I congratulate the Government on the substantial support that they have given to the shipbuilding industry in the past five years, and I congratulate them on their commitment for the future. But we need the maximum assistance in the next few weeks to enable us to obtain orders and to maintain our skills and employment in the north-east. We also need, in the near future, a long-term plan for the merchant ship building industry.

8.13 pm

Mr. Ian Wrigglesworth (Stockton, South): The speech of the hon. Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Trotter) illustrates how wrong the Minister was to dismiss the criticisms made from the Opposition Benches. Understandably, the hon. Gentleman, coming from Tyneside, made exactly the same sorts of criticisms and pleas to the Minister as were brushed aside in the Minister's speech.

I represent a part of the north-east where the Tees, one of the three rivers, has almost no shipbuilding left. We have Smith's Dock, and that is the last vestige of a great shipbuilding industry on our river. In other parts of the region—other hon. Members can testify to it—the same dreadful slide to oblivion is taking place.

This evening the Minister served the House with the usual diet of jam tomorrow. He assured us that the Government are following all the right policies and that everything will be all right at the end of the day. The Minister's speech will bring precious little consolation to the shipyards on Tyneside, Wearside, the Clyde and other parts of the country. They are tired of hearing that there will be jam tomorrow. They are tired of the way that the Government are carving up the industry while they are breaking their backs in trying to make a success of it. As the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Bagier) said, that is particularly true of the north-eastern region, where people scrapped their summer holidays to get a ship launched on time. They have broken their backs in trying to succeed, but all they are getting from the Government is the eternal assertion that privatisation is the answer, that no more subsidies can be given, and that it is a question of market forces, when we all know that there are no market forces operating in the industry and have not been for years.

I am very disappointed with the Minister's speech and I echo what other hon. Members have said. He should not have dismissed the remarks of the former chairman of British Shipbuilders in the way that he did. He should have given a proper reply to the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith), who made the accusation that our shipbuilding industry is getting into an

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unviable state. Those remarks were echoed by the hon. Member for Tynemouth. The Minister should not brush the accusations aside, and I hope that in the reply to the debate the Minister will tell us the Government's views on the current state of the British shipbuilding industry and how they think it will be able to remain as a viable force, not only in providing a merchant marine, which the trading interests of the country require, but in meeting our defence interests.

In the shipbuilding industry, as with so many other industries in regions such as the north and north-east, we can see the chickens coming home to roost. It is an inevitable consequence of the Government's economic policies, pursued since they came into office in 1979. There is no demand for the products of the shipbuilding yards, and the Government have taken very little action internationally to stimulate demand in the world economy, which is vitally important in getting the orders that the industry so desperately needs. As a consequence, there are major question marks hanging over large sections of the industry.

The Government's answer to the problem is to sell off the profitable warship yards and to have the management of British Shipbuilders spending time not on getting orders, improving efficiency and having a competitive industry, but on privatisation. I have worked in nationalised industry and I have seen at first hand how management's time is spent in dealing with Government interference and the ideological hang-ups of Governments who try to determine the objectives of the industry. The management and the work force are deflected by that interference from their true objectives — to make the industry a success.

The Government must bear a heavy responsibility for distracting the management and work force of British Shipbuilders and of the shipbuilding industry from the major problems facing them, and for concentrating instead on the privatisation programme. The Government should drop that programme and let the management get on with the task of facing the major problems that arise from international competition and the low demand in the domestic and international economy. Great damage is being done to what was formerly a great industry. As the damage to employment in the region grows in the months ahead, one hopes that the Government will begin to understand the results of their policies.

The fear remains that the Government do not accept that there are large sections of manufacturing industry which can and should remain in operation. Since 1979, when the right hon. Member for Leeds, North-East (Sir K. Joseph) was Secretary of State for Industry, many of us have held the view that there were members of the Administration who did not believe that historically Britain could sustain a manufacturing industry. What has happened to the shipbuilding industry is a major example of that aspect of Government policy. It is a sad fact that that should be so, and it is not surprising that the work force in the shipbuilding yards around the country believes that that is true, when there is so much evidence of it, not only in that industry but in so many other sectors of manufacturing industry.

I should like to say a word on behalf of my hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) about the Hall Russell yard. I hope that the Minister will give a much better assurance than he has so far. I should like to see him drop the proposal for selling such profitable businesses. However, if he is to allow British Shipbuilders to go ahead and sell that yard, I hope that he will go further than saying that he hopes that it will be sold to a shipbuilding enterprise, and not for North sea work. It is necessary for that area to have a continuing shipbuilding industry when the offshore work dries up. I hope that the Minister will give a firm commitment on that point.

I should like to refer to the viability of the industry. It is a crucial point for the whole of our trading and economic interests. It is vital that this country above all, with its maritime interests, should have a clear commitment to a maritime policy and a viable shipbuilding and shipping industry. I echo and agree with the remarks of the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East and others about the great question mark hanging over the industry.

However, it is question not just of this country's economic and trading interests but of its defence interests. Our defence capability is not just reliant upon warships. It also depends upon the merchant marine. Nowhere could that have been clearer than in the Falklands dispute. The Government should have learnt that lesson, if no one else has. Merchant ships are just as vital to our defence as warships, especially if we intend to develop the strength to provide a credible non-nuclear deterrent beyond the 30 days of war stocks now being built up by NATO. That requires the merchant ship numbers, types and capacities to maintain world-wide economic shipping, military reinforcement, resupply shipping and shipping in support of military operations, together with a substantial surplus to make good losses. Ship repair and new building capacity is essential on top of that if we are to sustain the defence.

Therefore, there is a much bigger argument about the industry's viability than simply this country's trading and economic interests. There is also the defence question, to which I hope the Minister will address himself. I hope that he will not shuffle it off to his colleagues in the Ministry of Defence, but reply to that point as we are debating such an important matter.

I hope that the House will support the motion tabled by the Labour party. My colleagues and I will do so wholeheartedly. We look to the Minister to give us more reassurance than his colleague the Minister of State did when he spoke earlier.

8.23 pm

Mr. Piers Merchant (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): As time is so limited, I propose to make only a few brief points. However, I feel bound to speak on this occasion in view of my direct constituency interest, representing a Tyneside seat in an area traditionally dependent on shipbuilding.

The once great strength of yards on the Tyne brought in the past wealth, employment and enterprise to the city of Newcastle. Even as recently as 10 years ago, 35,000 jobs were sustained on Tyneside and Wearside in the shipbuilding yards. Ten years before that, the figure was nearer 44,000. Today, taking into account recently annouced redundancies, the figure is less than 14,000. In 1926, British shipyards produced about 40 per cent. of world demand. Today the figure is about 2 per cent. The industry is being decimated, and needlessly so. I say "needlessly" because the process is not inevitable. I do not subscribe to the view that the rundown of the shipbuilding

industry is unavoidable. I do not believe that we must necessarily give up the old heavy industries as part of a historical process and restructure our industry solely along the lines of new technology, electronics and service supplies. I agree with what was said by the hon. Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Wrigglesworth) on that point.

Of course, it is eminently sensible for a region and a nation to diversify as widely as possible, and it is highly dangerous to concentrate and specialise overmuch. The Tyne—and the Northern region as a whole, for that matter—suffers from its failure to diversify over the years. Thus the shipbuilding crisis becomes more intense. However, that is a different argument.

My point is that, even in an admitted world recession and a dire shortage in the world of ship orders following a huge contraction world-wide, shipbuilding industries in some countries seem able to flourish and even to expand. Why cannot our industry flourish as well or at least hold its position in comparison with other countries?

It would be easy to find a single scapegoat. The circumstances almost cry out for scapegoat politics. Many Opposition Members find it all too easy to discover a scapegoat. Privatisation appears to be the latest one. However, I fear that the answer is not that simple. In fact, many are to blame for the present situation in British yards.

Before nationalisation, management was hardly an inspiring force powered by bright young entrepreneurs. Their attitude to management was all too often summed up not so much by the modernistic approach of, say, Japanese managers as by the worst attitudes of industrial defeatism — innovative necrosis, under-capitalisation, organisational chaos, and often contempt for their work force, which was more characteristic of the worst aspects of 19th century industrial relations than of the 20th, let alone 21st century. Then came the hand of state interference in the shape of nationalisation, a shake-up that hit the industry at a vulnerable time in a particularly painful way. It resulted in preventing an early and swift response to recession, which might have breathed life into the industry at the most critical moment.

However, finally and never to be underestimated was the effect of industrial unrest that racked the Tyne yards. The irresponsibility and short-sightedness of union leaders are widely recognised on Tyneside as constituting one of the worst records that the region can summon up anywhere. Time and again delayed orders, strikes—[HON. MEMBERS: "Rubbish."]—restrictive practices and poor productivity took their toll. Opposition Members know that fine well. Investment did not come because who would invest in an industry that itself seemed not to want a future? It is sad to see today that the price is being paid that many predicted five or 10 years ago would have to be paid. The sectarian narrowness of union leaders over this decade has contributed largely to the unemployment created in the past few years.

Mr. Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, East): The hon. Gentleman must reconsider what he is saying because he is talking drivel. He must either reconsider it or cite some examples.

Mr. Merchant: The hon. Gentleman asks for examples. I shall cite some of the situations of the past few weeks. We are talking not just about industrial disputes over the past five or 10 years, from which one would think the union leaders would learn, but about industrial disputes that have occurred in the past few months in the Wearside and Tyneside yards. I shall quote from a report of 29 September in *The Journal*. It refers to:

"Sunderland Shipbuilders where 1,900 manual workers at three yards are in the fourth day of a strike following a new pay deal for 28 crane drivers. The strikers say if it can be done for the crane men, the rest of the workforce ought to have a new agreement too . . .

Clark Hawthorn, Wallsend where 400 workers are staging token strikes in protest against nine months of short-time working . . .

British Shipbuilders (Engineering and Technical Services), Sunderland, where 36 workers are staging a sit-in in protest against manning levels, flexibility arrangements and pay following 18 recent redundancies . . .A fourth dispute—an overtime ban by 1,800 men at Swan Hunter's Neptune Yard on the Tyne".

At a critical moment in the life of the industry, four disputes were running at the same time. If that can be justified, anything can be justified. The sectarian narrowness of union leaders for an entire decade has contributed greatly to the high level of unemployment and to the increase in unemployment that, regrettably, those yards are now experiencing.

It is time that everyone realised that all those faults must be tackled. The damage has already cut so deep that it will not be easy to put things right. Certainly it cannot be done overnight. How much healthier it would be to hear some positive voices from the Opposition and, perhaps more relevantly, from those who lead the men in the yards. I have catalogued disputes that have taken place in the past few weeks. The saddest perhaps was the dispute at the yard building the Atlantic Conveyor, an order specially provided to help the Tyneside yards despite better tenders elsewhere. My hon. Friend the Minister said that he was pleased that that dispute had ended, but in 1984 such disputes should never even start. Everyone in the industry must pull together to prove that British shipbuilding can be competitive, productive and profitable. That, in turn, will attract new investment.

In the short term, I entirely endorse the request made by the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Bagier) and my hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Trotter) for the swift placing of orders that are within the Government's gift. Nevertheless, I believe that the long-term solutions lie not with the House or even in the realm of politics. As with the rest of British industry, the answers lie fundamentally and ultimately in the attitudes and endeavours of both the work force and the management of the industry itself.

8.31 pm

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): We do not intend that the debate should concern only the thoroughly unnecessary redundancies announced last week, although we are 100 per cent. behind those workers fighting for their jobs. Conservative Members should read the Opposition motion, which continues the campaign that we have waged on behalf of the shipbuilding industry since 1979. We have always stressed that there are problems in the industry worldwide—a stagnant market and competition from the far east where the Japanese and Koreans undercut our prices by huge margins.

When the industry was nationalised in 1979 it was almost bankrupt. The nation inherited problems of overcapacity and in some cases overmanning. Machinery and equipment were out of date due to lack of investment

[Mr. Ernie Ross]

by private owners. Yet Conservative Members want to give back to those people the parts of the industry now making a profit in the forlorn hope that they will keep it running and making profits. The nation also inherited a poor industrial relations situation. I entirely agree with the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Merchant) that this was and is mainly due to bad management without any real commitment to the industry.

Unlike Conservative Members, the trade unions have put enormous effort into tackling those problems. The trade union movement accepted changes which meant a reduction in capacity and the loss of 20,000 jobs. The number of bargaining units was reduced from 168 to one so that our commitment to the industry could be based on an overall wage agreement, and, instead of envying and competing with one another, workers in the various yards could work together to produce an industry able to compete with foreign industries. The shipyard workers have made great sacrifices, but those sacrifices have never been acknowledged or reciprocated. Management has remained intransigent and in many cases anti-nationalisation, which has been thoroughly unhelpful and sometimes actually destructive.

Workers in the industry have faced periods of great insecurity. Thousands of jobs have been axed and the threats of redundancy and privatisation have hung over the industry since the Conservative Government came to power. Meanwhile, the wages of skilled workers in the shipyards have fallen from fourth to twentieth in the league table. The Minister, who is no longer present, called on us to encourage our colleagues in the industry to make a further commitment in the recent wage negotiations. We took up the challenge and discussed it with our colleagues in the shipyards, and they made that commitment. But what has been their reward? There has certainly been no reward for the constituents of the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central, who have recently been made redundant or whose redundancy is imminent. The workers in the industry have constantly made commitments on wages and conditions, but the Minister failed to acknowledge that today.

Unfortunately, neither the Government nor the management have brought the same commitment to the industry. The trade unions recognised from the outset that co-operation was needed if the industry was to survive, but the co-operation has been all on one side. That is why there is now bitterness and disillusion in many areas of the industry. The workers and their trade unions have put forward constructive proposals to both Government and management over many years, but they have been almost entirely ignored.

We have consistently argued that Britain, as an island nation, needs ships for both trade and defence. That being so, we must plan and control the management of that sector through a maritime agency. We must ensure that United Kingdom owners buy ships from United Kingdom yards. The industry is competing with companies abroad which are receiving far more support from their Governments. In the past 36 years, not one Japanese domestic order has gone to a yard outside Japan. That is the kind of commitment that our shipbuilding industry needs from British owners.

We also need more flexible application of the intervention fund. Even if the Minister cannot give the figures, perhaps he will tell us whether the flexibility secured from the EEC is on the lines called for by British Shipbuilders, allowing unused funds to be carried forward to support the winning of further orders. Just how flexible is the intervention fund to be?

As we have pointed out before, British industry has lost the ability to design engines, which represent 15 per cent. of the cost of any order. We used to be good at that, but we lost that capacity in 1979. We now have only the slow-speed engines from Clark Kincaid. It is ridiculous that after spending £4·5 million on plant and machinery only 12 years ago that capacity is now lying idle and it is intended to close it down.

The story of shipbuilding in this country since the Conservative Government took office is appalling. The Government's actions have been based on ignorance and political prejudice. In 1950, the United Kingdom held nearly 20 per cent. of the world market. Today it has about 3 per cent. Last year the United Kingdom won only 1 per cent. of world orders. This year we expect perhaps 2 per cent. We all know what that has done to the work force.

Most yards are located in areas of high unemployment —the Clyde, the Tyne and the north-west. However, our argument is not based on keeping open an outdated industry for the sake of it. The introduction of new technology offers many possibilities to shipbuilding, which is an integral part of our manufacturing base. It creates wealth and generates economic activity. Instead of closing down yards, we should train our young people to participate in an advanced manufacturing industry.

What we see in the shipbuilding industry exemplifies the Government's determination to erode Britain's manufacturing base. Last year, for the first time since the industrial revolution, Britain had a deficit in trade in manufactured goods. That happened despite the fact that the vast resources of North sea oil were at the disposal of the Government. The Government have squandered that wealth. Without that oil, the trade balance and the economic pointers would have looked very much worse. In the three months to June this year, output fell by 3 per cent. compared with the first quarter of 1984, showing almost no improvement when compared with a year earlier.

We do not ask for the shipbuilding industry to be cosseted. We ask for a chance to compete fairly with other countries, including EEC countries, which recognise that shipbuilding has a prime role to play in building up the economic and industrial base.

It is ludicrous that an island nation should be prepared to abandon an industry crucial to its trading health and defence capability. The Secretary of State for Defence has announced cuts which are necessary in defence spending. There is doubt that new warships are needed by the Navy. Yet billions of pounds are squandered on Trident and cruise. The Government have rammed their inglorious escapade in the south Atlantic down our throats, but they are now failing to put their alleged patriotism into practice. They hesitate to ensure that we have viable merchant and defence fleets.

We need support not for a dying industry but for one which is being stifled. Other Governments recognise the importance of the shipbuilding industry and take steps to ensure its survival; our Government do not.

We have put forward positive proposals. We have suggested reserving the coastal trade and the offshore supply sector for vessels flying the United Kingdom flag.

We have said that we should ensure that coastal shipping users receive the same financial support as rail and inland waterway users. We have argued for supporting our shipyards to the same extent as foreign shipyards are supported by their Governments. We have demanded that British vessels should be required to be built and repaired in British shipyards. We have said there is a need to regulate working time for seafarers in coastal shipping.

The Opposition have put forward all those proposals, but all that we have heard from the Government is the repeated claim that they are helping the industry. Those who run, or used to run, the industry do not accept that claim. Those who work in the industry do not accept it. The towns, villages and cities that have been, or are about to be, hit by redundancies do not accept it. I am sure that when Conservative Members go into the Lobby at the end of the debate they will not have been convinced that the Government support British shipbuilding.

8.45 pm

Mr. Cecil Franks (Barrow and Furness): There are many hon. Members in all parts of the House who represent shipbuilding constituencies where the shipyards face the future with considerable apprehension and fear. However, it would be wrong to allow the impression to be given that the picture is the same throughout the country. There are shipyards that face the future with optimism. Equally, we should not allow ourselves to be misled about the reasons for the parlous state of British shipbuilding, which is almost entirely due to the disastrous combination of appalling management, the Luddite mentality of the shipbuilding trade unions and a totally undisciplined work force. That disastrous combination has brought about the state of affairs that the Opposition complained about.

We can talk as much as we like about what should be done, but unless we can improve the management and the trade union leadership and bring discipline back to the work force our words will remain mere words.

Warships have been built for the best part of a century in Barrow and Furness. During that period, prosperity has ebbed and flowed. However, 20 years ago, the Vickers management took the decision to specialise and to concentrate on building submarines. That decision was due to the foresight of the then chairman of Vickers Shipbuilding, Sir Leonard Redshaw. Vickers concentrated on that sector, and although it built and launched HMS Invincible, Vickers accepted that that lay in the past and that submarine building lay in the future. Barrow shipyards were the home of the first Polaris submarine, and Trident is now being designed and is in the early stages of construction. However, what has happened in Barrow has not been matched elsewhere.

I should like to give a parallel. This afternoon I had a meeting with representatives of certain vested interests in my constituency who came to lobby me about the Government's bus policy—a topic which will no doubt consume much of our time in the future. The representatives were the chairman of my localmunicipal transport committee, the chairman of the local Transport and General Workers Union branch and his secretary and the AUEW branch secretary. I told them that they would have to accept that they would be in competition, and they replied that the competition would be unfair and that they would not be able to compete. When I asked why, they said that there were wage and hour agreements with the trade unions. I said, "I am sorry, but this is a different ball game. My prime concern is with the consumer—the man who pays his fare. If you have problems with the trade unions, they are for you to sort out. We are living in a competitive world." The same is true with shipbuilding. There is a world of difference between the Government and the Opposition. If one strips aside the philosophies of Socialism and capitalism, one sees that the Opposition are primarily concerned with the interests of the producer and that the Government are primarily concerned with the interests of the consumer. The Opposition cannot comprehend that if there is no consumer there is nothing for the producers to produce.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. With respect, the debate is about shipbuilding, not about buses. We all know that there is only one consumer of submarines—the Government.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Paul Dean): Order. Time is short, and we must get on with the debate.

Mr. Franks: What the hon. Gentleman says is not correct. Vickers have to earn export orders, and there is considerable competition in that area. There is also competition from shipyards in Britain which would dearly love to build conventional submarines. Barrow is in competition and there will be even greater competition after privatisation, but there will be greater opportunity. We are not afraid of privatisation; we are confident. We in south-west Cumbria ask ourselves why should we have had to suffer a wage freeze when we have made profits of £21 million? We are the only part of British Shipbuilders that has been consistently successful. Why should we have to suffer because of the nonsense that has gone on in Clydeside and Merseyside? Tyneside and Wearside are a little better. Why should we be held back when we have good management, a loyal work force and a successful product? Why should we be held back because other parts of the industry have no wish to survive and, frankly, do not deserve to survive?

Barrow and Furness welcomes privatisation and looks forward to its prosperity continuing to grow. We welcome privatisation — managers and labour — and the Government will give us our opportunity.

8.48 pm

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): If all our shipyards had order books the length of the Barrow order book, we would be able to give a very different message tonight. I do not want to denigrate any of the work done at Barrow. However, to turn up every day and to know that the order book extends way into the future is a very different experience from turning up each day, as many of my constituents do at Cammell Laird, knowing that the yard is on its last order. The House should bear that in mind when considering the different records in the shipbuilding industry.

I should like to give the Government three messages. They come not from me, but from my constituents. First, they are looking to this debate to get an answer to whether or not we are to have a viable shipbuilding industry. Linked to that they want to know whether the Government are bringing to the debate the urgency that reflects what is happening in our yards. The Government gave us an example of what they meant by urgency in the previous Parliament. My constituents test whether the Government consider a problem to be urgent by matching their action

[Mr. Frank Field]

with getting the task force ready for the Falklands. If we compare the Government's actions to safeguard the shipbuilding industry with their efforts to attend to that island way down in the south Atlantic, which most of us thought existed only on the front of postage stamps, the Government are found wanting.

My constituents cannot understand why the Government continue to let unemployment rise generally, and especially in the shipbuilding industry. They know the line that the Government take—that it is important to contain public expenditure, that that results in a cut in interest rates and that that encourages new business. However, by containing public expenditure, an increasing number of people are put out of work. As a result, more people draw the dole and thus public expenditure rises. The Government are caught in a vicious circle. My constituents are therefore looking for some common sense to be applied to the economics of the shipbuilding industry. We are not asking for more of the enthusiastic rant of the hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Franks). We do not want the slogans about the industry being denationalised and from that will come extra jobs. We are not interested in that; we are interested in protecting the jobs that we now have. We shall judge the Government on how well they reply in regard to protecting those jobs.

I disagree with the hon. Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Trotter), who is always listened to with respect. He said in his coded fashion — he usually presents a coded message to the Government — that they cannot be faulted on their financing of the industry. Nobody denies that that money now totals £1 billion. The Opposition's dispute has been how the £1 billion has been handed out. It has been given on a year-by-year basis, thus making it almost impossible for British Shipbuilders to plan a long-term future for the industry. We are pleading for a long-term perspective rather than endless short-term measures.

Mr. Trotter: The problem is that no one has been able to forecast demand for ships. People to whom I have spoken in the industry have been over-optimistic in their assessment of the number of orders that will be forthcoming. That has made it extremely difficult to plan for the industry.

Mr. Field: That has been part of the difficulty, but another part is the failure to bring forward orders from the public sector. My constituents want there to be urgency in bringing those orders forward and believe that money spent in securing those orders will protect their jobs, lay the basis for the shipbuilding industry of the future and play some part in giving the Government economic success. In those circumstances, fewer people would be drawing the dole and there would be less tendency to push up the public sector borrowing requirement. We have not yet heard from the Government an urgency that in any way matches the crisis of the shipbuilding industry.

The second message that my constituents want me to advance is that, if Cammell Laird is allowed to fold, that could be the end of a community in our area. Fewer than 2,000 people now work in the yard. Those jobs are important, but they are not the only ones at stake. There will be a knock-on effect to the small businesses that supply the yard. We have talked of a ratio of three jobs in outside industries being lost for every one that is lost in the yard. Moreover, if we lose our yard, we shall lose the apprenticeship school and therefore the constant stream of skilled labour to the area. Will the Government walk away and let Cammell Laird close? Will they be like Pontius Pilate and wash their hands? If not, what hope have they to offer to my constituents before we divide at 10 o'clock?

Thirdly, my constituents want me to recall a theme that now constantly recurs in the Prime Minister's speeches around the country—the enemy within. My constituents want me to tell the Government that they agree with her, that there is an enemy within, but that it is the enemy of unemployment. They want to know what the Government are doing about that enemy which is tearing the heart and guts out of our constituencies and constituents. In Cammell Laird a large number of men have bravely gone against union advice, walked through picket lines and gone back to work. In short, they have done everything that the Government have asked them to do, and they want to know what the Government now intend to do for them. Will the Government just laugh in their faces, or will they come forward with some orders and so protect jobs?

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. There are five hon. Members hoping to speak, and the winding-up speeches are expected to begin at 9.30 pm. We should all be happy if the five hon. Members would divide the time between them.

8.56 pm

Mr. Christopher Chope (Southampton, Itchen): I wish to address my comments to two parts of British Shipbuilders — Vosper Thornycroft and Vosper Shiprepairers. It is a sad blow for the people of Southampton to learn that there are to be 790 redundancies at Vosper Thornycroft. I am sure that everyone hopes that those redundancies will not have to be compulsory. Lack of orders has led to those redundancies. It is scandalous that the Government have delayed for so long on a decision about type 22 frigate orders. I cannot say that if the orders had been made last year it would not have been necessary to make so many men redundant but, on the evidence, that would appear to be the case. If the Government want two type 22 frigates, is there any justification for their having placed the orders in July 1983 and, even as I speak, not having reached a conclusion?

I hope that whichever yards win—obviously I put in a strong plea for Vosper Thornycroft — the announcement will be made before Christmas so that some people who work in the warship building sector of British Shipbuilders have a more cheerful Christmas than might otherwise be the case.

I am sure that the people of Southampton will sympathise with those in Vosper Thornycroft who are victims of market forces, as a result of which redundancies have arisen. I am also sure that people in Southampton are saying, "Is it not a pity that there are other people in Southampton who are determined to impose self-inflicted wounds?" I refer, of course, to the docks. Tomorrow there is to be a mass meeting of people employed in the docks in Southampton. I hope that they will come to their senses and realise that they, too, will be redundant unless they try to make the port competitive, as have workers in British Shipbuilders.

The privatisation of Vosper Thornycroft could not be any worse than the present situation, and I would expect

it to be much better. It would mean that the millstone around the neck of Vosper Thornycroft at the loss-making yards would be removed and that would allow the profits which have been made over the years to be reinvested. That would be a strong base from which to win fresh export orders.

The refit of the Indonesian frigates is an indication that export orders can be won by Vosper Thornycroft. If a quick decision is taken—I implore the Government to make it quick—on privatisation, I am sure that Vosper Thornycroft will be able to win more orders in the world markets.

Vosper Shiprepairers is in my constituency, but at present it is in limbo because it is awaiting consideration of tenders for privatisation. When does the Minister expect a decision to be taken on the privatisation of Vosper Shiprepairers, and does he expect that firm to be privatised as a whole or in parts? There are three parts of the shiprepair business in Southampton, but the work force and management simply do not know whether British Shipbuilders is planning to sell those parts individually or collectively.

This is also an area in which an urgent decision is needed. There was the disappointment of losing the quote for the QE2 refit this year, and the 1985 cruise liner refits will be considered early in the new year. Vosper Shiprepairers wishes to prove itself to be more competitive than, sadly, it has been in the past.

Labour Members who think that competition and competiveness play no part in British shipbuilding will be interested to know that when the QE2 refit was put out by Cunard the lowest tender was £1·8 million from Hapags in Bremerhaven. Other tenders were £1·9 million from a Dutch shipyard; £2·18 million from a shipyard in Hamburg; and £2·7 million from Vosper. Who can expect divisions of British Shipbuilders to win orders if they are as uncompetitive as that? I very much hope that when Vosper Shiprepairs is privatised it will become much more competitive and will win back the cruise line orders.

Vosper need not necessarily be the lowest tenderer, because travelling from Southampton to the northern European yards involves much steaming time. Nevertheless, it must be more competitive than previously. The figures which I have quoted, which were given to me by Cunard, demonstrate that the yards in Southampton must be more competitive if they are to survive.

9.2 pm

Mr. Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, East): I shall, Mr. Deputy Speaker, take note of what you said about brevity.

The charge against the Government is twofold. First, they have failed to analyse correctly the nature of the crisis in the shipbuilding industry, and from that failure they have moved to the most Lamontable of conclusions. They believe, quite wrongly, that there is a free market in shipbuilding. There is no such thing. If Government policy assumes that there is or, even worse, that there should be, unfortunately our major competitors such as Japan and Korea do not take that view.

Instead of supporting the industry, the Government intend to smash it and to sell a small part of the remnants to the private sector—almost solely to deal with the requirements of the Ministry of Defence. There is no commercial reason for this, because of the nature of pricing naval work. Such privatisation will mean ruination for a fair part of my constituency.

Swan Hunter, a magnificent yard, is our major employer which deals with both naval and merchant work. It is our belief that the Government are deliberately holding back type 22 orders in order to shed labour prior to privatisation. That is a despicable way in which to treat my constituents, yet that is what they and I believe the Government aredoing.

The workers there ask, "And what of Swan's management? Where do their loyalties lie? Are they with the interests of the current owners or those of the private consortium which seeks to buy the profitable bit after the Government have killed the rest?" What confidence can that work force have in a senior management which is literally planning to jump ship?

The Government do not even care about merchant shipbuilding. Swan Hunter is being told "The future lies with warship work" — Conservative party code for saying that there will be no more merchant work. Labour Members understand that there is a world over-capacity, but why do the Government meet that crisis by pulling out of the market rather than protecting a share of it for our nation? The Koreans and Japanese do not believe in free markets. They will buy their share of the world market, and we shall give them ours. If ever the Government protect our merchant shipbuilding, I believe that they will do so when the remnants of the merchant yards have been handed over to private industry, and not before.

I wish to kill the nonsense about subsidy. Miners, shipbuilders, heavy engineering workers and all the manual workers in the north-east who form part of the industrial base of our nation through their work, wages, insurance premiums and bank accounts subsidise and carry the burden of much of the south-east based service sector of the economy. The Government seek to isolate shipbuilding from the rest of the economy, but that is not possible.

The Government's policy is disastrous for my constituency. Of the seven wards there, four are shipbuilding wards. In those four wards 49 per cent. of male unemployment is made up of time-served men with five-year apprenticeships behind them. All that skill is wasted. Despite that dramatic statistic, unskilled workers will suffer even more, if that were possible. They face returning to the days of standing at the gate and trying to get a day's work or of having a three-day contract. My constituents will not accept that.

In the Rochester estate in Walker, which is in the heart of the shipbuilding community, male unemployment is 73 per cent. At Walker school, which is the community school that serves the shipbuilding area, more than 90 per cent. of school leavers will not find jobs. At my surgery, grown men have broken down and cried because they have no work. There has been a steady increase in hard drug taking and addiction. Last weekend, I met a delegation of mums, all of whom had come to see me about glue sniffing and solvent abuse and wanted to know what could be done to stop their youngsters doing that. That was a clear statement of personal tragedy. What could I say to them?

Newcastle local authority is having to work hard to prevent council estates in east Newcastle from becoming no-go areas. I have a keen interest in housing, both as a councillor and as a Member of this House. It is the first time that we have faced these sad circumstances.

[Mr. Nicholas Brown]

This may sound odd, but all credit is due to the Conservative group on Newcastle city council, which does not share the views of Conservative Members. When the council last debated shipbuilding, the Conservative group behaved in a most constructive and generous way about an area which they do not represent—it is clear why they do not. The Conservative group called for state intervention to support a level of employment in the community, for which Conservative Members seem to have no sympathy. All credit is due to that group of councillors but shame to Conservative Members. All credit is due to Tyne and Wear county council, which the Government vindictively seek to abolish, for trying to state the case for the industry through the "Save our shipyards" campaign.

My constituents demand that the Government change their policy. If they do not, the state will not be able to cope with the consequences, and respect for parliamentary democracy and the law will be irrevocably undermined. They will be undermined by the Ministers' complacency.

9.9 pm

Mr. Richard Ottaway (Nottingham, North): Not surprisingly, the tenor of the Opposition's contribution tonight is that if more money could be pumped into shipbuilding, all would be well. Many people wish that that was the case. The harsh economic facts of life are such that shipping does far more than merely subsidise our home industries. Shipping is an international business and relies on a flow of trade. Ships are required to service the flow of trade. If there is no demand for trade, there is no demand for ships.

If Opposition Members want to know where the crisis in the shipbuilding industry is, I suggest that they fly to Athens. A third of the world's shipping is controlled from Athens. As one flies into Athens over the Bay of Corinth and then Elefsis bay and looks out of the window, one sees rows and rows of ships laid up. There are not tens or hundreds but more than 1,000 ships laid up in the bays around Athens and in the Corinth canal. That is where the crisis in the shipbuilding industry is.

One must ask what those ships are doing there. The simple reason is that the cost of operating a ship is fixed. If a ship's earnings are less than its running costs, the shipowner will lay it up. The world's sea lanes are full of ships slow steaming at break-even prices. The days of the get-rich-quick ship operators of the 1950s and 1960s are over. The days of Onassis and Livarnos are finished. There is no demand for shipping any more.

If a shipowner who has not gone bust occasionally has need of a ship, he has no loyalty which will cause him to come to England. He may have been educated in England, but if he can build a ship more cheaply elsewhere, he will go there. He will turn to the shipbuilding yards of the far east and the Pacific basin where he can have a ship built for two thirds of what it would cost in England. Opposition Members may argue that that is because Asian yards subsidise ship owners. The difference in the price is greater than the subsidy. The work force is more efficient and more productive than the work force in this country.

The South Korean industry is second only to that of Japan. In 1974 the Korean industry ranked 70th in the world. Last year, it increased its share of the world's order book from 9 to 14 per cent. compared with the United Kingdom's share of 2 per cent. Western yards often blame that on unfair competition. The Korean Government are accused of granting excessive subsidies and export credits to enable their yards to quote prices up to 35 per cent. cheaper than those of their European rivals.

The Koreans, however, will argue that their two largest yards, Daewoo and Hyundai, receive no direct Government subsidy, although they benefited initially from a five-year export credit. The terms, however, are said to be less favourable than those offered by the Japanese.

The Korean yards are cheaper because they are more modern and more efficient; their raw materials, particularly steel, are cheaper than those in Europe; and they have a disciplined work force. The average working week in Korean shipyards is 60 hours and wages are about one third of those paid in Japan. There is no doubt that their continued expansion is unhelpful to present world over-capacity.

Mr. John Smith: So?

Mr. Ottaway: I am trying to explain why no one buys British ships.

Mr. Smith: What is the hon. Gentleman going to do about it?

Mr. Ottaway: Ask my hon. Friend the Minister. It is not only the far east that can compete on better terms; the Finnish yards built the Royal Princess within the right time and at the right price. That is why a shipowner will go to Finland. As my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Chope) said, if Hapags can convert the QE2 more cheaply than British yards, the contract will go to Germany.

The Government should give some financial assistance to shipbuilding. As hon. Members will remember earlier this year we had "Exercise Lionheart" where a number of——

Mr. Smith: So what?

Mr. Ottaway: I listened to the right hon. and learned Gentleman. The least he can do is to listen to me.

In that exercise, a large number of soldiers were carried to Europe by foreign ships. The Government should consider what will happen if those ships are not available in wartime. If we cannot rely on such ships, as the hon. Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Wrigglesworth) said, the Government should consider providing some subsidy out of the budget of the Department of Trade and Industry or the Ministry of Defence to build up the merchant marine so that such exercises can be carried out in the future.

Money is not the only consideration. We have only to look at the traumatic events that took place in Birkenhead. When a shipowner is deciding whether to build in Birkenhead he will remember the scenes that he saw there earlier this year. A militant core of workers held up construction of a gas rig and HMS Edinburgh. He will decide that it is not worth while building his ship or rig in Birkenhead.

Mr. Frank Field *rose*——

Mr. Ottaway: When the hon. Gentlemen say that something has to be done, I agree. We have to be able to build ships as efficiently as they do in Korea, and we have to sort out our industrial relations. Until that is sorted out, we shall always have a crisis in the shipbuilding industry.

9.15 pm

Mr. Ted Garrett (Wallsend): Unfortunately, the Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry, is no longer in his seat. Had he been so, he would have agreed that in Committee and on the Floor of the House he and I have debated, and disagreed, and sometimes agreed on, all the facets of the shipbuilding industry. One thing is certain: he and I have been witnesses to a play that has become a tragedy. We have watched and have now become aware of the inexorable end to this tragedy. Despite some of the statements that we have heard tonight, that inexorable end seems to be that we shall not have a shipbuilding industry. We have been told tonight that the industry is in trouble at the moment, but that it can be more lean and efficient and still have a future. That may be the case, but the proof has not emerged in the debate so far.

I was singularly unimpressed by what the Minister said. Perhaps I have become cynical and have heard the arguments too often. I know that the 2,100 people employed in the Wallsend yard of Swan Hunter have no possibility of a reprieve from redundancy. The Government have not had the courage to say that the position of the redundant workers is infinitely worse than has been suggested. The Minister said that the future orders were a matter of confidentiality. I have the statement that was made to the employees last week and it lists six options, which obviously include the notional contracts and perhaps some of the tenders being negotiated now. If work resulted from these, I would be a little more cheerful, but it does not seem likely.

I am beginning to think that the Tyne and Wear will again become isolated industrial deserts. The Government's policy of standing away from the manufacturing base and pretending that it does not exist is to blame. We have seen the near extinction of the steel, cotton, textile and machine tool industries, and so it goes on. It cannot continue. The difference of philosophy between the parties must be submerged in the national interest. We must have a manufacturing base, which must include shipbuilding. If we have not, we are doomed as a nation.

If the Government's decision to keep away from getting involved in the future of the manufacturing base continues, there is not much hope. The famous rivers of the Tyne and the Wear will be all right because both banks will have green verdant pastures on which the cattle and the sheep will graze. There will be trees, but there will be no people and no jobs. The Minister must sacrifice his blind ideological belief in free enterprise as the answer to our problems. It is not. We must get rid of this ideology and think of the well-being of the 57 million inhabitants of our island. We must think of the people whose jobs depend on some of the decisions that we make tonight.

9.18 pm

Mr. Michael Fallon (Darlington): I speak in this debate, as I have spoken in previous debates, as someone who has a close interest in Redheads Shiprepairer. It is not a financial interest. My hon. Friend the Minister will know, because he was with me on the day that the yard was opened, that I have taken an interest in its work and have kept in close touch since then with Jack Richardson and his men.

It is worth putting on record that the Government have made it possible for the men in that yard, and for the men in Tyne Shiprepairer Ltd. alongside it, to take a stake in their company and to continue to work in jobs which they inevitably lost under nationalisation. Both those yards are already successful. Redheads now has a turnover of some £2 million. Tyne Shiprepairer Ltd. has an order book worth some £3 million.

Redheads in particular is more than simply a commercial success. I hope that all hon. Members would wish it to be a commercial success in a hostile ship repair environment. It is also a shining example to the rest of the industry, not simply the repair industry, of the much more flexible approach that is required in working practices, entrepreneurship and by going out across the continent of Europe to market one's product.

I ask Labour Members to reflect on one question. Would Redheads and the men who work in that yard have enjoyed that success and continued to enjoy that success had we gone on with the same old nationalised bureaucratic inflexible industry that they chose to establish in 1977?

I suggest that the Government should look again at Redheads and consider whether the flexibility there—which both management and staff have shown can change a yard which BS closed because it was making a loss into a yard that the men themselves now own and which is making a profit—can be adopted on a much wider basis in merchant shipbuilding.

9.21 pm

Mr. Bob Clay (Sunderland, North): This debate, like previous debates on shipbuilding, has revolved around clear expositions from Labour Members and pathetic excuses from Conservative Members. We have heard the same excuses tonight that we have heard in the past. Nothing has moved on for Conservative Members. We have already lost some yards. But things have moved on for Labour Members because in the next few weeks—not months or years—a massive slice of the industry will go under. Some announcements have already been made in the past few days.

My constituency is facing sell-offs, closures already announced or closures that will take place if there are not orders at the Deptford yard of Sunderland Shipbuilders and Austin and Pickersgill in the next few days. We are talking about over 3,000 redundancies on the river by March next year. We cannot wait until March next year to get the orders to right that situation.

I am glad to see that the Minister of State has just returned. I want to remind him of the questions asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Bagier) to which we would like specific replies. There is an Ethiopian order. It lies with the Minister's Department. He has had that application now for some weeks, having suggested that Austin and Pickersgill should put it in. When will he respond? Time is running out.

The Government also have within their gift a decision on the St. Helena order. That again could keep the yard open. The Deptford yard of Sunderland Shipbuilders is also working on its last ship. As I understand it, BS says that that yard is unlikely to get a further Mexican order which it could have had because it cannot compete with cheap French credit. Those are not my words, but those of BS.

We also understand that ITM Middlesbrough Ltd. would order immediately from Sunderland Shipbuilders a heavy lifting barge for the Morecambe Bay gas exploration

[Mr. Bob Clay]

if the Department of Energy would make up its mind that it wants to place that contract. The Government can make an immediate decision on such matters, and if they do not do so thousands of jobs will be lost. Indeed, no one now disputes that for every one job lost directly in the yards, another three are lost in the immediate vicinity, in subsidiary and ancillary services. Therefore, on one river in my constituency 10,000 jobs will be at stake in the next three months, despite the fact that the area already has a 26 per cent. male unemployment rate and that in some parts of the town, particularly in those where many shipyard workers live, the rate is well above 50 per cent. That is what is at stake.

The simple questions that we ask about the orders available give the lie to the defeatist claptrap that we have heard from Conservative Members about there being no orders and about the recession making it all impossible. Recession or no recession, we are talking about orders that exist. Someone will obtain them, and it is a question of whether the Government will ensure that they are placed in British yards. In the past few months orders have been lost. Austin and Pickersgill could have had an order from West Germany for two or three ships. There was a price gap of £2 million. So £2 million of further Government intervention could have placed orders in that yard and kept it open.

I, along with others, wrote to the Minister urging him to ensure that British Shipbuilders and his Department did something to secure that order. But the Department dithered, underbid and lost the order, as some of us predicted would happen. It has now done that twice on the same order. That is either incompetence or a sign that the Department intends to run down the industry and let the yards close.

Some hon. Members believe that there is incompetence and misunderstanding, but, as I have said before, the evidence points more and more to the fact that the Government have a wilful policy of eliminating merchant shipbuilding in this country. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) quoted the comments of Sir Robert Atkinson in a lengthy and interesting interview with the *Sunderland Echo*. Since then, Sir Robert has said something even more damning. On regional television, in the north-east of England, he said:

"When I tried to talk to them"—

the Government and the Minister—

"about investment they did not want to know. When I wanted to talk about Research and Development they weren't interested. But if I talked about closing yards or sacking workers, a light shone in their eyes."

Those are the words of the former chairman of British Shipbuilders, who was appointed by the Government.

Opposition Members must decide whether Government incompetence is to blame or whether, as Sir Robert Atkinson says, the Government have a policy of deliberately destroying the industry. Unless the Minister can give concrete answers tonight to the questions that have been asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South and me about those orders and about the Sunderland yards, the shipyard workers will believe, just as we must believe, that they could not give a damn and that they intend to close the yards.

I shall conclude on a point that has already been made by my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown). Conservative Members are reaping the whirlwind that they sowed with pit closure after pit closure and the appointment of Mr. MacGregor and Graham Day. They will have the same problem twice over or more if they continue with this policy. Those communities will not tolerate that level of unemployment and hopelessness any more than the NUM does. In some areas, including mine, the workers will fight alongside each other. They have started doing so already. The Government should realise the trouble that they will store up if they allow the yards to close. I only hope that if the violence that comes from the hopelessness and despair, and that is the product of this Government's policies, is unleashed in areas such as Wearside, we shall not hear nauseously hypocritical tut-tutting from Conservative Members. They have been warned. If Ministers do not take action immediately, that will be the inevitable consequence of their abandonment of those communities.

9.30 pm

Mr. Don Dixon (Jarrow): I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) on making a first-class case for our motion. The Minister accused my right hon. and learned Friend of getting his needle stuck. That is a cheek because the Minister has offered the same arguments ever since he became Minister. His only offer is more privatisation. He said that the Government have helped the shipbuilding industry since 1979. That reminds me of the person who said "If things don't improve I shall have to stop asking for your help."

The shipbuilding industry is in such a state that it cannot afford any more redundancies or contraction. My hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Bagier) talked of practical ways in which we can help in the short term. The hon. Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Wrigglesworth) asked about the industry's viability and the Government's commitment. My hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross) talked about a maritime policy, as recommended by the Select Committee on Trade and Industry way back in 1981. The Government have taken no action.

Redheads has been mentioned, as it was during a debate on the Queen's Speech. I agree that more talent is stagnating in the labour exchanges than is speculating on the stock exchanges. Redheads prove that the men themselves can run an industry. Perhaps too much say has been given to management in the nationalised industries. Shop stewards certainly complain about that to me.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, North (Mr. Clay) spoke about the expected massive redundancies and how communities will react. My hon. Friend the Member for Wallsend (Mr. Garrett) talked about tragedy hitting the shipbuilding industry and said that nothing would be left. My hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) talked about the number of skilled unemployed males in his constituency.

The Minister never mentioned the community or the social consequences of redundancies. As my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, North said, shipbuilding communities are like mining communities. The living and working environments are tied. When a shipyard closes, a town closes.

I shall not talk about what happened to the town in which I lived in the 1[illegible] but in Tyne and Wear 20 per cent. of manufacturing jobs are connected with

shipbuilding. For every job inside the shipyard two exist outside to service it. In Wallsend 44 per cent. of male employment is in the shipbuilding industry. In Jarrow and South Shields 18 per cent. of male employment is in the shipbuilding industry.

In my constituency 31·3 per cent. of the male population is out of work. In addition, we heard this week that British Steel is to close its rolling mill there, throwing 246 men out of jobs. Swan Hunter sacked 2,100 men and decided that Palmers at Hebburn would be put into mothballs.

This is the first time in living memory that no ships are being built on the south side of the Tyne. This Government have done what Hitler's bombers could not do during the last world war. The Government have no feeling for the shipbuilding communities. The reduced spending power of the workers is devastating businesses and shops in our areas. Since the Tyne and Wear "Save our shipyard" campaign started, I have received letters from shopkeepers and other business men who are worried about the effect of redundancies. If the Government had showed spirit and had fought to create employment in our area, they would have done what the Tyne and Wear county council has done. Instead of trying to eliminate the council, the Government would have been emulating it.

An article in the local paper stated:

"Any further contraction in shipbuilding and in engineering activities on the north-east coast would do irreparable damage to the future of the nation.

If the skills and knowledge invested in this area were lost through any further contraction they would never be regained.

This would be a great loss to the nation as a whole as they are the skills which would be needed in the future.

All good men and true the length and breadth of the north-east coast should come forward to join a concerted bid to save the industry.

Now is the time for all men of good standing who are interested in this country and its future to forget their political and other differences and speak out for the sake of the nation."

Those were the words not of the general secretary of the boilermakers union, or the regional secretary of the TUC but of the former chairman of British Shipbuilders, Sir Robert Atkinson, in an article printed in the *Sunderland Echo* on 23 July.

The hon. Members for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Franks), who has disappeared at the moment, and for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Chope) talked about privatisation. I can tell them about privatisation because I worked in the British shipbuilding industry from the time I left school when I was 14 until I became a Member in 1979. Until 1977, the British shipbuilding industry was in private hands, and they made an almighty mess of it. That is why the industry was nationalised in 1977. If the Labour Government had not achieved orders for Polish ships, there would have been no British shipbuilding industry.

The Government talk about the entrepreneurs in private industry. There was the Paton report in 1962, the Geddes report in 1966 and the Booz Allen report in 1972. Every one of those inquiries, which were conducted when the British shipbuilding industry was in private hands, complained about the lack of investment and bad management. It was not the men who worked in the industry but the management who had the say about investment during that time.

A survey conducted in the 1970s showed that there were assets of £825 per British shipbuilding worker. In Germany the amount was more than £1,000 per worker. Initially, it was more than £1,200. In Sweden there were assets of more than £1,800 per shipbuilding worker and in Japan there were assets of more than £2,800 per shipbuilding worker. The Minister talked about the £1 billion that has been invested since nationalisation. He said that last year £100 million was invested. In 1981-82 the Japanese merchant banks invested £620 million in seven shipyards. The Korean shipyards, in spite of the fact that they started from a good base, have invested £400 million a year. How on earth do the Government expect the British shipyard workers to compete?

The Government amendment states that the House "welcomes the efforts of the industry's management to achieve that objective".

I refer the House to the evidence given to the Select Committee on Trade and Industry. The chairman asked:

"I have a personal question for you, Mr. Day. When you took up your job, was your remit given to you . . . to privatise?"

Mr. Graham Day replied:

"I was aware from the media what the government policy was and I was told that in effect my remit had two parts."

He did not accept any brief in writing from the Government. He learnt about the Government's policy through the media, and took the job on that basis.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, North said, Graham Day is doing to British Shipbuilders what MacGregor is doing to the British mining industry. Is it a coincidence that both men come from the western hemisphere? The best thing that the Government could do would be to put them both on a boat and send them back to North America. We would probably have a better industry as a result.

We are not discussing only shipbuilding. We must consider the shipping industry. For a long time, that industry relied on 100 per cent. depreciation to give it the edge. It was dealt a savage blow when that provision was withdrawn by the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Since the Falklands operation, when 54 merchant ships were in the task force, there has been a reduction of more than 200 ships in our merchant fleet, totalling over 8 million deadweight tonnes.

Apart from Greece, the United Kingdom has the largest fleet in the EC and, consequently, the largest ordering requirement. It is about time that some British shipowners showed the same loyalty to British shipyards that Japanese shipowners show to Japanese yards. Not one Japanese shipowner has ordered a ship outside Japan since 1947. Everyone knows that the Koreans can build ships cheaper than the Japanese, so if we are talking about an open market in shipbuilding, why do Japanese shipowners not have their ships built in Korea? It is because they show a loyalty to their industry that British shipowners do not show to our industry.

In the past five years, the number of ships ordered by EC shipowners in their own countries has totalled 98 per cent. in Italy, 97 per cent. in Belgium, 82 per cent. in West Germany, 77 per cent. in France, 74 per cent. in the Netherlands, 73 per cent. in Denmark and only 44 per cent. in the United Kingdom. Last year, out of 360,000 tonnes of British owners' shipping orders, 311,000 tonnes went abroad. If those orders had been made in this country, our industry would not be in its present state.

Not only have the Government hit shipping and shipbuilding, but they have hit the people who sail on the ships. They even took away the 25 per cent. tax deduction that seafarers have been given for so long. That costs those men an average of £10 a week and penalises them in comparison with their counterparts in western Europe.

[Mr. Don Dixon]

Some Conservative Members claim that British shipbuilding workers have made no sacrifices since 1979. In fact, they made so many sacrifices that they have fallen from fourth to below 20th in the wages league and they have reduced the number of wage bargaining units from 160 to two—one manual and one staff. It was said some time ago that if British shipyard workers worked for nothing, they would still not be able to compete with the Koreans. It is nonsense for Conservative Members to say that the workers are the main problem in the shipbuilding industry.

We want the Government to call a halt to all closures in the industry. We have reached the bare minimum for survival and we cannot contract any more. At one time, we used to produce 80 per cent. of the world's tonnage; now we produce less than 2 per cent. We want a halt to privatisation, which would be nonsensical at a time when the industry is facing such severe problems. The private sector has already failed the industry.

We need a maritime policy and a new system of financial aids to replace the intervention fund. As an island nation, we must retain the shipbuilding, marine engineering and shipping industries. Shipbuilding plays a vital part in our nation's prosperity and in its protection. We have a capability that needs to be sustained and recognised as a national asset. It cannot be used intermittently, turned on and off like a hot water tap and available only when required. To be effective it needs continuous use and constant improvement. It needs continuous investment in men and materials. Once that capability is allowed to be displaced, it will never be recovered. Under the Government's policy, what will happen to the shipping and shipbuilding industry will be the same as happened to the motor cycle industry.

In the paper this morning I read that the Prime Minister had given a lecture in the Carlton club to some Conservative body on why democracy will last. I have no doubt that many of the people in her audience have never seen a pair of overalls, let alone worn them. If the Prime Minister and her Government let the shipbuilding industry go to the wall, they will be the "enemy within", and they will never be forgiven by the British people.

9.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. John Butcher): I should like first to respond to the very distinguished speech of the hon. Member for Wallsend (Mr. Garrett), who correctly drew the attention of the House to two themes which concern any hon. Member representing and industrial constituency.

I reassure the hon. Member that it is the Government's view that manufacturing matters. Eighty per cent. of what we make within our economy is internationally tradeable, and 18 per cent. of service sector activity is similarly internationally tradeable. Therefore, those members of our work force who are committed to manufacturing activity give us very good value for money, and it is this Administration's intention to see that our manufacturing base continues to provide the core of our wealth-creating activity.

I assure the hon. Member for Wallsend that I do not take the view that long-term unemployment is to be tolerated. I do not take the view that is sometimes taken in fashionable debating circles, that somehow structural unemployment is with us for ever. Indeed, I will give the hon. Gentleman two figures which support me in that contention. In 1966, our share of the world's export trade was 14 per cent. In 1983, it was 8 per cent. The steepest falls were not during Conservative Administrations.

According to the CBI, every 1 per cent. reduction in our world trade represents 250,000 jobs lost. If we are to believe those figures—and I do—surely it is not too risky to say in this House that we can and should regain the level of trade that we had such a short time ago. By getting back to the share of trade that we once had, we can regain 1·5 million jobs. I believe that that is a legitimate target.

When there is a whirlwind of international competition in the shipbuilding industry, how can we regain our share of the market? How can we fight back in the domestic and the international markets?

Mr. Robert C. Brown *rose—*

Mr. Butcher: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will allow me to proceed. Several of his hon. Friends have made distinguished contributions to the debate and I have many questions to answer. I shall try to answer them all in the time available.

The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) understandably and correctly voiced his concern. He talked about a crisis. A large number of redundancies are contemplated at Swan Hunter and at Vosper Thornycroft. I assure the right hon. and learned Gentleman that it is not my intention tonight to criticise the work force or the working practices of the industry at this time. One has to concede that in the past they were not of the best, but lessons are being learned, and people are learning to work together. That gives us the best element of hope for the future.

Incidentally, I accept the right hon. and learned Gentleman's figure that for every job in the shipbuilding construction industry, downstream there are three further jobs to consider. That also has an effect on the communities with which we are concerned. I shall refer to his comments about Graham Day and particularly about competition from the far east. I should like to report, for the time being, that next week we shall be involved in bilateral talks with the Koreans and it is our intention to place at the top of the agenda of the talks the effects that Korean pricing is having in distorting the market for shipping and in eroding their competitive position, which in turn is driving the rest of the world's industry into a downward spiral of ever-increasing subsidy. That cannot be right in the long-term for the Pacific basin. It is certainly not right for the United Kingdom.

The hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Bagier) asked about the SD14 order for St. Helena, which involves the Overseas Development Administration's position on the matter. I assure him that we shall make strong representations to my right hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development and ask that the decision be urgently reviewed, although the situation is not quite as straightforward as hon. members on both sides of the House may think.

My hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Franks) talked accurately about the key role of management. Without a good management and a good work force, no amount of public money can rescue any

company from uncompetitive practices and uncompetitive behaviour. My hon. Friend also talked about the far-sighted decision of Vickers. That company specialised; it produced successful results. It produced an excellent facility upon which we can build. I commend my hon. Friend on——

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): The Minister has never been in a shipyard.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Butcher: I commend my hon. Friend on his robust and pugnacious assertions——

Mr. Douglas: He has never been in a shipyard.

Mr. Butcher: May I say to the hon. Gentleman that I have worked—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is not seemly conduct.

Mr. Butcher: I neglected to say to the hon. Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Wrigglesworth) that at the moment we are negotiating on the intervention fund. We are arguing, as we were reminded by the hon. Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon), for increased flexibility, and my hon. Friend the Minister for State is asking for a much better deal from the European Community on the intervention fund.

I commend the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) on his courage to support those who want to work. He has supported the real right-to-work campaign, which concerns preserving jobs for those who wish to go to work.

My hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Chope) said that he would like to see the earliest resolution of the type 22 issue. My hon. Friend the Minister of State will be minded to bring his decision forward during this year. He is aware that many shipyards, like the one my hon. Friend the Member for Itchen represents, are waiting for that early decision. With regard to the position of Vosper Thornycroft on privatisation, I can confirm that British Shipbuilders is pursuing the privatisation of Vosper ship repair as fast as it can and has had several serious expressions of interest.

The hon. Member for Stockton, South, together with other hon. Members, asked whether we can predict or guarantee that those who may be bidding for and may eventually take over the Hall Russell facility will continue shipbuilding at Hall Russell. It is the intent of the Department of Trade and Industry that that should be so, subject to the usual questions on viability and the company's competence to continue shipbuilding activity on that site. I hope that that response gives some reassurance to the hon. Gentleman.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Merchant) rightly pointed to the roller coaster progression — some might call it regression — of the industry. He correctly said that working practices were now improving. That improvement must continue because, like a runner, our shipbuilding industry must gather pace and run faster and faster to haul back on the lead gained by our competitors. I hope that the examples of bad practices that he cited will be the last examples of bad industrial relations in the industry. He also reminded us that the capability of both work force and management is the key to success for all the sites up and down the country.

The hon. Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross) through his trade union associations has a special interest in technology. I am afraid that he will have to wait for a written reply to some of his questions, not least because I suspect that the House is in no mood to discuss the £30 million that British Shipbuilders has committed to projects such as CADCAM — computer aided design and manufacture—automated manufacturing techniques and so on. The hon. Gentleman is well versed in those disciplines and I undertake to give him the appropriate information on investment in those categories by letter. He also asked for greater flexibility in the intervention fund. That is precisely our negotiating position, and we shall continue to press for that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Ottaway) vividly pointed out why there is a crisis, illustrating the problem of surplus capacity by pointing to the 1,000 ships laid up in the bay of Greece. My hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Mr. Fallon) asked us to look again at Redheads. I confirm that we shall reaffirm the lessons of privatisation there and take on board the lessons learned at that excellent site.

The hon. Member for Jarrow asked us to think of the community. Of course we bear in mind the effect on communities. That is why we are negotiating the continuation of the shipbuilding redundancy payments scheme.

Mr. Eddie Loyden (Liverpool, Garston): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Butcher: That is why we, too, are interested in preserving skills.

Mr. Loyden *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Minister is not giving way.

Mr. Butcher: Our help and concern has been very tangible indeed. Regional support on Wearside has been £31·5 million, on Teesside £181 million and on north Tyne £57·8 million. That is not complacency. For south Tyne the figure is £50 million and for Glasgow £88 million. Not only have we put more than £1 billion into the industry: we have recognised the social consequences of redundancies and the particular difficulties faced by communities experiencing structural unemployment.

We have been accused of complacency. I reject that accusation on four main counts. The first is the now much debated £1,170 million. The second is the negotiation for an increase in our take from the intervention fund and a much better deal for the United Kingdom in Europe. The third is our negotiations with Korea. The fourth is our commitment in hard cash in orders from the public sector for £2,800 million worth of naval vessels spread over nine yards and involving 32 vessels. That is not complacency. We take the comments made in the debate very seriously indeed. We affirm our concern for the industry.

Mr. Loyden: Rubbish.

Mr. Butcher: Unfortunately, the hon. Member has not been here for much of the debate.

On that basis, I ask my hon. Friends to reject the motion. The motion is flawed. It does not identify the key considerations for profitability, competitiveness and our ability to beat international competition. I therefore ask my hon. Friends to vote for the Prime Minister's amendment.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 188, Noes 267.

Division No. 22] **[10 pm**

AYES

Abse, Leo
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Bagier, Gordon A. T.
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnett, Guy
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Benn, Tony
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Anthony
Boothroyd, Miss Betty
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'rmline E)*
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Brown, R. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne N)*
Brown, Ron *(E'burgh, Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Buchan, Norman
Callaghan, Rt Hon J.
Campbell, Ian
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alexander *(Montg'y)*
Carter-Jones, Lewis
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clay, Robert
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S.)*
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Concannon, Rt Hon J. D.
Conlan, Bernard
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cowans, Harry
Cox, Thomas *(Tooting)*
Crowther, Stan
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Dormand, Jack
Douglas, Dick
Dubs, Alfred
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Edwards, Bob *(W'h'mpt'n SE)*
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forrester, John
Foulkes, George
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
Freud, Clement
Garrett, W. E.
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Gould, Bryan
Gourlay, Harry
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hamilton, W. W. *(Central Fife)*
Hardy, Peter
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Heffer, Eric S.
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Dr. Mark *(Durham)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Janner, Hon Greville
John, Brynmor
Johnston, Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kilroy-Silk, Robert
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Ron *(Carlisle)*
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McCartney, Hugh
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
McKelvey, William
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Maxton, John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meacher, Michael
Meadowcroft, Michael
Michie, William
Mikardo, Ian
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Nellist, David
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Penhaligon, David
Pike, Peter
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, M.
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, G. *(Coventry NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, J. W.
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Ross, Stephen *(Isle of Wight)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ryman, John
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Short, Mrs R.*(W'hampt'n NE)*
Silkin, Rt Hon J.
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C.*(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'kl'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Rt Hon John David
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Tinn, James
Torney, Tom
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert
Weetch, Ken
Welsh, Michael
White, James
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Wilson, Gordon
Winnick, David
Woodall, Alec
Wrigglesworth, Ian

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John McWilliam and
Mr. Frank Haynes.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arnold, Tom
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Sir H.
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*
Baker, Nicholas *(N Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Benyon, William
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, John
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'to'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Boyson, Dr Rhodes
Braine, Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brinton, Tim
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Bruinvels, Peter
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon A.
Bulmer, Esmond
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Hon Adam
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(N Luton)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carlisle, Rt Hon M. *(W'ton S)*
Carttiss, Michael
Chalker, Mrs Lynda
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, W. S.
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Cockeram, Eric
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Cormack, Patrick
Corrie, John
Cranborne, Viscount
Critchley, Julian
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Dover, Den
Dunn, Robert
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Edwards, Rt Hon N. *(P'broke)*
Emery, Sir Peter
Evennett, David
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Anthony
Fletcher, Alexander
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Fox, Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Gale, Roger
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony
Greenway, Harry
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, E. *(B'y St Edm'ds)*
Grist, Ian
Grylls, Michael
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Harvey, Robert
Heath, Rt Hon Edward
Heddle, John
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(G'ldford)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irving, Charles
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Robert *(W Herts)*
Joseph, Rt Hon Sir Keith
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom

Knox, David
Lamont, Norman
Lang, Ian
Lewis, Sir Kenneth *(Stamf'd)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter, *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Richard
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Neil
MacGregor, John
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New F'st)*
McQuarrie, Albert
Madel, David
Major, John
Malins, Humfrey
Malone, Gerald
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Antony
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mather, Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Hal *(B'grove)*
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Mills, Sir Peter *(West Devon)*
Mitchell, David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Fergus
Moore, John
Morris, M. *(N'hampton, S)*
Morrison, Hon C. *(Devizes)*
Morrison, Hon P. *(Chester)*
Moynihan, Hon C.
Mudd, David
Murphy, Christopher
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Onslow, Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Oppenheim, Rt Hon Mrs S.
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Sir John *(Harrow W)*
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Parris, Matthew
Patten, John *(Oxford)*
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Pollock, Alexander
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Price, Sir David
Proctor, K. Harvey
Raffan, Keith
Rhodes James, Robert
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rippon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Robinson, Mark *(N'port W)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
St. John-Stevas, Rt Hon N.
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Silvester, Fred
Sims, Roger
Skeet, T. H. H.
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speller, Tony
Spence, John
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, J.
Sumberg, David
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thatcher, Rt Hon Mrs M.
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waddington, David
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watson, John
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Whitfield, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wiggin, Jerry
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Michael
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Michael Neubert and
Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 33 (Questions on amendments)*:—

The House divided: Ayes 259, Noes 185.

Division No. 23] **[10.12 pm**

AYES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arnold, Tom
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Sir H.
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*
Baker, Nicholas *(N Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Benyon, William
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, John
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'to'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Boyson, Dr Rhodes
Braine, Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brinton, Tim
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Bruinvels, Peter
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon A.
Bulmer, Esmond
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Hon Adam
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(N Luton)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carlisle, Rt Hon M. *(W'ton S)*
Carttiss, Michael
Chalker, Mrs Lynda
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, W. S.
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Cockeram, Eric
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Cormack, Patrick
Corrie, John
Cranborne, Viscount
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Dover, Den
Dunn, Robert
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Edwards, Rt Hon N. *(P'broke)*
Emery, Sir Peter
Evennett, David
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Anthony
Fletcher, Alexander
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Fox, Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Gale, Roger
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony
Greenway, Harry
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, E. *(B'y St Edm'ds)*
Grist, Ian
Grylls, Michael
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Heddle, John
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(G'ldford)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irving, Charles
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Robert *(W Herts)*
Joseph, Rt Hon Sir Keith
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knox, David
Lamont, Norman
Lang, Ian
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lewis, Sir Kenneth *(Stamf'd)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Ian *(Havant)*
Lord, Michael
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Neil
MacGregor, John
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New F'st)*
McQuarrie, Albert
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Malone, Gerald
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Antony
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mather, Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony

Miller, Hal *(B'grove)*
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Mills, Sir Peter *(West Devon)*
Mitchell, David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Fergus
Moore, John
Morris, M. *(N'hampton, S)*
Morrison, Hon C. *(Devizes)*
Morrison, Hon P. *(Chester)*
Moynihan, Hon C.
Mudd, David
Murphy, Christopher
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Onslow, Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Sir John *(Harrow W)*
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Parris, Matthew
Patten, John *(Oxford)*
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Pollock, Alexander
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Price, Sir David
Proctor, K. Harvey
Raffan, Keith
Rhodes James, Robert
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rippon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Robinson, Mark *(N'port W)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
St. John-Stevas, Rt Hon N.
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Silvester, Fred
Sims, Roger
Skeet, T. H. H.
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speller, Tony
Spence, John
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(W Dorset)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, J.
Sumberg, David
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thatcher, Rt Hon Mrs M.
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'lch N)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waddington, David
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watson, John
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Whitfield, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wiggin, Jerry
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Michael
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John Major and
Mr. Peter Lloyd.

NOES

Abse, Leo
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Bagier, Gordon A. T.
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnett, Guy
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Benn, Tony
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Birmingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Anthony
Boothroyd, Miss Betty
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'fermline E)*
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Brown, R. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne N)*
Brown, Ron *(E'burgh, Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Buchan, Norman
Callaghan, Rt Hon J.
Campbell, Ian
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alexander *(Montg'y)*
Carter-Jones, Lewis
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clay, Robert
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S.)*
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Concannon, Rt Hon J. D.
Conlan, Bernard
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cowans, Harry
Cox, Thomas *(Tooting)*
Crowther, Stan
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Dormand, Jack
Douglas, Dick
Dubs, Alfred
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forrester, John
Foulkes, George
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
Freud, Clement
Garrett, W. E.
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Gould, Bryan
Gourlay, Harry
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hamilton, W. W. *(Central Fife)*
Hardy, Peter
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Heffer, Eric S.
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Dr. Mark *(Durham)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Janner, Hon Greville
John, Brynmor
Johnston, Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kilroy-Silk, Robert
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamble, David
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Ron *(Carlisle)*
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McCartney, Hugh
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
McKelvey, William
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Maxton, John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meacher, Michael
Meadowcroft, Michael
Michie, William
Mikardo, Ian
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Nellist, David
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Penhaligon, David
Pike, Peter
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, M.
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, G. *(Coventry NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, J. W.
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Ross, Stephen *(Isle of Wight)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ryman, John
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Short, Mrs R. *(W'hampt'n NE)*
Silkin, Rt Hon J.
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'ld'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Rt Hon John David
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Tinn, James
Torney, Tom
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert
Weetch, Ken
Welsh, Michael
White, James
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Wilson, Gordon
Winnick, David
Woodall, Alec

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John McWilliam and
Mr. Frank Haynes.

Question accordingly agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House recognises the efforts being made by the British shipbuilding industry to overcome its present difficulties; notes that the Government has provided over £1,000 million of taxpayers' money to British Shipbuilders since 1979; recognises that only by becoming more competitive can the British shipbuilding industry have a secure future; welcomes the efforts of the industry's management to achieve that objective; and endorses the Government's decision to return British Shipbuilders' warship building interest to the private sector as soon as possible.

Airey Houses (Grants)

10.25 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Sir George Young): I beg to move,

That the draft Grants by Local Authorities (Appropriate Percentage and Exchequer Contribution) (Repairs Grant for Airey Houses) (Variation) Order 1984, which was laid before this House on 22nd October, in the last Session of Parliament, be approved.

It may be useful for hon. Members if I explain the circumstances that have given rise to this draft order.

Some five years ago, serious defects were discovered in a prefabricated reinforced concrete house of the Airey design, of which some 25,000 were built by the public sector in England and Wales after the second world war. The reinforced concrete structural posts of the house—which are concealed within the cavity wall and thus not capable of easy visual inspection—were found to be seriously cracked and spalled as a result of the corrosion of the tubular steel reinforcement within the concrete posts. Further examination of examples of this type revealed that this was affecting, actually or potentially, all houses of this type.

The defects entail the progressive deterioration, generally within a period of 30 years or so, of the PRC structural members. But for private owners of houses subject to this deterioration, and some 2,000 Airey houses have been sold by the public sector, the problem is not simply technical. In their unrepaired state, the houses are unmortgageable; private owners face substantial losses compared with the price paid by them, and they are unable to move. As most of them bought their houses before the defects or potential defects were detected and their significance understood, neither the purchasers nor the public sector bodies as vendors were in a position to protect the purchasers against incurring these losses.

This pattern of circumstances emerged first in 1981-82 in respect of owners of Airey houses, though, as hon. Members will know, subsequent research by the Building Research Establishment has revealed that all PRC dwellings designed before 1960 are likely to be similarly affected by the defects.

On 7 September 1982 my right hon. Friend the then Minister for Housing and Construction, the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Mr. Stanley), announced the Government's decision to make special assistance available to those who had purchased Airey houses at valuations that did not reflect the existence of the structural defects of the type I have described.

The scheme of assistance, which came into effect on 14 February 1983, has been administered by the local authorities, and it has been a matter for their discretion whether or not they give help under it and what form of help is given in a particular case. I am glad to say that most authorities have sought to help those who have applied.

Under the discretionary scheme, eligible owners were able to apply either for a repairs grant of 90 per cent. of repairs costs subject to an eligible expense limit of £14,000 in Greater London and £10,500 elsewhere, or to have their house repurchased by the local authority at its current market value, plus an ex-gratia payment equal to 90 per cent. of the difference between the current market value and the "defect-free" value of the house.

Expenditure incurred by authorities under the scheme on repairs grants, and ex-gratia payments in cases of repurchase, has been reimbursed by the Exchequer at a rate of 100 per cent. This high rate of contribution is in recognition of the voluntary nature of local authorities' participation in the scheme.

Three statutory instruments were made to bring the repairs grant component of the discretionary scheme into effect. Two were subject to the negative resolution procedure. The first enabled repairs grants to be given under the Housing Act 1974 in respect of Airey houses—SI 1983, No. 4, the Grants by Local Authorities (Repairs Grants for Airey Houses) Order 1983. The second set the eligible expense limits for such grants—SI 1982, No. 1895, the Grants by Local Authorities (Repairs Grants for Airey Houses) (Eligible Expense Limits) Order 1982. The third order required affirmative resolution of the House and set the rate at which a grant may be given by a local authority at 90 per cent. and the rate of Exchequer contribution towards the cost of that grant at 100 per cent. That order was debated and approved by the House on 24 January 1983.

The draft order before the House tonight seeks to vary the terms of that third order. Two related orders subject to negative resolution were laid before the House on 9 November—the Grants by Local Authorities (Repairs Grants for Airey Houses) (Revocation) Order 1984, and the Grants by Local Authorities (Repairs for Airey Houses) Order (Eligible Expense Limits) (Variation) Order 1984.

That brings me to the reason for the laying of this draft order and the related orders. Last Session, Parliament enacted the Housing Defects Act, and under the Act a statutory scheme of assistance for owners of prefabricated reinforced concrete dwellings designed before 1960 is to come into effect on 1 December. Designations and orders have been made for that purpose and the Department and the Welsh Office have issued a circular describing the arrangements. Similar arrangements are being brought into effect in Scotland on the same date though, as there are no Airey houses in Scotland, that country is not affected by the matters of concern to us in this debate.

Owners of Airey houses who have made no application before 1 December under the discretionary scheme will be able to apply for the assistance to which they are entitled under the Act. Their position will be the same as that of private owners of other types of PRC dwellings in respect of which assistance will now be available. They will no longer be able to obtain that help by applying under the discretionary scheme after 1 December.

I should like to dwell on this point for just a moment. Many of us heard my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Heddle) on the radio this morning. He was seeking clarification of the position of those who wish to have their Airey house repurchased. I think that he was speaking on behalf of his constituents.

The first point I want to stress is that Airey owners have never had the right under circular 6/83 to require the council to buy back their house. The present scheme is entirely at the discretion of the council. It is for the council to decide whether to operate the scheme and whether to give assistance by way of repairs grant or repurchase.

One or two authorities do not operate the scheme at all. Others do not agree to repurchase properties, only to give grants. Under the statutory scheme to come into effect on 1 December, those who were eligible to apply under the discretionary scheme will now have a right to assistance.

Secondly, I wish to clarify the position of those who were delaying an application for repurchase under the discretionary scheme. When the Airey scheme was announced on 7 September 1982, it was decided that Exchequer contribution should be available only in respect of applications for repurchase received in the three-year period up to 7 September 1985.

At that time there was no prospect of legislation on housing defects generally, and, indeed, there was little evidence that other house types were similarly affected. I have already explained the advent of the Housing Defects Act and in the course of the Bill there was no question but that the new scheme under the Act would subsume the existing discretionary scheme. This will take place on 1 December.

My hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire has, quite understandably, expressed concern about the position of those who have not yet applied for repurchase under the discretionary scheme.

The only difference between the discretionary scheme and the statutory scheme in this respect is that, for the latter, the Act lays down in section 3 the criteria by which an authority decides whether assistance should be by reinstatement grant or repurchase. For example, repurchase must be the form of assistance offered if the house, after repair, will not provide a further life of 30 years or be mortgageable. I should also draw my hon. Friend's attention to the provision in section 3(5) of the Act to the effect that repurchase must also be the form of assistance offered if it is unreasonable to expect the owner to await or secure the carrying out of the reinstatement works.

It is true that Airey owners applying under the Act will not be able to guarantee repurchase, but they cannot do that at the moment because they have no right. It would not be correct for their position to be different from that of other owners applying under the Act, especially as there is no specific statutory authority for repurchase under the discretionary scheme. It is worth adding that under the statutory scheme repurchase could take place up to 1994 rather than 1985 and that the terms of repurchase are marginally more favourable to the owner than under the discretionary scheme.

There is no question of Airey owners having to complete the resale of their houses by 1 December in order not to lose out under the new arrangements. The result which we are trying to achieve by this package of orders, and our advice to local authorities, is that owners who apply by 30 November should have a choice of proceeding under the discretionary scheme or of applying under the Act.

If Airey owners wish to secure for themselves this choice and they have not yet applied under the discretionary scheme, they need simply make an application under it before 1 December—a letter to the local authority will suffice. But if they do not apply by then, they will still be entitled to assistance under the Act. The only difference will be that, as I have said, under the Act it cannot be guaranteed that assistance will be by means of repurchase, rather than reinstatement, because under the Act the form of assistance depends on the application of the statutory conditions in each particular case.

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): Most of us have listened to my hon. Friend in complete bafflement. Will he advise us on how on earth we are to get across what he is saying to our constituents? I am at a complete loss as to how to do so.

Sir George Young: With respect, I think that it is my hon. Friends' job to interpret legislation in the best interests of their constituents. But if my hon. Friend wishes his constituents to keep their options open, they have only to apply under the discretionary scheme before 1 December. In that way they will obtain the advantage of the discretionary and statutory schemes.

Mr. Ivor Stanbrook (Orpington): Will my hon. Friend confirm that neither the old nor the new scheme applies to houses built originally in the private sector and purchased by private owners? Is it not true to say that no assistance is forthcoming for such private owners?

Sir George Young: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The discretionary and statutory schemes apply to houses that originated in the public sector. I am reluctant to impose the rest of the order's explanation on my hon. Friends, but I am nearly at an end.

Mr. Michael Knowles (Nottingham, East): The advice that my hon. Friend has just given indicates that applications should be made for discretionary grants under the existing legislation before 1 December. But if such an application were made and accepted by the local authority, would not the applicant then be unable to apply for possibly more advantageous assistance under the Housing Defects Act?

Sir George Young: My hon. Friend is not quite right. If those involved had not started the work, they could at any point withdraw their application under the discretionary scheme, and reapply after 1 December under the statutory scheme. So the option would be kept open, even if the local authority approved the application, as long as work had not commenced.

But by way of encouragement to my hon. Friends, perhaps I should state that the position was set out clearly in the draft circular which the department sent to the local authority associations on 25 September and was repeated in circular 28/84 sent out by the Department on 12 November.

There are Airey owners who have already applied under the discretionary scheme and whose applications have not yet been brought to a conclusion either in the start of repairs under an approval for grant, or by the completion of repurchase.

The present package of orders, including the draft order before the House now, deals with cases in which owners of Airey houses have already applied for assistance by means of grant under the discretionary scheme. We believe it is sensible, so far as the local authorities are concerned, that the detailed arrangements for such people should be brought into line with the provisions applying under the statutory scheme.

The orders which were subject to negative resolution, to which I referred just now, have the effect of limiting the availability of repairs grants under the 1974 Act to Airey owners who have applied by 30 November; and of setting the eligible expense limit for cases which proceed under the revised arrangements, but in respect of which grant has not yet been approved, at £14,000 throughout the country. This brings the limit into line with the expenditure limit set under the Housing Defects Act for the statutory scheme.

[Sir George Young]

The Act provides that the Exchequer contribution towards reinstatement grants paid by authorities under the statutory scheme should be at the rate of 90 per cent.

The draft order before the House brings the discretionary scheme into line by providing that the Exchequer contribution in respect of grants approved after 1 December should also be at the rate of 90 per cent.

I apologise for having to take up the House's time in explaining the background to this draft order. I can see that what is going on is not immediately obvious to the layman. Procedurally, the position is complicated. But our purpose is relatively simple: to achieve consistency of treatment of grants for the repair of Airey houses, whether in the case of discretionary grants which can continue to be given under the 1974 Act or under the statutory scheme provided by the Housing Defects Act.

I commend the order to the House.

10.40 pm

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): I understand the queries to the Minister, although the way in which some questions were put to him was less than fair. The Minister tried his best to explain a bad case. It is unacceptable for the Minister to come to the House on 27 November to make a statement that affects several hundreds of people who thought that they had another nine or 12 months to make a decision.

Airey house owners did not expect to have only a couple of days in which to make a decision, without all the facts being available. They do not know whether they will receive better treatment under the statutory scheme, because that scheme is not the same as the voluntary scheme.

I welcome the opportunity for hon. Members with Airey houses in their constituencies to raise the issue once again. The Minister said that about 25,000 such houses were built in the public sector in the United Kingdom. They are spread amongst at least 189 housing authorities. The latest note concerning distribution is dated 23 November 1981 and does not include Birmingham. Birmingham built 88 Airey houses and 28 of them are in my constituency.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Mansfield (Mr. Concannon), who cannot be here tonight, confirmed a few miunutes ago that he helped build Airey houses in his constituecy. Mansfield is not on the list deposited in the Library. Will the Minister place more updated information in the Library?

I accept that about 10 per cent. of Airey houses were built in Leeds, the base of the Airey company. Only 123 of the 189 authorities on the list built 200 or more. The average is 116, and only 59 authorities built more than 169 houses. Most of them built only in tens or twenties. Perhaps someone went round the country telling local authorities, "We have built a lot in Leeds. Why don't you try some out to see how things go?". Some authorities built fewer than 10 Airey houses.

Purchasers have the choice of selling back to the local authority. That scheme might solve one immediate problem—that of owning an unmarketable asset. But it does not solve all the problems. What happens if the local authority fails to repair the house sold to it? That problem will have to be solved when the legislation takes full effect.

What will happen to people who have sold back to the council and who wish to remain in their home? Before I knew about tonight's order I received a letter from a constituent dated 20 November. My constituent had sold his house back to the council and was a retired skilled building worker. He said:

"however, we are very concerned as to the safety aspect of the structural deterioration.

Five of the six columns that are exposed in the house have long cracks running upwards from below floor levels . . . These are becoming increasingly worse as time goes by."

Last Friday, after crawling around under the house, I found cracks 15 in or 16 in long running from the base of the floor. The fact that the owner has sold his house back to the council does not solve his problem. He may be living in a house that is unsafe due to the deterioration of the pillars. He has spent a considerable amount on his house, and is reluctant to continue extending and improving that property because he does not know what will happen to the house in the medium to long term.

The Under-Secretary of State referred to some of the limits that the Treasury has placed on expenditure. I understand that the estimated average market value cost of repurchase at the time the Housing Defects Bill and the Airey schemes were being considered was put at £1,800 per dwelling. I ask the Under-Secretary of State to respond to the circular issued to hon. Members by Shelter. The organisation highlights the case of two Airey houses in a council area near London which were originally sold for £8,000. They have just been valued at £38,000 and £54,000 respectively. What is the position when such valuations are put on houses either before Friday, when the present scheme lapses, or after Friday when the statutory scheme starts? What has been the expenditure to date?

I understand the logic of the Government's argument in trying to match the 90 per cent. reimbursement to local authorities with the measures in the statutory scheme. The fact is that, whichever way one looks at this, local authorities now get 100 per cent. of what they spent on the refurbishment or repurchase and, after Friday, they will get 90 per cent. That is a cut. How much money has been spent by local authorities, reimbursed in full by the Government, to update the scheme for voluntary sales back to local authorities? The Under-Secretary of State should have that information available to him from the Treasury.

What happens to someone who does not sell back and decides to take a gamble that his house will be OK? The adjoining half of the property may still be in the hands of the local authority. If only 10 per cent. of the houses have been sold, the chances are nine to one that the other half of the property is in the hands of the local authority. The owner will not be able to sell, even if he has had repairs done. The building societies will not offer a mortgage to any potential purchaser if the joint structure has not been dealt with completely. It behoves the Under-Secretary of State to give an update on the discussions about a warranty scheme that have been taking place with the National House Building Council and the Building Societies Association. As I understand it, unless all the houses in a block—whether there are two or four—are dealt with, it does not matter if one or two owner-occupied houses have been repaired. Those owner-occupied properties are unsaleable if the adjoining properties are in local authority hands and the local authority has not had the resources to carry out repairs.

Sir George Young: The hon. Gentleman said that someone might take a gamble and go for reinstatement and then discover that the property was not mortgageable. In those circumstances, the person would not have been able to get a reinstatement grant under the Act. The Act clearly states that, unless the property is mortgageable, reinstatement is not available. In those circumstances, repurchase would be the only option under the Act, so the person would not be in the position to take a gamble.

Mr. Rooker: I do not think that it is as clear as that. If a house were mortgageable as an individual property —the valuations were correct and the cost of putting it right fell within the guidelines—there would still be a problem, if adjoining houses were owned by a local authority that, because of restrictions on its expenditure had not been able to repair its properties. Would building societies give a mortgage on that owner-occupied property? I understand that they would not do that. That is why the Government are having discussions with the building societies. Perhaps the Minister will expand on his intervention when he winds up.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary, the Earl of Avon, told the Institute of Housing in Birmingham last week:

"There is still a large element of speculation in many of the statements which are made about the scale of defects . . . Where there are no facts, then let us see what can be done to obtain the information necessary to paint as complete and as accurate picture as possible . . . So far as I am aware, there is no firm evidence of the number of dwellings affected . . . Few authorities have this information in respect of their own stock".

Given that the Housing Defects Act is about to come into force, I find the Ministers's comments complacent. He spoke about resources and said:

"it is unsound to argue that repairs to defective dwellings, for example, are going to cost £X millions if the extent of the problem has not been established."

The Minister quoted the Building Research Establishment's conclusion that it will often be 10 or 20 years or more before the processes of deterioration result in physical damage. He then argued:

"The costs of repairs should therefore be considered in the context of general repair programmes"

of local authorities. That is not good enough for Airey houses or for any of the houses covered by the Housing Defects Act.

No one can contradict me when I say that extra responsibilities are being imposed on local authorities as a result of the discovery, after all these years, that several hundred thousand non-traditional dwellings may be subject to structural defects and they will all require individual inspection. That was never budgeted for by local authority housing departments. It behoves the Government to give local authorities the extra resources required to carry out their responsibilities. They should not have to take money from existing programmes for housing improvement grants, general repairs and so on.

The required expenditure could be massive. Therefore, local authorities must be given the money to enable them to check on the scale of the problem. The Earl of Avon says that the problem must be investigated, but the Government withhold from local authorities the resources to enable them to find out the facts.

Before we are asked to consider any orders under the Housing Defects Act, Ministers must assure us that they will give local authorities the wherewithal to carry out their new responsibilities. Without that, a fraud will be perpetrated on the people in the operation of the Housing Defects Act. Many people think that because that legislation affects all non-traditional properties except Airey houses, action will be taken soon about their dwellings whether the occupiers are local authority tenants or owner-occupiers. That is not the case.

Unless the Government are prepared to put resources behind their Act, it will be seen as a fraud. I do not want that to happen, because there are a lot of worried people living in non-traditional homes. They are entitled to understand and believe that, having passed the legislation, Parliament will give the local authorities the necessary resources to ensure that the legislation becomes as effective as hon. Members thought it was when it was passed by the House of Commons.

10.55 pm

Mr. John Heddle (Mid-Staffordshire): I start by declaring an interest. I am a vice-president of the Building Societies Association, and I regret the fact that the building societies movement, through the constituent societies, has placed a blanket blight on the 25,000 properties that we are discussing tonight. Undoubtedly, there are a number that are inherently defective; there are an even greater number that are sound in wind and limb.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend and his colleagues in the Department of the Environment. I also pay tribute to the Government for having been the first Government for a generation to acknowledge that a significant number of system-built houses that have been available to rent and to purchase since the war have defects. The Government came to the House and announced, I think in September 1982, following a campaign by my hon. Friends and by Opposition Members, that the defects existed. It is right that we should place on record our gratitude, on behalf of our constituents, for the fact that the Government have made a significant sum available to try to reinstate and rehabilitate the properties, and to reinstate and rehabilitate the quality of life of the former tenants.

In the Radio 4 interview this morning to which my hon. Friend referred, I said that the bureaucratic left hand seemed not to know what the administrative right hand was doing. I do not apologise for that remark and I do not retract that sentiment. It is extraordinary that on the one bureaucratic hand we are dealing with the small print of circular 6/83, published on 14 February 1983, which, as my hon. Friend pointed out—he was right to correct me —said that former tenants, now owner-occupiers of the Airey houses, do not have the right to sell back. Nevertheless, paragraph 29 of that circular sets out clearly that an application to repurchase must be received by the local authority by 7 September 1985. That surely implies that the owner-occupier has a right. All he is obliged to do is to tell the local authority, in the words of paragraph 29, and his application to repurchase must have been received by the local authority by that date.

The draft circular was sent out by the Department in September, when the majority of senior personnel in local authority housing departments throughout the country were probably on holiday, or recovering from being on holiday, and therefore were not in a position to brief the Association of District Councils, which was not fully staffed to be able to brief the constituent local housing authorities to tell their councillors and the people affected of the terms, which differ from and contradict — beneficially, I agree—those of circular 28/84.

[Mr. John Heddle]

The debate highlights the fact that the procedure, though generous in intent, is itself far from defect-free. I submit to my hon. Friend that all owner-occupiers of Airey houses should have had and still should have the right to sell their properties back to the local authorities, and that those local authorities should have a statutory duty to buy them back. Otherwise, it makes nonsense of the intent of circular 6/83.

Is it not nonsense that two circulars should be in existence simultaneously and that one of them, if it does not contradict the other, certainly conflicts with it?

Why is a former tenant, who has exercised his statutory right to buy, to receive only 95 per cent. of the defect-free value in compensation? Surely the whole basis of compensation enshrined in the Land Compensation Act 1973 was that anyone affected by some act for which he or she was not responsible should be placed in the same position after the event as he or she was before it. Therefore, because there is an inevitable blight on all these properties, district valuers—being the admirable human beings that they are — will subconsciously subtract perhaps 5 per cent. from the value of the property. Therefore, the owner-occupier should receive 105 per cent. of the defect-free value compensation less the 5 per cent. tolerance, to bring it back to 100 per cent.

The hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) referred to the position of the owner-occupier who sells back to the local authority but remains in the property as a tenant. I ask my hon. Friend to confirm that, having once more become a tenant, that person will be entitled to the credit of the subsequent years occupation should he or she wish to exercise the right to buy another property from a local authority.

My constituents, Mr. and Mrs. P. Ward of 12 Beech gardens, Lichfield, look forward to receiving my hon. Friend's unequivocal and unqualified confirmation that they will be entitled to receive compensation based on current market value, provided that they exercise — I chose my words carefully — those rights that were enshrined in principle in both the circulars but not in law before 7 September next year, and that in so doing they will not lose any of the discount that they could have lost if they were forced to tell the local authority before the close of business this Friday, 30 November, that they would otherwise have had to sell back their property.

Provided that my hon. Friend can give that assurance, hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber will leave tonight replete and content in the knowledge that all our constituents will have enjoyed the right of compensation that they rightfully deserve.

11.3 pm

Mr. Robert Litherland (Manchester, Central): In debates on the Housing Defects Act 1984, both in this Chamber and in Committee, it was always accepted by hon. Members on both sides of the House and other interested parties that the Government's intention to bring the Act into force as soon as possible was a welcome move. I doubt whether the Airey house owners will welcome its being brought to fruition so quickly through this variation order.

Opposition Members have always argued that the Act has immense limitations. It is not all-embracing and does not address itself to the real problems confronting local authorities that have major housing problems caused by system-built defective housing.

When the Act comes into force on 1 December it will assist owner-occupiers such as owners of Airey houses who have purchased in good faith from local authorities and then found the properties to have latent defects. There is no argument about that, and I say good luck to them. After all, they bought the houses in good faith.

Local authorities also had those houses built in good faith, mainly due to promptings from various Governments with the offers of subsidies if they built system-built, package-deal housing. That housing was seen as the panacea of all our housing ills in the 1950s, 1960s and the early 1970s. That high density living accommodation did not solve the problems that then existed and has since created other problems.

The Act and the order do not even begin to scratch the surface of the problem. In one of its submissions to the Minister the Association of Metropolitan Authorities claimed that about £10 billion would be needed to put right the defects in post-war non-traditional housing. As we have stressed from the outset, it is not what is in the Act but what is left out. The Government's efforts may be welcome, but they are feeble in the extreme.

Shelter has highlighted the deficiencies in the repair schemes for this type of property and the delay in bringing forward a properly accepted scheme. Indeed, Shelter doubts whether the Act can operate until suitable arrangements have been made to test and approve potential repair methods. Even if a scheme were acceptable to the National House Building Council and the Building Societies Association were devised, it would come well after 1 December, when the Act comes into force.

As a result of that delay, Airey houses and other system-built properties will have to be repurchased. Bringing the Act into force before a suitable scheme for approving and assuring repair methods is in operation will cause many problems, not least an increase in the financial cost to local authorities. If no scheme has come to fruition and a large number of applications come forward for repurchase the financial burden will be very heavy indeed and the NHBC repair scheme could fall by the wayside. If councils have to find the capital cost of reinstatement grants without financial assistance from the Government in their housing investment programme allocations—the Chancellor's autumn statement made it clear that there would be cuts and there would be cuts and there is bound to be a further reduction in housing investment, especially in 1985-86—housing departments will be forced to pass on the burden to other areas of the housing programme.

Under the Act, payments to owner-occupiers in respect of defective housing will become mandatory. Local authority owned defective housing may therefore suffer because concils cannot meet repair costs. The order epitomises the distinction made by the Government between owner-occupiers and council tenants. It is an unsatisfactory approach to this massive problem because it deals only with a very limited number of properties. I cannot for the life of me understand how the properties are designated. What is the difference between Airey housing or any of the other types designated and the properties on Wellington street estate in my constituency, to which I have referred many times in the House and in Committee,

which were built by Bison Northern Concrete only 12 years ago but are being knocked down by bulldozers right now. How much more defective can housing be?

The Government are dealing with a limited number of dwellings because they are interested only in the value of property. That is why there is discrimination. The Government are obsessed with money values. Where are their social values? Where is their consideration for council tenants who have to endure the misery of poorly-constructed, condensation-ridden properties which are expensive and difficult to heat? A lady came to see me because her husband was coming out of Christie hospital dying of cancer into a fungus-ridden flat in one of these system built properties. We had to bring in direct labour to modernise the property. *[Interruption.]* It is no laughing matter.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I did not say that it was.

Mr. Litherland: The property had to be decorated so that a man could die with some dignity.

The Minister knows that the problem exists. He saw a small fraction of it on his last visit to Manchester, although he will not come to visit Wellington street.

Mr. Winterton: My hon. Friend has not been asked —and the estate has been knocked down.

Mr. Litherland: I have sent many invitations to the Minister, but he has refused to come to Wellington street or to authorise a public investigation.

The building societies are not willing to give mortgages on such properties. The owner-occupiers who live on defective housing estates have no chance of selling their properties. I should like to quote from an article in the magazine *Building* of 23 November.

"Ever since the scope of the problem became kmown, it was seen as a potentially major setback to the Government's council house sales policy."

That is the Government's real concern.

"To prevent this two things were considered vital: to provide for repairs to defective units and to ensure that following the repairs the properties would be mortgageable . . . But the question of saleability was proving tricky, as building societies made it plain that they would not consider PRC homes—even after repairs —to be an acceptable risk for mortgage purposes unless they came with some kind of warranty."

There is no proper repair scheme, and no warranty. The problem is immense and the Government's remedy is futile. There is a vast proportion of system-build in my constituency and every day the situation deteriorates. Manchester is only one of seven authorities that have decided to demolish Bison wall frame housing. Other systems are in the pipeline for demolition, and many other authorities with various system schemes will demolish unless extra money is forthcoming.

The Government recognise the unfairness for the private owner. They should also recognise the unfairness to local authorities which built the houses in good faith on the recommendation of past Governments. They should recognise that the vast majority of those living in defective and potentially defective homes are tenants, and that those tenants have been overlooked by the Government.

Local authorities such as Manchester want financial support for planned repair programmes or, where necessary, demolition. The Housing Defects Act 1984 and the variation order merely tinker with the problem. The Government are using the proverbial piece of Elastoplast when the patient is bleeding to death.

11.13 pm

Mr. Conal Gregory (York): Airey homes are one of at least 26 types of prefabricated reinforced concrete housing. At the time of construction, builders believed that reinforced concrete would last for a very long time. As we now know only too well, this is not the case. In my own division of York, there are some 199 Airey and Unity houses. There are also Orlit houses and others not under immediate consideration. Many of the houses have been well looked after and improved. Many of the couples who have come to see me in my surgery or have been in contact with me have their life savings wrapped up in those homes. Those people will listen to this debate with considerable concern.

My hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Heddle) correctly declared his interest, but he skated over the role of the Building Societies Association, which I believe has been rather too cautious. A great deal of professional expertise could have been directed towards helping the people of York and many other areas.

It is curious that, although there might be a mortgage on a property, when the owner wishes to move because of a job or hospital commitments, the building societies show him the door. Moreover, prospective purchasers who have had a survey done at their own expense are also shown the door. Where is the caring attitude and the professional skill there? Surely a body such as the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, which is often employed by building societies or other bodies, could have produced a voluntary scheme. There must be a note of disappointment about an appropriate scheme not having been developed.

The difficulty is that owners of the homes which we are discussing are immobile. Some live in caravans in other parts of the country because they have had to leave their home, although they have a purchaser in mind. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will say whether such people are likely to get professional help and whether, through discussions with the Building Societies Association, mobility will be possible.

The order refers to a reduction from 100 per cent. to 90 per cent. in the Government's support to local authorities for the cost repurchase or grant. Why should Government support not be as generous as the 100 per cent. on the Airey scheme for grant and repurchase? Why is it not the 105 per cent. of which my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Heddle) spoke? I hope that he will speak in similar terms when he is wearing his other hat in the Building Societies Association. There is a need for proper compensation. The Government first announced a scheme to help private owners of Airey houses that had been purchased from a local authority as long ago as 7 September 1982. Well over two years later, there is still anxiety. Will my hon. Friend use his good offices to publicise, through the lobby press, what a good scheme he is offering? There is much anxiety among professional housing managers about how it works and the length of time envisaged. Home owners ask us for clarification and information, which is difficult to come by unless one reads professional housing publications.

The studies by the Building Research Establishment are professional. There should be a professional approach by those who want to help investors own their own home. I trust that, through the publicity of this debate and otherwise, we can relieve the tension and anxiety of people who have bought these homes.

11.18 pm

Mr. Michael Meadowcroft (Leeds, West): The hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Heddle) complimented the Government on two counts. I can agree with him on one—that they recognised the scale of the problem and brought forward the Housing Defects Act 1984. I cannot agree with him on the second, which is that the Government have provided the resources to deal with the problem. There is no evidence to suggest that the Government have produced extra funds nationally to assist hard-pressed local authorities. It is no use recognising the massive problems of local authorities—Leeds has the major problem—without taking account of the variation between one local authority and another.

The order will not make much difference to the financial problems of local authorities, but what difference it makes is for the worse. It was the Government's express wish that, wherever possible, the owner should receive a repairs grant rather than have his or her home repurchased. That is a legitimate wish, but most of the people involved are far too shrewd and sensible to accede to the Government's wish because, unfortunately, the Government's wish does not help them in the long run.

In Leeds, for example, four out of five of those who have found themselves in this position have applied to have their houses repurchased by the local authority. Only 56 repair grants have been made in Leeds. I accept that there might be a few more in the pipeline. However, no fewer than 311 properties have had to be repurchased by the local authority at a cost of about £5·25 million. That substantial capital sum is set against Leed's future housing allocation. A local authority that is facing the problem of Airey houses and other reinforced concrete houses will not be able to cope without the provision of extra finance.

The hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) said that the valuation of such houses in the London area was from £38,000 to £54,000. The average repurchase price in Leeds is slightly more than £16,000 and the repairs to each house are costing on average £11,500. There is an obvious differential. The precedent that is being set by the treatment of Airey houses may well extend to other types of house and that factor is worrying Leeds and other authorities. They are afraid that they will be forced to repurchase the houses without the provision of extra capital. It will be impossible to find the sums involved.

It seems that the Government's approach to repair grants encompasses three different criteria. First, the Minister mentioned the availability of a mortgage if the repairs have been carried out. The other two criteria are equally important. The first of them is that there should be an economic consideration, in other words, an owner should not be placed in financial hardship. The average sum being found by owners is about £2,500. There are many owners who would be unable to find such a sum so they would be excluded under one criterion.

The third criterion is that of a 30-year life. Given our experience of system-built houses, we would be hard pressed to say that in all cases the houses will be satisfactory for a further 30 years. The solution that has been found by the Leeds council may well put its Airey houses in that category but the rest remain imponderables. The council's technical experts are expressing doubts about being able to find a solution for other similar types of house. This means that fewer than 20 per cent. will be taking up the repair grant option. Virtually everyone may ask for his house to be repurchased by the local authority.

The most bizarre factor is the right to buy, which was referred to by the hon. Members for Perry Barr and for Mid-Staffordshire. If a person asks for his house to be repurchased by the local authority and he is eligible for discount because he has lived in it for two years, the local authority cannot include the cost of the dwelling's renovation in the valuation. The occupier will be able to buy the house back from the local authority, after the authority has spent about £11,500 to repair it at current prices, without having to pay any part of those costs. What incentive is there for anyone to apply for a repair grant when that sort of provision is available under the Act? The order is unlikely to have any real effect. Its only effect is likely to be detrimental to local authorities.

The building societies are somewhat remiss in the extent of their caution, which extends beyond the physical problems of the dwellings. At a meeting of officials of the Leeds city council and the building societies, the building society representatives said that they would want a warranty, which in its way was understandable. They said also that it would not be sufficient for all the houses or one block to be treated. They wanted the entire neighbourhood to be treated. That way, people who examine the aesthetic appearance of the houses could say that they were mortgageable. If that is the extent of the caution, I fear that the number of people who will fulfil the criteria for repair grants will be few and far between. I suspect that the Government's desire to encourage people to seek repairs grants rather than repurchases, will not be fulfilled, even with Airey houses. It will be even less the case for other PRC houses.

11.24 pm

Mr. Martin Redmond (Don Valley): I assure the Minister that I understood every word he said until we heard the usual gobbledegook that confuses most people until they get a Philadelphian lawyer to interpret it. No matter which policies are advocated, they will not materialise unless there is cash to back them. Therefore, Airey-type house owners can only be frustrated by the Government's policies.

I wonder whether the Minister would consult some history books to see how the prefab problem was resolved. It was a more enormous problem than this one. Yet, with the co-operation of tenants, the councils and the Government resolved it satisfactorily. Every time we consider Airey housing and improvement grants, more problems seem to have accumulated. It may be helpful if the Minister looked at history books to see how the prefab problem was resolved.

If Airey housing were found in Conservative constituencies, the Department of the Environment might be a little more helpful in attempting to resolve the problem. I cannot understand why, when the problem is so acute, the Department of the Environment cannot provide more relief. On 1 December, when the Department of the Environment has played the publicity game, a mass of people may queue at local authorities' doors expecting grants or expecting the authorities to purchase their houses. We will again be using local authorities as whipping boys.

In Doncaster there are many houses of the semi-detached type. One was bought privately, but the others

remain in the public sector. If we resolve the problem in the private sector, how will the private owner react if the local authority cannot rectify the problem next door? Building societies will look keenly at possible damage when they give a mortgage.

A few days ago, the National Coal Board, which owns many Airey-type houses, was in the process of selling 11 of them, when the local authority bought the remaining stock. Those 11 tenants are now in limbo because the board is still the owner of the property. Could they get a grant, or will the NCB use some of the money which we granted it last night to rectify the problem?

The housing investment programme allocation is all-important. Without a reasonable cake, there are many problems. The Chancellor of the Exchequer has used the public sector as a whipping boy in seeking to save a few bob. Building firms in my constituency and the rest of Doncaster are interested in what is to happen to Airey houses because, as the cake diminishes, so does the number of building firms and the employment they provide in the constituency.

If we treat Airey house owners favourably, how will other people in the public sector react? Doncaster metropolitan district council has a marvellous tenants' association that covers the whole of the borough. There are well in excess of 170 branches and they will want to have a say if money starts going to Airey houses alone. Private sector improvement grants were held up in August 1983 because the cash had run out. There are 8,000 applications for improvement grants in the pipeline at present. There is a bob or two involved there.

The council owns 680 Airey-type houses and there are 200 in the private sector. There are also 35,000 council houses, some of which need repair. We can tinker with the cake, but unless it is increased the problem will become worse.

I hope that the Minister will return to his Department and get a few more pounds for a worthy scheme.

11.31 pm

Mr. Derek Fatchett (Leeds, Central): I do not intend to delay the House for many minutes; I am essentially a populist and I realise that the Tories are somewhat tired of talking about housing, because it is not a problem that normally affects them.

My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) said that he found the Minister's contribution somewhat difficult to understand. I disagree with my hon. Friend, because I thought that it was typical of all Conservative contributions on housing—restrictive and dogmatic. It is restrictive because it recognises a problem, as the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Meadowcroft) said, but does little about it. The proposals do not substantially help those who bought Airey houses. The measure is restrictive in its approach to local authorities by reducing the amount of grant available from 100 to 90 per cent.

The measure is restrictive in another respect, which has been mentioned by Conservative Members, because it introduces a time scale which will make it almost impossible for many people to exercise the right that the Government have grudgingly given them. It is ideological in another sense, and that is typical of the Tory approach. We seem to be interested in only one section—roughly 10 per cent. of the people who live in system-built houses. They are those who made the mistake of buying those houses.

The Tory party has a great deal to answer for. The Tories come here tonight wringing their hands about the problems that those people now face, but I expect that the hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Heddle) spent a good deal of time going to local authority tenants saying, "Buy your council house. It is a good buy." That was bad advice. I would not go running to him for professional advice. He does not have to declare and define his interest to me, because I have seen the type of political advice that he gives.

Those of the hon. Member's constituents who decided to buy their council houses as a result of his political persuasion must have a great deal to regret, financially and in many other respects.

The Government are not bothered about the 17,600 houses in Leeds that were built with steel or concrete components, or about the 5,018 timber-framed houses. The Government are reducing the amount of money available to Leeds and other authorities for public sector build. When the Minister replies, I should like to hear him say that he is concerned about the problems of the tenants living in that accommodation. We have not yet heard that from the Government.

A few weeks ago, I went to a meeting of tenants who live in system-built housing in Leeds. The tenants told me that their winter heating bill last year — before the Chancellor of the Exchequer increased electricity charges —was £250. The Yorkshire electricity board sent along experts to find out the reason for those high bills on the Halton Moor estate in Leeds. The reason was not the failure of the electricity board, but the defective housing in which the tenants were living.

The Government have a responsibility to those people, but at the moment the Government are running away from that responsibility. Leeds city council has judged that it will take £160 million to deal with the defective system-built housing in the city. I should like the Minister to talk not just about the small percentage of people who have bought Airey houses, but about all those — owner-occupiers and tenants—who live in defective houses. If the Government do that, we shall believe that they take the problem seriously. At the moment, they are hidebound and blinded by ideology and their restricted approach.

11.36 pm

Sir George Young: With the leave of the House, I shall try to deal with some of the points that have been raised. We are talking about the marrying of two schemes. Scheme one is discretionary, applies only to owners of Airey houses, and is due to run out next year. Scheme two is statutory, applies to Airey house owners and other defined house types and runs for another 10 years. We are trying to marry the two schemes, and avoid the situation described by my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Heddle), who said that the Government are in a contradictory position in having two circulars running at the same time.

Scheme two is, by and large, a better scheme, as it is a statutory one that gives people rights, and the terms of compensation are more generous. In particular—this is in reply to the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Meadowcroft)—there is the possibility of 100 per cent.

[Sir George Young]

grants to owner-occupiers under the statutory scheme where there is financial hardship, which there is not under the discretionary scheme.

The hon. Member for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond) asked about the HIP allocations for Doncaster, and some other hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett) asked about the position of local authority tenants. The Government have made it clear that if local authorities will tell us what they think that their obligations are for their own stock, we shall take this into account in making HIP allocations next year.

However, the local authority tenant is in a different position from the owner-occupier. The latter cannot move, whereas the tenant can, and the owner-occupier has lost his savings, whereas the tenant has not. Without a scheme, the resources to put a building right are not there for an owner-occupier, whereas a local authority has resources at its command. There is not a direct parallel between the position of the owner-occupier and the local authority tenant.

The hon. Member for Leeds, West doubted whether properties would be reinstated. I have seen, in Doncaster, some Airey-type houses that have been reinstated satisfactorily. Expertise is being developed by the building industry to restore Airey-type houses and, I hope, others, to a high standard that will last for 30 years, and be mortgageable. I am not sure that that would be the position in the circumstances that the hon. Member outlined.

I was asked why there is not a 100 per cent. contribution to the owner-occupier. It is reasonable that, when the taxpayer is bearing 90 per cent. of the cost, the owner-occupier who, before the Act, would have to bear the 100 per cent. costs himself, should be looked to for the 10 per cent. We have made provisions for that 10 per cent. to be made available by the local authority in cases of hardship. That 90 per cent. provision is a generous scheme.

My hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire asked about the position of one of his constituents. The best advice that I can give him is to advise his constituent to keep his options open by applying before 1 December. If he does that, he will have the benefit of both the statutory and the discretionary schemes. He made the point about the right to buy, a point that was made by other hon. Members. If a property is repurchased by the local authority and the owner-occupier becomes a tenant and stays in that building, he will subsequently have the right to buy on broadly the terms outlined by my hon. Friend.

Mr. Heddle: Will my hon. Friend clarify one point so that we can have it on the record? If my constituent keeps his options open and takes the advice that has just been given from the Dispatch Box and applies to the Lichfield district council by the close of business on Friday, will my hon. Friend confirm that he will not forfeit 10-months' worth of discount by obliging the local authority to repurchase in advance of 7 September 1985, which discount, if he waited until that time, under the original circular 6/83, he would not have forfeited in any event?

Sir George Young: I am not fully familiar with my hon. Friend's constituents, but the crucial date is the date of completion of the bargain. That would dictate the discount that would be repayable.

My hon. Friend made a slightly Freudian slip in his remarks when he said that he felt people should still have the right to sell back under the discretionary scheme. However, he corrected himself later and said that there is no such right under the discretionary scheme. One is dependent on the co-operation of the local authorities.

The hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Parr (Mr. Rooker) asked for up-to-date information about the distribution of Airey houses. We are dependent on the local authorities for such information. The latest list is in the Library and I understand that that is dated November 1983. We have written to local authorities for that information and we can do no better than bring together the figures which they provide to my Department.

The hon. Member for Leeds, West implied that reinstatement grant would be the method of assistance for Airey houses. I am not sure whether that will be the case. It depends whether a successful claim can be made under section 3(5), and whether the authority considers the repaired house to be mortgageable.

That brings me to a point made by my hon. Friend the Member for York (Mr. Gregory) and others about the NHBC and the BSA. I understand that there is a meeting tomorrow between those two bodies. They will be discussing the possible production of a certificate which will get round the problem of mortgageability and the resaleability of a property that has been improved. I share the views expressed by several hon. Members about the desirability of a scheme on those lines.

Mr. Gregory: In the course of clarification, may I seek my hon. Friend's assurance? Will that be for a long enough period to satisfy the building societies? At present, I understand that they are looking for one of some 30 years. The NHBC cover is normally for 10 years. Unless we can bring the two parties together my constituents and others will still be in the unfortunate position of having mortgaged their properties to building societies which are not prepared to put that money up again to prospective purchasers.

Sir George Young: I think that I can give my hon. Friend the reassurance that he wants. If one takes the position that he has just described, and if after reinstatement his constituent were not able to sell his property with vacant posession on terms where a mortgage would be available on satisfactory terms with a lending institution to a new buyer, he would be entitled to sell the property back to the local authority. That is clearly stated in clause 3.

There is no change in the rate of grant of 90 per cent. to the owner-occupier between the discretionary and statutory scheme. All the order does is change the contribution that the Government make to the local authority. It was 100 per cent. because the original scheme was discretionary and unless 100 per cent. reimbursement were offered by the Government there was a feeling that the local authorities would not have collaborated in a discretionary scheme.

I was asked how much had been spent under the scheme and how many people had been assisted. We do not have exact figures on the number of people who have been assisted. The information that we have is based on claims made by authorities for Exchequer contribution. Those claims are normally made in advance. In other words, they are estimates by the authorities of the numbers likely to apply and the likely split between repairs and repurchase. The number of repairs and repurchases for which local

authorities have submitted claims to my Department is 750. I was asked how much has been paid in contributions. Our estimate is that about £4·5 million will have been paid by the end of this financial year, but I shall write to the hon. Gentleman with further details when I have them.

The hon. Member for Perry Barr spoke, I think, about a tenant in an Airey house that was owned by the local authority. Of course a local authority has a statutory responsibility for maintenance and common law responsibilities in respect of the safety of property. That might be the solution for that tenant.

I was asked about the owner's ability to meet his part of the grant. I have explained that the local authority can pay 100 per cent. under the defects legislation. It was also assumed that owners would have a choice of repurchase or grant. But a reading of the Act shows that that is not so. The onus is on reinstatement, and only if reinstatement is not practicable in the way that has been described does one turn to repurchase. As was rightly pointed out, much depends on the building society's attitude.

The hon. Member for Leeds, Central asked whether the Government are concerned about local authority tenants. Of course we are, but the Act and the order concern owner-occupiers and it would not be right to have a long debate about local authority tenants tonight.

I have tried to deal with the points raised. The hon. Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Litherland) extended an invitation to me to visit some property. I was not quite sure whether it had been demolished. I visit Manchester regularly. I was in Oldham last month, where a very enlightened Labour-controlled local authority sold an entire council estate to a private developer, who modernised it and was selling it on to very proud owner-occupiers. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will use his influence to persuade Manchester city council to apply that sort of solution to some of the local authority estates in that city.

I hope that the House will approve the order.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 154, Noes 84.

Division No. 24] **[11.45 pm**

AYES

Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'to'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brinton, Tim
Brooke, Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Bruinvels, Peter
Bulmer, Esmond
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(N Luton)*
Carttiss, Michael
Chalker, Mrs Lynda
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Corrie, John
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Dover, Den
Dunn, Robert
Durant, Tony
Edwards, Rt Hon N. *(P'broke)*
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Anthony
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Harris, David
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Hind, Kenneth
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Robert *(W Herts)*
Joseph, Rt Hon Sir Keith
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knox, David
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Peter, *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Macfarlane, Neil
MacGregor, John
Maclean, David John
Madel, David
Major, John
Malins, Humfrey
Malone, Gerald
Maples, John
Mather, Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Hal *(B'grove)*
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Mills, Sir Peter *(West Devon)*
Montgomery, Fergus
Morris, M. *(N'hampton, S)*
Morrison, Hon P. *(Chester)*
Moynihan, Hon C.
Murphy, Christopher
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Parris, Matthew
Pollock, Alexander
Powley, John
Proctor, K. Harvey
Raffan, Keith
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Robinson, Mark *(N'port W)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Sims, Roger
Skeet, T. H. H.
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speller, Tony
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(W Dorset)*
Stanley, John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stevens, Martin *(Fulham)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stradling Thomas, J.
Sumberg, David
Taylor, Rt Hon John David
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waddington, David
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watson, John
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Whitfield, John
Whitney, Raymond
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Ian Lang and
Mr. Michael Neubert.

NOES

Alton, David
Ashdown, Paddy
Barnett, Guy
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Benn, Tony
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Blair, Anthony
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'mline E)*
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Brown, Ron *(E'burgh, Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Canavan, Dennis
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clay, Robert
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S.)*
Cohen, Harry
Conlan, Bernard
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cowans, Harry
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Donald
Dormand, Jack
Duffy, A. E. P.
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Loyden, Edward
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McKelvey, William
McWilliam, John
Marek, Dr John

Maxton, John
Meadowcroft, Michael
Michie, William
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Neill, Martin
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Penhaligon, David
Pike, Peter
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, M.
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, J. W.
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Silkin, Rt Hon J.
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C.*(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Spearing, Nigel
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Torney, Tom
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert
Welsh, Michael
Winnick, David

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Allen McKay.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Grants by Local Authorities (Appropriate Percentage and Exchequer Contributions) (Repairs Grant for Airey Houses) (Variation) Order 1984, which was laid before this House on 22nd October, in the last Session of Parliament, be approved.

NATIONAL HERITAGE (SCOTLAND) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Ordered,

That the Bill be committed to a Scottish Standing Committee. —[*Mr. Peter Lloyd.*]

Queen's Recommendation having been signified—

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the National Heritage (Scotland) Bill it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any expenses incurred by a Minister of the Crown in consequence of any provision of the said Act.—[*Mr. Peter Lloyd.*]

Okehampton Bypass

11.58 pm

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ernest Armstrong): We now come to the Exeter-Launceston-Bodmin trunk road (compulsory purchase orders).

Sir Peter Mills (Torridge and Devon, West): In view of the assurances that have been given to me in writing concerning a prayer in another place, I am satisfied that it would not be appropriate for me to move this motion tonight, but I reserve my position in the future.

Mr. Anthony Steen (South Hams): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Although I am delighted at this welcome news and would like to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Sir P. Mills) on making it possible, is it in order for the measure to remain on the Order Paper, occupying valuable space? As the order expires next Tuesday, will you confirm, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as the Leader of the House is in the Chamber, that the order should be removed from the Order Paper?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I understand that the order will be taken from the Order Paper, in view of the comment by the hon. Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Sir P. Mills).

Bridge of Don Barracks, Gordon

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Peter Lloyd.]*

11.59 pm

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): I sought this debate after the Minister of Defence announced during the summer recess — which was not untypical of the Ministry—that it would be closing the Bridge of Don barracks in my constituency. It emerged later that that would effectively end the training of Scottish junior soldiers in Scotland—a process which has gone on since the founding of the Scottish regiments 200 years ago—and that it would be transferred to, of all places, Newcastle.

I suggest that the training of Scottish soldiers should take place in Scotland and that the way in which the announcement was made was fairly typical of the Ministry of Defence. The decision was announced during a recess and without consultation. It was, in effect, a fait accompli.

The number of establishments for training junior soldiers will be reduced to 12, not one of which will be in Scotland. Even on the basis of proportion of population, 10 per cent. of 12 is more than one, but we are not to have even one training establishment — even though Scotland's proportion of recruits into the Army is higher than the national average. I remind the House, though no Scot would need reminding of it, that Newcastle is not Scotland.

I also criticise the Ministry of Defence for arguing that the case for closure of the barracks is a matter of economics, but giving no details of those economics. We have been asked to take the Ministry's word, and I am not prepared to do that. The only mention of a specific saving has been £8 million on capital costs. Compared with the defence budget, that is peanuts. Even compared with the training budget of £340 million, it is not a large sum. The Ministry has failed to make the case that that money will be saved.

The barracks are good barracks and have been invested in continually. Indeed, about £500,000 has been invested in them in the past year. *[Interruption.]* If hon. Members on the Labour Front Bench find the subject amusing, they should remember the traditions of the Scottish regiments and realise that I am discussing a major development on which they should be offering me their support, as a number of their colleagues have done.

Will the Minister give us more information about the alleged savings? Without further information, I am not prepared to accept the claim that the savings are substantial. Has the Minister taken account of other Army and Ministry of Defence changes that are likely to occur in north-east Scotland? The closure will mean that there are no barracks in north-east Scotland capable of taking a significant Army unit. How will the long-term needs of the Gordon Highlanders and the expanding TA be met?

Aberdeen is a major centre for North sea development and exploration and is, therefore, an important area in security terms. Has the Ministry of Defence consulted the Department of Energy, which, I understand, takes a different view of the matter?

This is not a party issue. When the closure was announced, I wrote to every hon. Member in Scotland and gained support for the retention of junior soldier training in Scotland from hon. Members of all the political parties in Scotland, including a number of Conservative Members. A delegation visited Lord Trefgarne, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary who made the decision. That delegation included the hon. Members for Moray (Mr. Pollock) and for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Malone) and Liberal, Conservative and Labour councillors. Unfortunately, it was an unsatisfactory meeting. It became clear that the Minister had not taken full account of the arguments and of the significance of the decision, and at one point he sought to equate our representations in a sympathetic way with some representation that he was receiving about the closing of an Army installation in Nottingham. If a Minister treats 200 years of Scottish tradition on that level, he fails to understand what the quotient of the Scottish contribution to the Army really is.

There is, of course, a local impact, although, even though the barracks is in my constituency, this is not the major component of the argument. It is regrettable that the decision will lead to the loss of 42 civilian jobs plus the impact of the loss of the barracks on the local economy. Although we in Aberdeen may be fortunate to have oil-related employment, we are getting a little fed up with the idea that because of that other jobs can cheerfully be destroyed. We want to maintain a diversity of employment within our area and we are not prepared to allow those jobs to be destroyed; and those civilians will not easily find alternative employment.

The core of the argument is that the long-term tradition of the seven Scottish regiments is being undermined by the decision. They were founded in the 18th century. They were established to build on regional and national loyalties within Scotland. It might be worth reminding the House that this was after the two Jacobite risings when it was of some importance to try to channel feelings in the right direction.

Obviously, representing a constituency with the name of Gordon, I am by definition — and the area is by definition — closely associated with the Gordon Highlanders. That is of considerable importance in recognising the role of regiments on a regional basis within Scotland. The traditions of the Scottish infantryman, the tartan, the trews or the kilt, the pipes and the drums, are an essential component of the pride of Scotland and of the backbone of the British Army. It is a worthy tradition, over 200 years old, and is not to be lightly discarded. I believe that it has been a major factor in the high level of recruitment from within Scotland. The fact that the training takes place in Scotland is also important.

The lads and their parents identify with training in Aberdeen, the third city of Scotland. They know where they are. They know that they are "our boys" and not, as they will be in Newcastle, the "Jocks" who are being trained outside their own environment, and not really sustaining the full strength of the Scottish tradition, which should be carried on within Scotland, where it is the core of the infantry regiments.

Mr. Alexander Pollock (Moray): In the event that the hon. Gentleman's argument fails to find favour with the Minister—although I hope that the hon. Gentleman can persuade him to have a change of heart—I wonder what thought the hon. Gentleman may have given to an alternative use for the barracks. For example, has he any information about the facilities available to the TA at

[Mr. Alexander Pollock]

present in the north-east, and how long its facilities may be available to it? Is that an aspect that perhaps the Ministry could explore for alternative use?

Mr. Bruce: I am grateful to the hon. Member and hope that the Minister will take account of his remarks. It is my understanding that the TA will require more facilities in Aberdeen. Indeed, the Gordon Highlanders have not yet settled on a permanent home within the city. To throw away the best Army premises within the north-east of Scotland at this stage would ultimately be a false economy which might lead to greater costs in the future. I hope that the Minister will be able to say whether these facts have been taken into account by the Ministry.

I remind the House that some years ago the Government attempted to disband the Scottish regiments altogether. That proposal was greeted with such a storm of protest, under the memorable slogan of "Save the Argylls", that the decision was averted. I can claim some connection with it, inasmuch as it was a former Member for the area I now represent, albeit a Conservative Member, "Mad Mitch", who played the leading part in that campaign.

Mr. Pollock: What about the role of the right hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Younger)?

Mr. Bruce: Indeed. I do not demur from that in any way. But "Mad Mitch" was himself an Argyll. The Government, having failed at that time to destroy the Scottish regiments head on, appear now to be trying to do it by stealth. They appear to believe that they can simply transfer the training outside Scotland and that we shall accept the consequences. We will not. I have already said that the campaign to persuade the Minister to reverse his decision has all-party and non-party support. The reaction and response from the Ministry of Defence are quite unsatisfactory, and do not show that it has taken account of the position. It gives no details of the savings that will be made.

Mr. Albert McQuarrie (Banff and Buchan): The hon. Gentleman has justifiably commented on recruitment into the Scottish regiments, especially the Gordon Highlanders, who have a great tradition not only in Aberdeen but in the Highlands region. Many of those who are now serving or will serve in that regiment come from the highlands and islands of Scotland where there is no alternative employment. As with their grandfathers and fathers, they have always, by tradition, wanted to serve in a Scottish regiment. For the north-east of Scotland, especially my constituency of Banff and Buchan, the regiment means the Gordon Highlanders. The Government are taking a retrograde step in considering taking away the barracks.

Mr. Bruce: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman and agree with his comments. It is ironic that whenever there is a rationalisation Scotland appears to lose out. Whenever there is a recession, recruitment in the Army rises, especially from areas where opportunities are more limited. Yet at a time when recruitment is rising, the Government slap us in the face and take the training away from Scotland, and destroy civilian jobs.

I regret that to date the MOD has got away with the decision because many Scots have not realised what it will mean—the end of the training of Scottish junior soldiers in Scotland after 200 years. The explanation so far from the MOD has been inadequate and mealy-mouthed.

The Scottish regiments have served the British Army well and, by the decision, their tradition is being swept away with the excuse of short-term economics. The Scottish people will not tolerate Scottish soldiers being trained entirely outside Scotland. They want their junior soldiers to be trained in Scotland for Scottish regiments. The decision will seriously affect morale within the Army in Scotland and will seriously affect recruitment. I do not believe that the MOD has made a case that economies will, in fact, be achieved. I urge the Minister to recognise that the Scottish people want Scottish soldiers to be trained in Scotland, not in England.

12.12 am

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. John Stanley): I fully recognise the importance of the contribution of the Scottish element of the armed forces to the armed forces as a whole—the Army in particular, but also the Royal Air Force and the Royal Navy. In my present responsibilities, I have seen a number of the Scottish regiments during the past year, both in the United Kingdom and when they have been stationed overseas.

There is a total understanding of the initial point made by the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) about the length and depth of the tradition of service in the armed forces in all parts of Scotland. I hope to show to hon. Members that the decision that we are debating in no way reflects any wish, intention or desire by the Government to loosen the ties between the armed services and Scotland. At the same time as the Government are taking this decision, they are also taking other decisions that represent an increased commitment and an increased expansion of the activities of the armed services in Scotland.

I well understand the concern and disappointment at the decision to close the Gordon barracks at Bridge of Don. The hon. Member for Gordon has voiced that concern again today, as have my hon. Friends the Members for Moray (Mr. Pollock) and for Banff and Buchan (Mr. McQuarrie). They expressed their concern, too, at a meeting with my noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces, which was attended also by my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Malone). My right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Department of Energy has also expressed to me his deep concern about this. I certainly understand the feelings that have been expressed and I should make it clear to Members on both sides of the House that the decision was not an easy one. Recognising the strong links between the barracks and the area over many years, we are very conscious of the disappointment involved.

None the less, I hope that hon. Members will understand the pressures on the defence budget and the consequent need to ensure that we get the best possible military value for the available expenditure. Those pressures inevitably led the Government to take a hard look at the ways in which we currently do things to see whether it was possible to achieve the same end result more cost effectively.

As part of that process, a study of the whole subject of army training was undertaken last year by General Groom. It was a very thorough and expert study. In essence, it found that our training organisation was simply too large

for either present or future needs. It showed that, although the army as a whole had steadily decreased, the training organisation had remained fairly static. In total, army training was costing more than £340 million per year and some 18 per cent. of all uniformed army personnel outside BAOR were employed in the training organisation. Those facts, to which the hon. Member for Gordon himself referred, are fundamental to an appreciation of the background to our decision.

The army training organisation is certainly effective. I do not think that there is any doubt about that. That its training standards are among the highest in the world is amply demonstrated not just by the army's performance in the field but by the number of foreign and Commonwealth Governments who welcome the chance to send students to our training courses. Given the costs and the manpower tied up in the training sector, however, it was necessary to examine whether it could be organised more efficiently while maintaining its traditionally high standards.

The Groom study made a number of recommendations offering opportunities for significant savings. Many of those recommendations are still being worked on. Because it offered the chance of fairly early savings and because it was comparatively self-contained, decisions on the junior training organisation were taken first and the Army Board concluded this summer that substantial savings could be achieved by concentrating junior training in fewer establishments.

Mr. Bruce: Will the Minister nevertheless acknowledge that in future there will be no junior training at all in Scotland and that that is a major departure?

Mr. Stanley: I shall be coming to that, although I should point out that training of junior leaders from Scotland, for example, is at present undertaken entirely outside Scotland so it is not a novel departure. Plenty of training of Scotsmen at both junior and adult level already takes place outside Scotland. However, I wish to give the House a balanced picture.

At present there are 21 establishments providing training for juniors. We calculated that by a better organisation of our resources it would be possible to reduce that number to 13. Some of the remaining establishments could continue to provide adult training, while others could be found an alternative use. However, I am afraid that given the overcapacity for training with which we started, two establishments were found to be surplus to our needs. They were the Gordon barracks at Bridge of Don and the Prince of Wales depot at Crickhowell. Those two establishments are the smallest infantry junior depots. That does not mean that they are not efficient. Both provide excellent training, but because of their overheads neither could be cost-effective in comparison with other larger establishments.

At present we estimate that about 3,000 juniors will be recruited into the infantry each year. They can be accommodated in just four larger establishments — Ouston, Shorncliffe, Pirbright and Flowerdown. It is never easy to take the decision to close an establishment and it is particularly difficult when, as in the case of Bridge of Don, the establishment has a long and distinguished link with the British Army. It was a hard decision to take. We weighed up very carefully the effects that it would have locally and the possible effects on morale and recruitment.

Sir Hector Monro (Dumfries): My hon. Friend talks of weighing up the possibilities. Did the Government consider either bringing in the junior leaders to Aberdeen, which would have been the best option from the point of view of keeping the establishment open, or taking the junior leaders from Shorncliffe to Milton Bridge and Glencorse and the juniors from Aberdeen to Glencorse and Milton Bridge, so as to retain a further training commitment in Scotland? That option would have been secondary to Aberdeen, but it would have been far superior to the decision that has been taken.

Mr. Stanley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I shall discuss the junior leaders in a moment and take up that point then.

Weighing the balance, we came to the conclusion that the manpower and financial case for going ahead with our plan for rationalising junior training was very strong. We estimate that under our revised plan for junior training as a whole, we shall be able to achieve civilian manpower savings of over 100 as well as providing considerable scope for releasing a significant number of servicemen from training to operational duties. Additionally, we should be able to obtain capital savings of about £8 million.

The decision to close the Bridge of Don barracks does not imply any lack of commitment on the part of the British Army towards Scotland. Even after the closure there will be a substantial Army presence in Scotland comprising two regular infantry battalions, 25 other regular units and 33 Territorial Army units including 11 of battalion or regimental size, with an additional seven Home Service Force companies forming in January 1985 including companies at Elgin and Aberdeen. We also plan to increase the TA in Scotland in a few years' time, including the creation of an air defence regiment based at Edinburgh and an airfield damage repair squadron at Kinloss.

There is also a substantial RAF presence, with two important stations at Kinloss and Lossiemouth, both of which receive heavy investment, and of course the Royal Marines have a large number of personnel at RM Condor, Arbroath, where it is planned that the barracks will undergo a major rebuild at a cost of £26 million.

The junior soldiers who are now trained at Bridge of Don will in future be trained at Ouston. The time that they will spend there will be comparatively short—about six months—after which they will return to complete their training in Scotland. The Scottish junior leaders, who currently undertake their training at Shorncliffe on the east coast will in future be trained nearer to Scotland at Ouston. That will reduce the distance that they will have to travel from home. I do not believe—in response to my hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro)—that it would be in any way economic to preserve the Bridge of Don barracks simply to concentrate there the training of the Scottish junior leaders. The study showed that the best way of dealing with junior leadership training was at Ouston, outside Newcastle. At least that has the merit of bringing Scottish junior leaders substantially closer to Scotland, although I fully understand that Newcastle is not Scotland.

Mr. McQuarrie: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Stanley: If I give way I shall not be able to deal with the important point that my hon. Friend raised in an intervention. Perhaps he would be very brief.

Mr. McQuarrie: Does my hon. Friend agree that the majority of recruits who go to the Gordon barracks come from the Highlands? Does he further agree that the barracks could be used fully for training and that, rather than take leaders away from Aberdeen, others could go to the Gordon barracks? Since 1976, millions of pounds have been spent on the barracks and the residential quarters for the families of soldiers. That money will be wasted if the barracks are no longer used by the Army.

Mr. Stanley: I understand that. We have done a full evaluation of existing establishments and those from which we can get the best economies of scale and lowest overheads, and I am afraid that it comes out unfavourably for the Gordon barracks and Bridge of Don. I am sorry about that.

I should like to deal with my hon. Friend's point about alternatives. My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces is to visit the region to see the barracks and have further discussions with local representatives early next month. We have looked carefully to see whether there is any alternative service use for the barracks. My hon. Friend the Member for Moray raised that issue. Although no firm alternatives have presented themselves so far, we understand that there might be interest in the barracks from the Territorial Army in the Aberdeen area. If it makes a costed proposal, I assure the House that it will receive urgent and sympathetic consideration. However, I must be frank—it would be wrong if I led the House to place too much hope on that possibility. I understand that it is no more than a suggestion. It is attractive but as yet uncosted and not presented to us. For it to be accepted, the proposal would have to demonstrate that it had a significant military purpose and that it would achieve savings in cost and manpower equivalent to those which would be produced by the closure.

As I said at the outset, we are faced with an urgent need to obtain the best possible value from our available resources. Nobody would be more pleased than I if it were possible to keep these barracks open on sound economic grounds, but it would not be right to suggest that they should be kept open regardless of the economic facts. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Gordon for raising this issue and to my hon. Friends who have stayed late to hear the debate. I assure them that the importance of this issue in regard to how the Army achieves economies and to the local community fully justifies the debate and I assure the House that we are ready to consider urgently and sympathetically any proposals for an alternative use, provided that such alternative uses make military sense and do not dissipate the savings that we aim to achieve by closure.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-eight minutes past Twelve o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 28 November 1984

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

LOCHMADDY AND EAST LOCH TARBERT (IMPROVEMENT OF PIERS, ETC.) ORDER CONFIRMATION

Mr. Secretary Younger presented a Bill to confirm a Provisional Order, under section 7 of the Private Legislation Procedure (Scotland) Act 1936, relating to Lochmaddy and East Loch Tarbert (Improvement of Piers, etc.); And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be considered upon Tuesday 4 December and to be printed. [Bill 13.]

Oral Answers to Questions

ENVIRONMENT

Local Government Reform

1. **Mr. Fatchett** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the P.A. Management Consultants' report on the non-financial aspects of the proposed abolition of the metropolitan county councils, a copy of which has been sent to him; and if he will make a statement.

The Minister for Local Government (Mr. Kenneth Baker): The report is long on assertion and short on fact. I remain convinced that the proposals in the Local Government Bill will help to make local government more effective and more economical, without the need to impair the standards or the quality of services.

Mr. Fatchett: It comes well from the Government to talk about the report being long on assertion and short on fact. Is it not the case that the PA report concludes that if the Government go ahead with their proposals we shall have another change in local government structure within the next decade? Is it not the case also that the Coopers and Lybrand report, which was published this morning, shows that the Government's financial conclusions are incorrect? Against that background, would it not have been sensible for a prudent and non-dogmatic Government to establish a public inquiry? We now have dogma running ahead of common sense.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I appeal for shorter questions.

Mr. Baker: The hon. Gentleman represents part of one of our great cities. Before 1974 the Leeds city corporation had all the powers of a former county borough. It was large, powerful, professional and effective. The hon. Gentleman should be ashamed to imply that the corporation will not be able to provide the services which will be devolved to it in a better way than they are provided by West Yorkshire county council.

Mr. Tracey: Has my right hon. Friend noticed that the posters which have appeared on hoardings in the latest stage of the multi-million pound propaganda campaign of the metropolitan counties and others have been pasted upside down? Does he agree that that is a fair reflection of the economic and other attitudes of the leaders of those councils?

Mr. Baker: The advertising campaign in London on behalf of the GLC and ILEA is at the ratepayers' expense and is a scandalous waste of ratepayers' money. The GLC will be spending about £7 million this year, which Mr. Livingstone thinks is peanuts. We do not have that sort of money to spend and we would not be allowed — *[Interruption.]* Our political budget on this issue is much more modest and we shall be spending a little of it tonight on a party political broadcast, when I shall be setting forth the reasons why Mr. Livingstone does want the GLC abolished.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I remind the House, including the Minister, that this question relates to the metropolitan counties. Question No. 3 relates to the Greater London council.

Mr. Merlyn Rees: Is it not the case that as a result of this legislation the provincial police will be controlled for at least three years directly from Whitehall? Is that not a constitutional aspect of the legislation which should be considered most carefully? It is certain that control will not be passed to Leeds, where it rested before 1974.

Mr. Baker: The right hon. Gentleman brings considerable experience to the debate on this issue— [HON. MEMBERS: "Answer the question."] I am about to do so. The right hon. Gentleman asked whether that matter should be considered carefully. I give him the assurance that it will be debated at length in Committee. As he rightly said, there are provisions to have precept and manpower controls for a transitional period of three years for the joint authorities.

Mr. Rippon: Before we get into detail, can my right hon. Friend confirm that the Government have already begun the drafting of the amendments to the published Bill?

Mr. Baker: I have little doubt that my right hon. and learned Friend will be of assistance to us in that respect.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Does the Minister accept that the management consultants' report on the metropolitan counties says that the result of the Government's proposals will be to provide institutionalised conflict and a failure to co-ordinate—[HON. MEMBERS: "Reading."] Yes, I am reading. I want to be accurate. What does the Minister say to his right hon. and hon. Friends who were reported in the *Local Government Chronicle* poll as being dissatisfied with the transfer of functions to joint boards?

Mr. Baker: These matters will be debated at length in Committee on the abolition Bill. The report was compiled from a series of interviews and questionnaires. The PA sent a questionnaire to all the metropolitan county

councillors. Not surprisingly, their reply was that they thought that their jobs were useful and their roles effective. In the immortal words of Mandy Rice Davies, "They would, wouldn't they?"

Dr. Cunningham: As the Minister appears keen, for once, to refer to the facts, is it not true that the overwhelming burden of evidence submitted to the Government was against the proposals? Is it not a fact that the Government cannot substantiate their claims of financial savings? Is it not also a fact that, contrary to what he claimed, many of the services will not return to the boroughs or districts, but will go to quangos and joint boards? Are those not the facts?

Mr. Baker: I disagree with the hon. Gentleman. I have made it clear that 75 per cent. of the services which are now the responsibility of the metropolitan counties and the GLC will become the responsibility of the successor lower-tier authorities.

House Building

2. **Mr. Fisher** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his latest estimate of the number of houses to be started in 1985 in the public and private sectors.

The Minister for Housing and Construction (Mr. Ian Gow): Total housing starts for England in 1983 were 187,000, of which 146,000 were in the private sector, the highest figure for 10 years. Housing starts in the first nine months of this year are slightly below those for the same period last year, but completions are up. It is not the practice to make forecasts for future years.

Mr. Fisher: Does the Minister not agree that the figures are a wholly inadequate response to the housing crisis facing the country? Can he explain why, with 250,000 construction workers unemployed and with housing authorities such as mine in Stoke-on-Trent desperately anxious to build more houses, especially for the growing elderly population, the Government will not put in more finance and will not even allow local authorities to borrow money in the market place through their housing investment programmes?

Mr. Gow: Total capital housing provision in the public sector for next year is in excess of £3 billion. That is a substantial figure. The hon. Gentleman and the House must understand that a growing proportion of our people —now 63 per cent. in England—are owner-occupiers. The policy which the Government have followed has responded to the needs and aspirations of the people, while continuing to make substantial provision for public sector housing.

Mr. Hunter: Is there not a significant and laudable reason for the slightly fewer housing starts; namely, that under this Government local authorities have been able to provide more resources for special needs housing and for improvements?

Mr. Gow: My hon. Friend is right. Within the housing investment programme allocations it is for each authority to decide its own priorities. I agree with my hon. friend that priority should be given to the categories that he mentioned.

Mrs. Clwyd: Will the Minister remind us of the number of people on the housing waiting list, how many are homeless and how many are living in houses unfit for human habitation?

Mr. Gow: Some of the figures for local authority housing waiting lists are the reverse of accurate. Those figures should be revised in very many cases. I do not accept the premise of the hon. Lady's question.

Mr. Brando-Bravo: Does my right hon. Friend agree that private sector starts would be substantially higher if it were not for the fact that many Labour authorities hoard and sit on land for building because they believe that private sector building is bad and that only public sector building is good?

Mr. Gow: My hon. Friend is right. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment has made his first directions for the sale of unused or under-used land, as recorded on the registers which the Government introduced. Of the land on those four sites, 45 acres are suitable for housing. I certainly intend to follow up the Government's initiative of directing, where appropriate, the sale of unused or under-used land.

Mr. Rooker: Does the Minister think it desirable that the total of housing starts, whatever their mix, should return to the number for the lowest year under the Labour Government?

Mr. Gow: That depends on need.

Sporting, Recreational and Leisure Facilities

3. **Mr. Pendry** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to ensure that the sporting, recreational and leisure provision currently made by the Greater London council and metropolitan counties will continue following abolition of those authorities.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Neil Macfarlane): As I said in the answer which I gave to the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) on 21 November, my right hon. Friend announced on 11 April our plans for sport and recreation following the dissolution of the GLC. Responsibility for these matters will pass to the boroughs. The Sports Council will have additional funds to assist with projects of wider than local interest.

Mr. Pendry: Does the Minister recognise that that is a complacent reply which will disappoint hundreds of thousands of people who live within the Greater London council and metropolitan council areas and who look to him to fight his corner on their behalf to ensure that sport and recreation provision is maintained after abolition? Does he further recognise that the GLC has spent more than £40 million on that provision and that the metropolitan counties have spent an equivalent sum? Why does the hon. Gentleman not take note of the action of his colleague the Minister for the Arts, who is fighting his corner for those whom he represents? If the Minister did that, perhaps even he would end up in the Cabinet.

Mr. Macfarlane: The hon. Gentleman is getting a little over-excited about some matters. If he looks at the record for recent years he will find that since 1979 the Government have increased grant-in-aid by 100 per cent. to the Sports Council, and have provided infinitely more

money than previous Governments did for the urban aid programme—between £16 million and £23 million in the past few years.

Only in the last 12 to 18 months has the GLC started to show some interest in sport in the metropolis. The London boroughs and the metropolitan districts are infinitely better prepared to know what is required at local level. The GLC has only come along later to shell out our constituents' money for wrong projects.

Sir Hector Monro: Will my hon. Friend assure me that, whoever controls sport and recreation in London, better facilities and coaching will be provided in order to improve the standard of English cricket?

Mr. Macfarlane: I take note of what my hon. Friend said. He has experience of these matters. I have no doubt that he is well satisfied with the standard of Scottish rugby. Let us hope that that will be enacted next week.

Mr. Cartwright: In view of the spectre of rate-capping that hangs over the London boroughs and metropolitan districts, will the Minister assure the House that grant-related expenditure assessments for the London boroughs and metropolitan districts will be altered to guarantee them the resources needed to provide the leisure, recreation and sports facilities now provided by the GLC and metropolitan counties?

Mr. Macfarlane: The hon. Gentleman raises an important subject. That is why the Government have ensured that the funding for sport and recreation has not been lost in recent years. Normal adjustments to the rate support grant will be made after abolition. However, I have to tell the House that no specific increase will be introduced solely in respect of sport and recreation. These matters will be adjusted.

Mr. Moynihan: I recognise the importance of providing sport and leisure facilities in London, but does my hon. Friend agree that a substantial amount of work has already been done, and is planned to continue to be done, by the boroughs, the governing bodies and, above all, the Sports Council?

Mr. Macfarlane: My hon. Friend is right. The strategy which has been produced by the Sports Council and the regional councils on sports and recreation, which will be able to take on a great deal of work after abolition in March 1986, has been responsible for identifying the paucity of facilities in certain areas.

Mr. Wareing: Does the Minister realise that much of the assistance given by the metropolitan counties comes from sponsored companies, such as Merseyside Improvements Ltd., which not only provide jobs, but work to a reasonable standard for many of the sporting organisations? Can the Minister guarantee that those organisations will continue to be provided with such assistance after the abolition of the metropolitan county councils?

Mr. Macfarlane: I am always anxious to encourage sponsorship of any sort for anything to do with sport, leisure and recreation, and it is precisely because of the Government's policies that we have been able to rejuvenate that on Merseyside.

Mr. Waller: Is my hon. Friend aware that in West Yorkshire county council area, and no doubt in many others, some metropolitan districts have no representatives on committees responsible for many important functions, and that that could not be the case following abolition? As surveys have shown that the overwhelming majority of people have no idea which functions are the responsibility of the metropolitan county councils, is not existing democratic responsibility a myth, and is it not far more likely to exist after abolition?

Mr. Macfarlane: I do not believe that it is far more likely to exist. My right hon. and hon. Friends will consider that important point to ensure that there is no gap after abolition.

Mr. Tony Banks: The Minister is appallingly informed about the GLC's contribution to sport. It has been half funding the National Sports Centre since its inception. Is the Minister aware that the GLC gives £8 million a year in grants to sporting bodies? What will he do to ensure that that funding continues, and will he guarantee the future of the London marathon, which, contrary to his information, is supported organisationally by the GLC?

Mr. Macfarlane: If the hon. Gentleman would listen instead of gassing away to his colleagues on the Back Bench, he might learn something. The only contribution that GLC representatives have made to sport in London is to threaten and try to ensure that funds will not reach the National Sports Centre at Crystal Palace, and to walk out of some committees of the Greater London council. The marathon is a privately run organisation——

Mr. Tony Banks: No, Sir, it is not.

Mr. Macfarlane: —and my Department and my right hon. Friends have given every help to the marathon's organising committee. The marathon is safe with the Conservative Government.

Mr. Denis Howell: The marathon may be safe, but the Minister will never run 26 miles and 385 yds if he continues to answer questions in that way. How can he say that the GLC has made no contribution when it and its predecessor authority were responsible for the National Sports Centre at Crystal Palace—it is the only one we have — and it meets the capital, revenue and debt charges of the centre? Who will meet those after abolition? Similar questions could be asked about the Lea Valley sports centre.

Will the Minister confirm that in this year's estimates, not only for the GLC but for the metropolitan counties, £58 million is being spent on sport and recreation? Where will that money come from after abolition? Why can we not have a consultation exercise for sport similar to that for the arts? Will the Minister issue a consultation document so that we can have a sensible, reasonable and intelligent discussion on the future of sports provision?

Mr. Macfarlane: I welcome the right hon. Gentleman's return to these affairs after his brief skirmish as a shadow Home Office spokesman. The only evidence in recent months of the GLC's contribution to sport was its spending of much money on poor projects. Its representatives walked out of several committees, and it threatened the National Sports Centre with a complete removal of financial support. Its spending in recent years has been profligate and has been removed from the taxpayers and ratepayers of Greater London. Future funding has yet to be considered, but at present the Sports

Council and the regional councils on sport and recreation are well placed, with the London boroughs, to run sport in the metropolis.

New Towns (House Sales)

4. **Mr. Proctor** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give the number of new town homes sold under the right-to-buy provisions by the Basildon development corporation and other new town development corporations; and if he will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Sir George Young): Between May 1979 and September 1984 Basildon development corporation has sold 3,903 dwellings to sitting tenants, and other English new town development corporations have sold 11,315.

Mr. Proctor: Does my hon. Friend accept that that is a source of great pride to those who live in the Basildon area? Will he encourage and facilitate shared ownership provisions for tenants who are prevented from buying their homes, especially newer houses, because the cost floor rules mean that the sale price is near to the market price and, therefore, they cannot obtain the full discount?

Sir George Young: Basildon is rightly proud of its record. It has sold more houses to sitting tenants than any other of the new town corporations.

Under the Housing Act 1984 tenants have a right to shared ownership in the circumstances which my hon. Friend described.

Mr. Cowans: Will the Minister tell the whole truth? Will he publish the cost to the taxpayer of those houses and the cost at which they were sold? Is it not true that there is a big discrepancy between the two figures?

Sir George Young: No, there is not. It is not possible to sell a house under the right-to-buy provisions at less than its cost. This is the cost floor, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mr. Proctor) rightly referred. I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman is totally misinformed.

Dr. Mawhinney: Will my hon. Friend accept the appreciation of thousands of my constituents in Peterborough who are now able to own their homes, thanks to that legislation? Will he also accept that the exemplary selling commitment of the Peterborough development corporation helped to shame the Labour-controlled district council into selling houses as well?

Sir George Young: Although Basildon has sold more houses to sitting tenants, I am happy to tell my hon. Friend that, looked at in percentage terms, Peterborough has done even better. I am sure that it will have acted as an inspiration to the local authority, which I hope will respond with greater efforts to dispose of more of its homes.

Green Field Land

5. **Sir John Farr** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will take steps to ensure that green field land is used for housing purposes only as a last resort and not before adjacent city centre sites have been utilised.

Mr. Macfarlane: My right hon. Friend published advice on land for housing in July under DOE circular 15/84. That circular restates the Government's commitment to existing conservation policies and the protection of good quality agricultural land. It emphasises the need to make full and effective use for housing of land within existing urban areas.

Mr. Farr: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. On the subject of green field land, which is a precious and declining asset, can he assure the House that the Government are aware that in some cases neighbouring local city councils decline to sell land to housing developers, for reasons best known to themselves? In view of the pressure that this is putting on adjacent green field sites, will my hon. Friend consider whether the city councils concerned should be encouraged in some way to sell their land?

Mr. Macfarlane: My hon. Friend brought a delegation to see me not long ago to discuss these matters. He knows the steps that we are taking to try to promote the development of urban land for housing. That is why we are pursuing a wide range of measures—for example, both urban development grant and derelict land grant—to help development in urban areas. I think that that is the best way forward. I am well aware of what my hon. Friend said was happening.

Mr. Park: How can the Minister reconcile that reply with the fact that at the same time in his Department applications are being turned down for derelict land clearance status, as happened in the case of Coventry?

Mr. Macfarlane: If the hon. Gentleman has a specific case in mind, affecting an area of land about which he knows, he should let me know about it.

Leeds (Housing Stock)

6. **Mr. Meadowcroft** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the survey of its housing stock prepared by the Leeds city council, a copy of which has been sent to him.

Sir George Young: I understand that the hon. Member is referring to a later version of the document enclosed with the council's letter to my Department of 2 July. It is desirable that local authorities should make objective assessments of the condition of their housing stock for management purposes, and the results are of value to my Department in deciding housing investment programme allocations.

Mr. Meadowcroft: I am grateful for that reply. Will the Minister accept that, with the level of capital finance currently available to Leeds city council, it is impossible for it adequately to maintain its own stock or to provide grants to private owners for improvement, with the inevitable and sad result that the council will be forced to return to policies of compulsory purchase and slum clearance on a wide scale, which have destroyed communities in recent years?

Sir George Young: I do not share the hon. Gentleman's rather gloomy assessment. I see no advantage in reverting to compulsory purchase orders and the rest of it. We have tried to direct a higher proportion of the regional allocation to Leeds in genuine recognition of the problems which the hon. Gentleman described. The document which he sent to my Department will help us in the next few days in deciding an appropriate allocation to Leeds for 1985-86.

Wildlife and Countryside Act

7. **Mr. Hardy** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what changes he expects to see effected in the provisions of the Wildlife and Countryside Act during the present Session.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. William Waldegrave). The Commons Environment Select Committee is currently conducting an inquiry into the operation of the Act. Any question of considering major changes to the Act would need to await consideration of its report.

Mr. Hardy: Does the Minister accept that the consensus supporting conservation, to which he referred approvingly in yesterday's debate, seems to be demanding rather wider amendment of the Act than the Government seem likely to accept? Why are the Government so wretchedly lacking in imagination and so devoid of sympathy for decent demands? Will this not cause considerable rage in the circles supporting conservation unless a more reasonable attitude is taken?

Mr. Waldegrave: I pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman's contribution to the formation of a consensus on the need for some limited changes, and I hope to see those passed on the route down which the hon. Gentleman has gone. Wider and more major changes will need to await consideration of the Select Committee's report.

Mr. Soames: Will my hon. Friend consider incorporating into the review of the Act the possibility of doing something to include common land, which is in many cases a reserve of habitat for wildlife? Is my hon. Friend aware that there is widespread concern in my constituency about the wildlife on the Copthorne upper and lower commons, whose protection would be enhanced by the stiffening of this Act?

Mr. Waldegrave: This shows that the matter to which my hon. Friend refers, and on which the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) is an expert, is serious. This also shows that once we begin to widen the Act a number of extra measures could be made, which we would need to consider carefully.

Mr. Chris Smith: Why have the Government not given a commitment to introduce, in Government time, their own Bill to amend the Wildlife and Countryside Act, as we had all expected them to do when they gave commitments on this matter last year?

Mr. Waldegrave: There appears to be agreement on both sides of the House that the so-called three-month loophole should be blocked. A private Members' Bill was introduced, which unfortunately was defective. We have offered help to improve it. We can therefore deal with this through that procedure.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Does the Minister accept that, outside the national parks and the sites of special scientific interest, protection for the landscape is often insufficient? Would it not be helpful if the same system of notification of farm grant applications as applies in the national parks were implemented in respect of local authorities and the Agricultural Development and Advisory Service? Would this not be in the interests of the heritage?

Mr. Waldegrave: That would be a wide reform, with implications for how the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food conducts its advisory service. We need to await the advice of the Select Committee.

Land Register

8. **Sir Anthony Grant** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many acres of land were recorded on the local authority land register at July 1984 as being vacant, dormant or derelict land in public ownership.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: At 1 July the land registers gave details of 110,863 acres of unused or underused land owned by local authorities and other public bodies in England.

Sir Anthony Grant: Is it not time that this absurd hoarding was stopped? How many disposal notices have been issued to public sector land owners under the 1980 Act, and what has been the effect of this notification?

Mr. Baker: I echo my hon. Friend's sentiments. As far as we have been able to discover, about 18,000 acres have been sold, leaving about 110,000 acres on the register. We examined nine sites and then proceeded to issue directives about a fortnight ago for the disposal of them. We shall be looking at other sites as well.

Mr. Eastham: With regard to the so-called hoarding of local government land, is it not a fact that three factors affect local authorities? The first is inadequate derelict land grants, the second is inadequate housing investment allocations and the third is that private developers are interested only in leafy suburbia, and not in the inner cities.

Mr. Baker: The amount allocated for derelict grant is going up this year, and stands at about £75 million. The capital investment in housing, as my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Construction has said, will be over £3 billion this year. As to leafy suburbia, in the past month I have visited two or three sites in the north of England where derelict inner city council estates are being renovated and refurbished with Government assistance.

Mr. Steen: It is reassuring that my right hon. Friend follows all previous Secretaries of State in saying that the amount of public land is too much and unacceptable, as this has been said for about 10 years. Could not my right hon. Friend instruct all public authorities to reduce their derelict and vacant land by perhaps 25 per cent. a year, otherwise the land will never be used?

Mr. Baker: I am not as pessimistic as my hon. Friend. I do not have the powers that he asked me to use. We intend to keep up the pressure on the vast amount of land that is not used. The whole purpose of the legislation is to bring idle land into active use.

Mr. Straw: As my hon. Friends the Members for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Park) and for Manchester, Blackley (Mr. Eastham) have made clear, the truth is that the Government's actions wholly belie their words. The Government have put local authorities which wish their derelict and dormant land to be brought into public use —whether in the private or public sector—in a financial straitjacket by restricting the conditions governing the availability of derelict land grant and by prohibiting the full use of capital receipts by local authorities. If the

Minister wishes to encourage local authorties to do what they want to do—to bring this land into use—why does he not lift forthwith the restrictions on the use of capital receipts?

Mr. Baker: The capital receipts from the sale of housing land can be as high as 100 per cent. I ask the hon. Gentleman to get his facts right about the derelict land grant. Each year we are increasing the amounts available for derelict land grant. This is a major priority for my Department.

Water and Sewerage Industries

9. **Mr. Hicks** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what factors he took into account in setting the proposed levels of capital investment in the water and sewerage industries; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gow: The public expenditure provision for water authorities announced in the autumn statement of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer is expected to enable their investment to increase by about £80 million, or 12 per cent., in 1985-86. This takes account of the needs identified in the water authorities' 1984 corporate plans, including the development of water resources, faster progress with the renewal of sewers and water mains and further work to restore or maintain the quality of rivers, estuaries and coastal waters.

Mr. Hicks: I welcome the intention to increase the level of financial expenditure on the infrastructure. Does my hon. Friend think that it is sensible at this stage to impose a water tax on consumers, especially when we are all anxious to keep down inflation and when the general public are still worried about the basis on which water and sewerage charges are imposed?

Mr. Gow: My hon. Friend is not right in referring to this as a water tax. There is a danger in thinking that one can have higher investment in the water industry, and more money spent on the repair of sewers and the construction of reservoirs, without paying for all of this. The targets that have been set by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor are in no way unreasonable. The present rate of return on assets is only 1 per cent. Under my right hon. Friend's proposals, the average rate of return next year is estimated to be 1·4 per cent.; in 1986-87, 1·7 per cent.; and in 1987-88, 1·9 per cent.

Mr. O'Brien: Will the Minister consider the position that will develop in the coming year for the regional water authorities, especially the Yorkshire water authority, as a result of the hardship that will be imposed on industrial and domestic users because of the suggested 12 per cent. increase in water charges? Will the Minister have regard to the hardship that will be created in the Yorkshire water authority area in particular and throughout the country in general?

Mr. Gow: The increase in water charges in the next financial year will vary from region to region and from authority to authority. The average water charge levied by water authorities in the current financial year is £78. If the average charge rises by 10 per cent. next year, the bill will rise from £78 to £85 or, to put it another way, from 21p a day to 23p a day. Water charges are taken fully into account when supplementary benefit is calculated. Some 3 million households receive help in the way that I have described.

Mr. Conway: What steps is my hon. Friend taking to substitute water metering for water rates?

Mr. Gow: Earlier this month I announced in the House that my Department had set up a study with the water industry to inquire into the possibility of extending water metering to the household customer. That inquiry will be completed as soon as possible and I shall then report further to the House.

Mr. Penhaligon: Whilst most hon. Members recognise that water has to be paid for, why do water authorities have to be run for profit? Why do profits have to increase by one third this year, especially after the difficulties experienced in the west country?

Mr. Gow: The hon. Gentleman has not understood that a consequence of higher water charges will be the much needed higher investment, for which the hon. Gentleman called earlier this year. He is aware that in the south-west work is starting about now on the third of the strategic reservoirs. In the public sector we are seeking to follow the necessary disciplines of obtaining a proper return on investment. A 1 per cent. return on investment is inadequate for the water industry.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: While I support the general argument that my hon. Friend puts forward, does he agree that it is completely unreasonable that my constituents in Southend, and others, should have to pay what is called an additional extra because the water authorities are obliged to spend £50 million of capital expenditure for the sole purpose of taking nitrates out of water? As that is caused solely by agricultural practice, should that not be put on the agriculture Vote, instead of making my constituents pay more money to receive polluted water?

Mr. Gow: I shall discuss my hon. Friend's suggestion with my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, but I do not expect that it will be well received.

Dr. Cunningham: How does the Minister explain his sudden conversion to higher capital investment in the water industry when, in the past two financial years, he has presided over an underspend in excess of £100 million? Is it not adding insult to injury to those people who suffered severe water shortages this year to impose upon them some of the biggest increases in water rates? Is not the reality that the manipulation of external financing limits is simply a tax on water consumers? Why does the hon. Gentleman not face the truth?

Mr. Gow: The hon. Gentleman had left what was then the rather esoteric atmosphere of No. 10 Downing street before the famous letter of 15 December 1976 was written to Dr. Witterveen by his right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey).

Mr. Rogers: What about Disraeli? Tell us about Disraeli.

Mr. Gow: This is what the right hon. Member for Leeds, East then wrote:

> "An essential element of the Government's strategy will be a continuing and substantial reduction over the next few years in the share of resources required for the public sector."

The hon. Member was a member of that Government. We are increasing capital expenditure in the water industry. The hon. Gentleman has confused investment with the cash limits set for that year. Although the EFL was

undercalled by over £100 million in 1982-83, the investment underspend was £37 million and, thanks to low tender prices, that represented a volume of work close to what had been planned.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I again call for shorter answers.

Private Rented Accommodation

10. **Mr. Yeo** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will introduce legislation to promote the availability of private flats and houses for rent.

Mr. Gow: The Housing Act 1980 contained several provisions designed to stimulate the provision of private rented accommodation. I am considering whether further steps can be taken to encourage private landlords to meet the demand for homes to rent.

Mr. Yeo: Does my hon. Friend accept that he could substantially increase the availability of private houses and flats for rent by repealing existing legislation? Does he further accept that by doing so he would, at no cost to the taxpayer, increase mobility of labour and thus take an important step towards reducing unemployment among young people?

Mr. Gow: I have already said to the House on several occasions that the Rent Acts, which were designed to assist those who wanted accommodation to rent, have injured the very people whom they were designed to help and have succeeded in many cases in drying up the supply of private rented accommodation. Nevertheless, the Government have already taken initiatives to help, notably by the introduction of shorthold and by the reduction of the interval from three to two years of the period after which a landlord can ask the rent officer to review the rent. As I have already made clear to the House, we are considering what further we can do.

Mr. Winnick: Why does the Minister not accept that when his party brought in the sort of measure that his hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) is suggesting—for example the Rent Act 1957—it did not result in any way in providing more accommodation for letting, but produced Rachmanism? Is the Minister aware that private tenants will fight very hard to retain the rights that they must have against private landlords?

Mr. Gow: I do not accept the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question, because it is not true.

Local Authorities (Competitive Tendering)

11. **Mr. David Atkinson** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to publish his consultation document on further steps on competitive tendering by local councils.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I shall issue a consultation document within the next few weeks.

Mr. Atkinson: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the majority of services undertaken by local government in this country are being supplied by private enterprise in at least one industrial country, if not several, in the free world? Therefore, will my right hon. Friend undertake to survey, in his consultation paper, not what is now being attempted in this country by way of privatisation, but what has already succeeded elsewhere, most notably in the United States of America?

Mr. Baker: I give my hon. Friend that undertaking. I shall look at his suggestion. We have opened up a considerable number of activities in local government to competitive tendering. It has been beneficial, as is shown by the enormous savings that have already accrued.

Mr. Chope: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the proof of the pudding is in the eating? Wandsworth council has saved about £23 million as a result of competitive tendering and the London borough of Merton has saved about £6 million. Comparing the rate rises in Wandsworth and Lambeth over the last few years, it can be seen that in Lambeth the rates have gone up by 107 per cent. and in Wandsworth by only 6 per cent.

Mr. Baker: I pay tribute to the pioneering work of my hon. Friend, when he was in charge of Wandsworth council, in pressing ahead with privatisation. I remind the House that the Audit Commission, which is not a Government body, produced a report showing specifically that all authorities which had privatised various services achieved indisputable savings through contracting out.

West Midlands County Council

13. **Mr. Nellist** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will break down by percentage of total expenditure the value of those services presently administered by the West Midlands county council that he intends should be in future controlled by *(a)* district authorities, *(b)* joint boards and *(c)* other forms of control.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The county concil's net current expenditure, as recorded in its budget return for 1984-85, would be devolved as follows: 40 per ceat. would be controlled by the individual district councils, 60 per cent. would be the responsibility of the fire, police and passenger transport joint authorities, which would be composed of, and therefore controlled by, elected councillors from the districts.

Mr. Nellist: Is the Minister aware that those figures will be treated with some scepticism? In my own county, the west midlands, analysis shows that the figure would be only 20 per cent. by value of services incurred by districts, and therefore under the democratic and accountable working control of working people, and that 80 per cent. would go to bodies which would be either centrally controlled or under undemocratic and unelected authorities. How does the Minister square that with his assertion that it is a great leap forward for democracy?

Mr. Baker: The hon. Gentleman represents a city which has been consistently against the county council. The city of Coventry has always wanted to run its own affairs. The figures that I gave are correct. I ask the hon. Gentleman to remember that when the duties are devolved to the joint passenger authorities, the police boards and the fire boards, elected councillors from the metropolitan districts will serve on those boards and control their expenditure.

The metropolitan counties have very few friends. Now that the hon. Member is taking up their cause, I think that they will view that fact with grave concern.

Mr. W. Benyon: Leaving aside the details of this question, is my right hon. Friend not concerned about the fact that during the protracted stages of the legislation that is about to come before the House, the arguments will

centre on whether the Government's financial estimates are right, or whether the estimates of Coopers and Lybrand are right? Is there not a case for having a major independent financial look at the matter before we go any further?

Mr. Baker: I agree with my hon. Friend that the costs and savings in our estimate will be subject to considerable scrutiny, but I remind the House that our reason for embarking on the legislation is to return responsibility for a wide range of local government activities to the lower tier because we believe that it is more responsible and effective and that the work can be done more economically at the lower level.

Mr. Snape: Is it the Minister's intention to make the new joint boards as economic and democratic as, for example, the Severn-Trent water authority, which over the past decade has increased its precept by 244 per cent. compared with the precept increase of the metropolitan county of West Midlands of 159 per cent.? Bearing in mind that the Government have ensured that the meetings of the water authority are held behind closed doors so that the press are not allowed to attend and, further, that the Government have rigged the membership of the authority to suit their own political prejudices, is that the sort of democracy that the Minister wants to promote in the House to enhance his career?

Mr. Baker: I am doing nothing at all to the Severn-Trent water authority. With regard to the conduct of the business of the joint authorities, they will be subject to the same provisions for making their meetings open to the public as other local authorities. I remind the hon. Gentleman that there will be elected councillors on the joint authorities, and they will be responsible for the conduct and affairs of those joint authorities.

Council House Sales

14. **Mr. Knox** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many council houses have been sold in England since May 1979.

Sir George Young: From April 1979 to September 1984 about 620,000 dwellings were sold by local authorities and new towns in England.

Mr. Knox: Can my hon. Friend say what proportion of the total stock of council houses that figure represents?

Sir George Young: Not without notice, is the short answer.

Mr. Flannery: How many starts are there on the stocks to replace houses so that the demands of the waiting lists can be met? Can the Minister tell us just how many people are now on the waiting lists and how many houses are there to accommodate them?

Sir George Young: The hon. Gentleman seems to assume that the houses are not there once they have been sold. The houses remain part of the housing stock, and real people continue to live in them. The hon. Gentleman asked about the waiting lists. If his thesis is right, that the sale of council houses denies people on waiting lists the opportunity to move up, he would expect there to be fewer re-lets each year. I have the figures in front of me. In 1979, 194,000 people occupied local authority re-lets. In 1982, that figure had gone up to 223,000.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels: While I welcome the good figures for the sale of council house dwellings to date, may I ask my hon. Friend to chase up Labour-controlled councils such as Leicester to enable more people to buy their own houses and flats?

Sir George Young: There are still a number of authorities whose performance under the right to buy is unsatisfactory. My Department pursues progress with them so that all tenants can exercise their right to buy without delay or difficulty. Two thirds of the authorities that are monitored are Labour-controlled.

Mr. John Fraser: Why have not the capital receipts from the sale of over 600,000 council homes been recycled into rebuilding? Is not the truth that the Treasury has virtually stolen £3 billion to £4 billion of capital receipts —[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] Yes, the Treasury has stolen £3 billion to £4 billion of capital receipts from the sale of council houses, which could be used to build over 100,000 new houses to let, for major capitalised repairs on council estates, and for major improvements and repairs to privately owned houses. Is not the truth that the money is being taken away by the Treasury and that the people have been deceived about what was to happen with the proceeds from the right to buy?

Sir George Young: I am not sure how the Treasury could have stolen, if that is the right word, £3 billion or £4 billion, as total receipts from the sale of council houses have been only £2 billion. That £2 billion has been used by local authorities to supplement their housing investment programmes. It has been ploughed back into housing.

Land Register

15. **Sir Reginald Eyre** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the estimated cost of keeping and updating the land registers of public vacant land; how many civil servants, part or full-time, are employed in maintaining the land registers; and what is the estimated cost on his Vote for so doing.

Mr. Macfarlane: The departmental staff and accommodation costs of maintaining the land registers are not separately identified, but are estimated at about £325,000 per annum. The equivalent of 21 full-time staff are employed for the purpose.

Sir Reginald Eyre: Is my hon. Friend aware that the Department's announcement last week about compulsory sales of land is greatly to be welcomed and will help to justify that expense? Can he give further details of the procedure to be adopted, and will he vigorously follow up this new approach?

Mr. Macfarlane: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his comments. The announcement meets observations and requests made by many of my right hon. and hon. Friends, not least my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen), who has been very vigilant on this. We have to proceed slowly, as the land is not owned by the Department. Many nationalised industries and local authorities actually own the land. We have now made progress and issued first directions to local authorities in Darlington, Sunderland, Oldham and Nottingham. We shall be watching the situation closely and continuing the kind of progress that my hon. Friend seeks.

Mr. Tony Banks: What discussions has the Minister had with his colleagues about releasing some of the land held by the Ministry of Defence?

Mr. Macfarlane: That is a topic for continuing discussion by Ministers and officials.

(Environmental Effects) Agricultural Policy

16. **Mr. Kenneth Carlisle** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the progress of his initiative calling on the European Commission to review the progress made towards ensuring that environmental concerns are taken into account in common agricultural policies and to identify the scope for further action in this field.

Mr. Waldegrave: I wrote to Commissioner Narjes on 9 October. The Commission is currently considering our initiative. I propose to table a memorandum setting out the United Kingdom position for discussion at the next meeting of the Environment Council on 6 December.

Mr. Carlisle: Does my hon. Friend accept that this important initiative must be carried through to success? Does he also accept that there is no sense in using agriculture grants merely to add to farm surpluses, and every reason to switch grants to support farming that takes account of conservation?

Mr. Waldegrave: I agree with my hon. Friend. Our initiative in the Environment Council is aimed at matching that of my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in the Agriculture Council and to make a reality of the Community's integration of agricultural and environmental policies.

Dr. David Clark: I welcome the initiative at the EEC. However, does the Minister appreciate that it will affect only a very small part of our agricultural production and will inevitably involve delays? Does he accept that an alternative or additional means to achieve the same ends would be to amend the Wildlife and Countryside Act to empower MAFF to undertake expenditure on the promotion of nature conservancy in the same way as the Act requires water boards to do?

Mr. Waldegrave: Amending the Wildlife and Countryside Act would not alter Common Market law. This proposal aims to do just that. There must, of course, be limits on the expenditure, because, if for no other reason, this country above all does not wish to increase the total Common Market budget. Nevertheless, it is a valuable initiative, which has been widely welcomed.

Hydrocarbons (Exploration)

17. **Mr. Stephen Ross** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received concerning the need to safeguard the environment of rural areas especially sensitive to development from disturbances caused as a result of exploration for hydrocarbons.

Mr. Macfarlane: I am well aware of the concern caused by increased interest in exploration for hydrocarbons, particularly in southern England. That is why, in August, this year, the Department issued draft guidelines to local authorities on planning control over oil and gas operations. Since then I have received 45 representations in response to our request for comments on the draft and some 20 other letters on site-specific proposals.

Mr. Ross: I congratulate the Minister on what he has done so far. I assure him that I am not referring to the Solent, but does he accept that some landscapes are so sensitive that the environmental interests outweigh even the need for oil? Does he accept that it is vital for the Department of the Environment and the Department of Energy to agree on those areas before embarking on the kind of process now taking place in the Solent?

Mr. Macfarlane: I understand the concern that the hon. Gentleman expresses. That is why, in response to other questions in the House on 24 October, my right hon. Friend the Minister of State made a commitment that environmentally sensitive areas should be subject to the most rigorous scrutiny. Local planning authorities and county authorities also have a major part to play, as in some respects they are the experts in the immediate location of the exploration activities. The draft circular therefore emphasises that environmentally sensitive areas must be paramount at all times.

Mr. Nelson: There will be widespread support for the report that my hon. Friend has circulated to local planning authorities, giving them guidance on the criteria that they should apply to such applications. However, is my hon. Friend aware that while those of us who represent areas of great sensitivity, including areas of outstanding natural beauty, wish to support the national interest, we have had representations from our local authorities to the effect that the report needs to be stiffened? It should explain exactly why onshore exploration is important in the national interest. It should give more figures and more reasons.

Mr. Macfarlane: I can only advise the House on planning aspects. If my hon. Friend is anxious for details about onshore activities and the country's energy system, he will of course approach my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy. However, the planning system allows the views of the public to be fully considered at all times. The local planning authorities represent the start of a rigorous process of appraisal.

3.30 pm

Gibraltar

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Sir Geoffrey Howe): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I wish to make a statement about the outcome of the series of meetings that I have had with the Spanish Foreign Minister, Sr. Moran, about Gibraltar.

At our most recent meeting in Brussels on 27 November, we reached agreement about the way to put into effect the terms of the Lisbon statement of 10 April 1980. I am arranging for a copy of yesterday's communiqúe to be placed in the Library of the House. As a result of that agreement, the specific measures which I shall describe in a moment will be implemented by a date to be agreed, but not later than 15 February 1985.

From the date of implementation, direct communications between Gibraltar and Spain will be restored. This means that there will be free movement of people, vehicles and goods.

From the date of implementation, Spaniards in Gibraltar will enjoy those European Community rights which would otherwise become available only from the day of Spain's accession to the Community. From the same date, Gibraltarians in Spain will enjoy similar rights.

The legislative proposals necessary for this will be introduced in Gibraltar and in Spain. This arrangement does not affect the derogations and transitional periods which will have been agreed between Spain and the Community. These will of course be applicable to Gibraltar, in particular as regards the free movement of labour.

The range of matters to be covered will include freedom to enter and settle, rights of establishment and trade union rights, together with the right to provide a service and to purchase land and property. In addition, the Spanish Government have agreed that they will take the early actions necessary to allow safe and effective air communications within the air space in the region of Gibraltar.

On the day that communications are restored, the Spanish Foreign Minister and I will meet to begin the negotiating process envisaged by the Lisbon statement. That process will be aimed at overcoming all the differences between us over Gibraltar and at promoting co-operation on a mutually beneficial basis on economic, cultural, touristic, aviation, military and environmental matters. The Chief Minister of Gibraltar, Sir Joshua Hassan, will, of course, accompany me to that meeting.

Sr. Moran has told me that the Spanish side will raise the issue of sovereignty in these negotiations, as they are entitled to do on the basis provided by the Lisbon statement itself. Yesterday's communiqúe makes it equally plain that the British Government will fully maintain their commitment to honour the wishes of the people of Gibraltar, as set out in the preamble to the Gibraltar constitution. That commitment stands unchanged. Sr. Moran, for his part, has made clear the importance that he, too, attaches to the wishes of the people of Gibraltar.

Sr. Moran and I agreed about the importance of establishing practical co-operation between the people of Gibraltar and the neighbouring region. The Chief Minister of Gibraltar has expressed the same view. This will be of benefit to all sides. It will provide an important opportunity for Gibraltar's economy to develop and diversify.

This agreement marks the development of a new stage in relations between Britain and Spain, who are fellow NATO allies and prospective partners in the European Community.

Throughout this series of talks, I have kept in the closest touch with the Chief Minister of Gibraltar, Sir Joshua Hassan. I am most grateful to him for his consistently wise advice and support. In his statement yesterday, Sir Joshua Hassan said that he welcomed the agreement and believed that it will be beneficial to the people of Gibraltar. In his view, it will be a first step in the process of normalisation and fruitful co-operation between Gibraltar and the immediate vicinity for the benefit of all.

Sir Joshua Hassan described this agreement as an honourable outcome. I entirely endorse that judgment. I firmly believe that the agreement is in the interests of Gibraltar. The interests of Gibraltar and its people have always been, and will remain, of central importance to the British Government.

Mr. Denis Healey (Leeds, East): I should like first to welcome the agreement on behalf of the Labour Opposition. It is a welcome step forward. However, I am bound to say that the concessions made by the Spanish Government are ones that they would have been obliged to make the moment they joined the European Community and undertook to make four-and-a-half years ago in an agreement with Lord Carrington. Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman agree that the new feature of this agreement since Lord Carrington's discussions is the agreement by the Government to discuss the sovereignty of Gibraltar when negotiations begin after communications are restored? The Opposition welcome that commitment and believe that it might set an important precedent for other parts of the world, such as the Falklands, where it is necessary to link the reopening of communications with discussions on sovereignty.

Like the right hon. and learned Gentleman, we welcome the fact that the Chief Minister of Gibraltar regards the agreement as honourable. We welcome the Foreign Secretary's view, which was expressed at the end of his statement, that the interests of the people of Gibraltar must remain paramount.

Perhaps I could ask the Foreign Secretary a few detailed questions. First, can he tell us anything about how he sees the future of the dockyard in Gibraltar in the light of the new agreement? Secondly, what obligations will the Government accept for the pension rights of any Spanish employees who may take advantage of the new agreement at the appropriate stage to accept employment in Gibraltar? Finally, we regard this agreement as removing a serious obstacle to better relations between Britain and a democratic Spain. We hope that the right hon. and learned Gentleman and the Government will now give powerful support to Spain's accession to the EC at the already agreed date.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his welcome of my statement. I am glad to endorse the points on which he closed. We join the official Opposition in looking forward to Spain's early accession and will continue to give our full encouragement to the completion of the enlargement negotiations at the date already foreseen.

With regard to the general pattern of the agreement, it should be observed that what is now being afforded is an equality of arrangements on both sides. Both sides are agreeing to accelerate the rights that would become available on accession somewhat ahead of time. With regard to sovereignty, the right hon. Gentleman must recognise that the Lisbon statement specifically allowed any subject to be raised by either side and it was always foreseen that sovereignty was likely to be raised by the Spaniards in that context. Indeed, it had been raised before. It arises as a result of this implementation of the Lisbon agreement.

The right hon. Gentleman would be quite wrong to draw any parallel between this case and that of the Falkland Islands. They are historically, legally and constitutionally quite different. There is a complete contrast between the conduct of the two countries concerned—Spain and Argentina. Spain is an ally in NATO and a prospective partner in the European Community. Moreover, successive Spanish Governments have said publicly that they will pursue their claim by peaceful means. As I said in my statement, the Spanish Foreign Minister has spoken publicly of the need to respect the interests and the wishes of the people of Gibraltar. There could be no greater contrast between Gibraltar and the Falkland Islands.

Arrangements in regard to the dockyard have already been announced to the House. On 1 January 1985, the Royal Naval dockyard will be replaced by Gibraltar Shiprepair Limited, which is a commercially managed enterprise with A. P. Appledore International Limited acting as managers. The land and assets for the commercial ship repair yard are being handed over free of charge. Earlier this year we announced that £28 million had been made available to the Gibraltar Government for disbursement to meet the initial costs of conversion. We also announced that during the first three years of operation of the commercial yard work to a value of at least £14 million would be provided by the Ministry of Defence on Royal fleet auxiliaries.

I understand that people on the Spanish side of the border who have previously been employed in Gibraltar are already drawing, or are entitled to draw, pensions. All these matters are receiving consideration, but at the moment I cannot be specific.

Sir Frederic Bennett (Torbay): My right hon. and learned Friend will agree that in the past it would have been difficult for Gibraltar to keep going without Moroccan labour. Can he assure us that there will not be a dramatic cut-off in relation to Moroccans who already have jobs and without whose help it would have been impossible to keep the territory operating?

My right hon. and learned Friend's statement made it quite clear that the implementation of the Lisbon agreement was contingent on Spain's entry into the EEC on the hoped-for date in January 1986. If due to the influence of other powers—not Britain—that entry date is delayed, may we take it that it will not mean that the Spaniards will say, "Now we have not got in on January 1986 we are back to the status quo ante and we start all over again."?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I take my hon. Friend's point about a delay in the completion of the accession negotiations. The rights that would arise in those circumstances could not, I think, be altered. Spain will join the European Community. The date has been fixed for the implementation of this agreement—not later than 15 February—and I see no reason to suppose that anything thereafter will alter that date or its effectiveness for all these purposes.

My hon. Friend also spoke of the need to respect the position of Moroccans who already work there. Spaniards and Moroccans in Gibraltar have thus far been treated in the same way as all other non-European Community nationals. So far as we are concerned, they have always been able to live and work in Gibraltar, and that will remain the position.

Dr. David Owen (Plymouth, Devonport): The Foreign Secretary, Sr. Moran, and, indeed, Sir Joshua Hassan are to be congratulated on an extremely sensible and well-negotiated preliminary settlement. Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman agree that this is a vindication of the fact that the European Community is far more than just a trading arrangement, that it is a democratic institution and that it was inconceivable that Spain could have entered the Community while these restrictions existed?

In commenting on the differences between this case and the situation in the Falkland Islands, the Foreign Secretary has done less than justice to President Alfonsin of Argentina, who, after all, at some peril to his own life, was a critic of the aggression against the Falkland Islands——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I must remind the right hon. Gentleman that this is a statement on Gibraltar.

Dr. Owen: But, Mr. Speaker, the Foreign Secretary elaborated on that point in reply to the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey), the spokesman for the Labour party. The right hon. and learned Gentleman is not being fair to the democracy of Argentina and the statements of President Alfonsin about pursuing sovereignty through peaceful means. I hope that he will reconsider his statements, because they are damaging in the context of the situation in the southern Atlantic.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his opening remarks, but I must correct the emphasis which he sought to deploy in his latter remarks. An important difference now is that Argentina has an elected democratic government. We welcomed that fact when that Government took office. However, that is not the only factor that has to be taken into account. I drew attention to the much closer relationships which have existed and which will exist between ourselves, the people of Spain and the Spanish Government. That is apparent in the statements which they have made, which stand in sharp contrast to the simple and outstanding fact that Argentina —within a short time of 15 February two years ago—invaded and took possession of the Falkland Islands by force. That is an aspect of history which renders the whole matter vastly different. That is something that must be faced.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. An incidental reference to Argentina is allowable, but detailed references are not.

Mr. Albert McQuarrie (Banff and Buchan): I must congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend on the diligence and diplomacy which he displayed in the many meetings with Sr Moran to arrive at the successful

[Mr. Albert McQuarrie]

conclusion which was announced in yesterday's communiqué. However what is the reason for the fixed date of 15 February 1985? Is it not possible to give expatriates and others the opportunity of visiting either Spain or Gibraltar during this year's festive season?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his remarks. I would be disposed in principle to agree to anything which increased the prospects of festivity. The date which has been chosen takes into account the likely necessary time to carry through the introduction of the legislative measures that are necessary on both sides. It was clear that both sides wanted to move ahead as expeditiously as possible. The 15 February is a not-later-than date. If we can move ahead of it, so much the better. I fear that we shall not be able to do so in time for Christmas.

Mr. Michael Foot (Blaenau Gwent): Does the Foreign Secretary accept that the agreement, on which I congratulate him, illustrates how it is possible to negotiate in perfect good faith with the present Spanish Government? Does he draw the further conclusion that one of our main purposes over the coming months must be to negotiate further, fully in accord with the people of Gibraltar and in consultation with them, to ensure that we strengthen democracy in Spain, which is one of the greatest achievements of recent times? Does he accept that this sort of agreement can assist?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am grateful for the opportunity of agreeing with the right hon. Gentleman. This sort of agreement negotiated in this way can assist in this process. The accession of Spain to the European Community, on which we are all working as hard as we can, will make a powerful additional fortification to that process.

Sir Anthony Kershaw (Stroud): Has not the trouble in recent years been the unreasonable treatment by Franco of Gibraltar? If Gibraltarians are able now to deal in a reasonable, just and friendly way with Spain, may they not eventually find it possible to live in a Spanish dimension without losing their own identity?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: That is a question which in the end will have to be answered by the people of Gibraltar themselves. That is why we have underlined our commitment to respect the wishes of the people of Gibraltar. My hon. Friend is right in saying that one of the consequences of the agreement should be an improvement in the prospects of co-operation between the people of Gibraltar and the people of the nearby part of Spain. That can do nothing but good in opening up the prospects for further co-operation between the two peoples.

Mr. John Hume (Foyle): I, too, congratulate, the Foreign Secretary on the agreement. Does he agree that the issue of sovereignty becomes an obstacle to the resolution of larger and wider problems? He showed a welcome sensitivity to Spanish views on the subject by agreeing to have them on the table for discussion. Does he agree that the problem of Northern Ireland is far more serious than that of Gibraltar and that the issue of sovereignty——

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Hume: —is a major obstacle——

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Hume *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. That was an abuse on the part of the hon. Gentleman and I am surprised at his action.

Mr. Hume: We have taken many abuses over the centuries, Mr. Speaker.

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): Will the Secretary of State assure the House that there will be no change in the sovereignty of Gibraltar until its people decide that with a free democratic vote?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The position for the people of Gibraltar remains exactly the same as was stated in the 1969 constitution. It will be changed only if the freely expressed wishes of the people of Gibraltar point in that direction. We stand by that unchanged commitment.

Mr. Russell Johnston (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber): Is the Secretary of State aware that the Liberal party also wishes to congratulate him on the agreement, which is much in the terms set out by Sir Joshua Hassan, who I noticed attracted from the Foreign Secretary the quite unique tribute of being consistently wise? Can the right hon. and learned Gentleman confirm that the only aspect that will delay the agreement until 15 February is the necessary legislation in Spain and Portugal and that no other factors are relevant?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: That is the practical position. Obviously, having moved as we did in the past two days to reach the agreement, it was necessary to identify a date a reasonable period ahead, as soon as we could reasonably make it, and with a reasonable prospect of being able to complete all the necessary steps. It is a practical choice of a practical date and, as I have said, it is a not-later-than date.

Sir Bernard Braine (Castle Point): How does my right hon. and learned Friend envisage honouring the pledge that the wishes of the people of Gibraltar will be respected? Does he recall that 15 years ago the people of Gibraltar were given in a plebiscite the opportunity to declare whether they wished to remain under the Crown? Will he give a specific assurance here and now that at the appropriate time—and it may not be yet—the people of Gibraltar will be given the same right as they were given all those years ago?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I have given the specific assurance reaffirming the proposition set out in the preamble to the 1969 constitution that

> "Her Majesty's Government will never enter into arrangements under which the people of Gibraltar would pass under the sovereignty of another state against their freely and democratically expressed wishes."

There is no doubt about the wishes and feelings of the people of Gibraltar at the present time. That was established in a referendum some time ago. It may not be desirable to continue to test the temperature in that way. That will have to be considered by the Gibraltar Government. However, the principle that I have enunciated stands unqualified.

Sir John Biggs-Davison (Epping Forest): While congratulating my right hon. and learned Friend on his achievements and welcoming his reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Sir B. Braine), may I ask whether it follows from the communiqué that should the

Spanish Government raise the question of sovereignty, as they are entitled to do, any discussions of that matter will be academic?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I do not think that it would be right to reach that conclusion. The Spanish Government have stated on more than one occasion that they do not expect change in that respect, even on their own terms, happening at a fast pace. They have stated that they recognise the need to have regard to the wishes as well as the interests of the people of Gibraltar. In effect, they recognise that if the proposition contained in the constitution that I have just quoted is to be respected a process of persuasion on their part would have to be undertaken. All those are features which, realistically, they must take into account during the negotiating process.

Mr. Colin Moynihan (Lewisham, East): Will my right hon. and learned Friend take this opportunity to welcome the friendly, realistic and, above all, constructive approach of the Spanish Government not only on this issue but on the talks about a new extradition treaty, on Spain's becoming a member of NATO and on its seeking early membership of the European Community?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am glad to be able to say yes to that question. It is the prospect of making progress on, for example, the new extradition treaty that is encouraged by such an agreement. It is one of the practical illustrations of the benefits that can flow from such an arrangement.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. There is another statement to follow. I shall allow questions to continue on this statement for a further five minutes.

Mr. Robin Maxwell-Hyslop (Tiverton): Will my right hon. and learned Friend examine the unemployment and pension rights of Moroccans who prevented Gibraltar from collapsing when Franco's Government endeavoured to bring about its collapse by closing the frontier? Does he recognise that many people are extremely worried about what will happen to them? Without those Moroccan workers, there would have been a much heavier cash liability on the British Treasury to support Gibraltar. Does he agree that we have an ex-gratia obligation to ensure that some form of pension is provided for them when they are displaced as a result of these entirely excellent arrangements? I ask my right hon. and learned Friend not to neglect those matters because many hon. Members feel strongly about them.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to that matter. The pension rights of people who have been working in Gibraltar, whether Moroccan or Spanish under the previous disposition, depend to some extent on the schemes that have existed and that exist today. I shall certainly consider that point carefully.

Mr. Ivor Stanbrook (Orpington): Is not the concession of sovereignty a surrender to blackmail? We have never before discussed sovereignty with the Spanish Government. What is to stop them from nibbling away at this issue, confident in the knowledge that the principle of a transfer of sovereignty has already been conceded? The Spaniards never observed the Lisbon agreement. Why does my right hon. and learned Friend think that they will observe this agreement?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: My hon. Friend is wrong to say that the principle of sovereignty has now been conceded. The position remains the same as that arising from the Lisbon statement, except that the question of sovereignty can be raised. He is also wrong when he says that there is nothing to stop sovereignty from being conceded. My firm reaffirmation of the preamble of the 1969 constitution stops that. We shall continue to honour our obligations and respect the wishes of the people of Gibraltar.

Mr. Peter Fry (Wellingborough): Has my right hon. and learned Friend read this morning that a spokesman from the Spanish Foreign Office effectively said that the agreement meant that there would eventually be integration of Gibraltar into Spain? Does he accept that that is not inevitable? Will he note that a reason which may change Gibraltarians' opinion is a decline in their economy? Will he therefore accept that this country and the Government have a continuing responsibility that goes further than merely financing new ship repair yards?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I have noticed many statements reported in today's press, including the proposition of the Spanish Foreign Minister, which underlines the fact that the Spanish Government have the greatest respect for the feelings of Gibraltarians. The possibility that we have wanted to avert by making this agreement is the risk of a decline in the economic prospects of Gibraltar. Nothing could do more than this agreement to promote improved prospects in that respect. The British Government will continue to follow closely economic developments in Gibraltar. We envisage that this agreement will assist the economy of Gibraltar to develop and diversify.

Sir Kenneth Lewis (Stamford and Spalding): I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend, but I particularly congratulate the small Gibraltarian Government who may have considerable difficulties—hon. Members who know Gibraltar will recognise this—during the next two years with their economy in the new changed position. Will my right hon. and learned Friend promise to be behind that Government and, if necessary, to increase the subsidy to help them through this difficult period?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: We shall continue to follow economic developments in Gibraltar closely, as we have done thus far. I understand my hon. Friend's anxiety about the nature of the problems that have been and are facing Gibraltar. The opportunity opening up on 1 January with the commencement of the dockyard under new management will make a positive contribution to the future. The prospect of economic co-operation opened up by the agreement will make an even more substantial contribution to the prospects for economic prosperity. We shall certainly keep the position closely under review.

Mr. Stephen Dorrell (Loughborough): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that the agreement is welcome evidence of the improving relationship between Britain and democratic Spain? Is he further aware that it is an important demonstration that the proper way for democratic states to resolve sovereignty disputes between them is on the twin bases of discussion and respect for the rights of those most intimately involved?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I agree with both points.

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): As it is clearly established that it is the wish of the overwhelming majority

[Mr. Toby Jessel]

of Gibraltarians to stay British permanently, does not my right hon. and learned Friend believe that it would be rather unkind to allow Spain to delude itself into imagining that any change is likely at any time in the future?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: Even my hon. Friend must hesitate about asserting that any proposition is the permanent truth. What is true, without any qualification, is that the Spanish Government wish to raise the question of sovereignty, and that our commitment to respect the wishes of the people of Gibraltar remains firm, unqualified and as set out in the constitution.

Later—

Mr. Hume: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Earlier today I was fortunate enough to catch your eye following the Foreign Secretary's statement on Gibraltar and I was grateful for that. I am somewhat puzzled, however, at what I regard as the inconsistency of your treatment of the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey), the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen) and myself. When those right hon. Gentlemen raised what they regarded as analogous issues you allowed the Foreign Secretary to reply, but when I did the same you not only ruled me out of order but described my question as an abuse, which is, you will agree, rather strong language. I believe that I am entitled to raise an analogous issue, especially as I was making exactly the same point as the two right hon. Gentlemen — that the Government's policy on analogous issues is based not on principle but on expediency.

Mr. Speaker: Two abuses do not make a right. After the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen) raised the matter I pointed out that only an allusion could be made to the Falklands. The hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume), however, persisted in making a rather long statement about Northern Ireland. The Foreign Secretary's statement had nothing to do with Northern Ireland. Gibraltar was the subject of the statement.

Mr. Hume: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: No; we cannot have any further points of order on that.

Regional Industrial Policy

4.0 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry (Mr. Norman Lamont): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement on the Government's review of regional policy. I have today made four orders to bring into force the new regional development grant scheme and the new map of assisted areas. The orders, including that specifying the new assisted areas, are available in the Vote Office.

Our decisions have been taken after very full consultation, including consideration of almost 500 submissions. I have placed in the Library a list and a summary of the submissions received. The submissions received show considerable support for the Government's proposals as outlined in the White Paper. While the majority support the continuation of regional policy, many are critical of the waste inherent in the present system and consider it possible to make the policy more cost-effective.

To achieve greater cost-effectiveness we have concluded that the new map should have two tiers instead of three, and that the inner tier, which will qualify for automatic grants as well as regional selective assistance, will be restricted to 15 per cent. of the working population. This compares with 22 per cent. for the present development and special development areas. The outer tier of the map, which will qualify for regional selective assistance, will cover a further 20 per cent. of the working population. We have included in the new map several areas, most notably parts of the west midlands, that have previously been denied regional assistance. Both tiers will be eligible for support from the European regional development fund.

In redrawing the map we considered the present and future employment patterns of each area, along with other factors, including the risk of distortions where non-assisted areas are adjacent to assisted areas. Some such effects are inevitable in any regional policy. For the new RDG scheme we have set the rate of capital grant at 15 per cent. In our view, the new rate is high enough to ensure that grants are an effective incentive to investment.

For too long regional policy has unduly discriminated against service industries even when such industries offer the prospect of increased employment. We have, therefore, decided to make some service activities eligible for regional development grant. These are listed in the relevant order.

Since unemployment is such an important concern today, it is also right that any policy as expensive as regional policy should be tied more closely to jobs. We have already announced our intention to make two changes to give effect to that aim. First, capital grant will be subject to a cost-per-job limit. Too much money has been spent in support of capital-intensive projects that create few jobs and do little for the economies of the regions. The cost-per-job limit will be £10,000. However, we wish to minimise the burdens placed on small firms and this limit will not normally be applied to firms employing fewer than 200.

Secondly, we also announced that in future firms should be able to receive a job grant as an alternative to capital grant. The job grant will be set at a level of £3,000

for each new job created. Firms will not have to choose between job grant and capital grant: they will automatically receive whichever is the greater.

The Government also intend to continue to give selective assistance to projects that protect existing employment but which otherwise would not go ahead. With the increase in the outer tier of the map, this will mean an increase in selective assistance. Overall, the balance between automatic grants and selective assistance will shift considerably towards the latter.

After the working through of the transitional provisions, we expect the new regional policy to cost nearly £300 million per year less than if present policy were to be continued. This will be a considerable lightening of the public expenditure burden of the policy. Even so, we shall still be spending nearly £400 million on regional policy in 1987-88 to improve job prospects in the worst hit areas.

The most important feature of our policy is that money will now be spent in the areas with the worst problems and that, in terms of new jobs per pound of expenditure, the new policy will be far more effective than the old.

Mr. John Smith (Monklands, East): Before I ask the Minister about the content of his statement, may I ask him what arrangements the Government propose to make to debate this important statement? Is he aware that, for hon. Members on both sides of the House, the detail in the orders will be the most important information that they can obtain, but they will not be able to comment on it today? Therefore, it is important to have an early debate on the principle and on the orders, and I hope that we can have more than one day.

Is the Minister aware that the truth behind his glib references to flexibility and cost-effectiveness is that the statement announces the end of effective regional assistance? Is it not disgraceful, at a time when unemployment in the regions has never been higher, that the Government have made a slashing reduction of £300 million a year, which represents £1·5 billion during five years, in the regional development budget? Is it not appalling that, although unemployment is much higher than it was when special development areas had to be created, the reduction in the regional development grant to 15 per cent. plus the other limits will mean that, effectively, special development areas will be abolished completely?

Does the Minister realise that this is the second major attack on the regional development system since the cuts of 1979 and 1982? There has already been a major reduction in assistance. Can he confirm that expenditure between 1974 and 1979 was £6·4 billion, which was reduced to £4·1 billion between 1979 and 1984, which is a reduction of 35 per cent. even before the changes that he has just announced? Why does the regional development programme have to shoulder further reductions that will go to the heart of its effectiveness?

Are not the limits of £10,000 a job on capital grants and the miserly £3,000 on job grants completely unrealistic, when it costs the Government £6,000 a year for every person who is unemployed? Do not the Government demonstrate that the so-called emphasis on job-oriented assistance is completely bogus? Are not the levels well below the permitted EC levels, and do they not put our regions at a serious disadvantage within the Community, where we already have 10 of the 25 most disadvantaged regions?

Is it not the case that areas moving from special development area status and development area status to the outer tier will face a sharp and severe cut in the assistance that can be offered, which is bound to be a major blow to their hopes for industrial development and a major accelerator of local unemployment? Can the Minister state —the House will listen with care to his answer to this— the expected increase in unemployment as a result of the changes announced today?

Although the Opposition welcome the inclusion of parts of the west midlands within the ambit of the outer tier assistance, is it not sad that the collapse of manufacturing industry and the huge increase in unemployment in the west midlands, as a result of the Government's policies, are such that the west midlands must now be helped in this way? Although the core of Birmingham has 30 per cent. unemployment, why is not a single ward in the west midlands made a development area?

Is it not quite deplorable that the help to be given to areas now included in the outer zone of minimal assistance has to be at the expense of other areas which have had their help reduced? Is it not a case not only of cutting the jam but of insisting that the vastly reduced amount be spread as thinly as possible?

Much is made by the Government of the capital expenditure on the Sullom Voe oil terminal and some chemical projects. Could not a limit have been put on certain categories of expenditure by a simple exercise in reclassification without having to downgrade the whole system of regional development?

Why does the inclusion of services, which we welcome as an addition to the existing help for services, have to be at the expense of major cuts in support for main line manufacturing by the withdrawal of grants for replacement and much of the modernisation programme? Will tourists and hotels be covered in the service assistance? Whatever is the extension of services or of the map, surely it in no way makes up for the massive reductions elsewhere.

Is it not extremely foolish to compound the folly of the withdrawal by the Chancellor in his Budget of capital allowances through the withdrawal of grants for replacement and modernisation, which will have a major disincentive effect on industrial modernisation?

Do not the Government realise that the massive drop in investment in manufacturing industries since 1979 is at the heart of our troubles? Why are they encouraging it?

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is it appropriate, in a matter as important as this, when there are many Back Benchers who have an interest, for the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) to take all our time in this way?

Mr. Speaker: This is a matter that affects a great many right hon. and hon. Members. When I call Back Benchers, I must take into account the amount of time taken by the Opposition Front Bench spokesman.

Mr. Smith: The House will realise that, however bland and short the Minister's statement might be, this is of tremendous importance to many areas that are suffering very high unemployment.

[Mr. Smith]

Is not the reality that the Government are signalling the end of regional development policies that have been pursued by Governments of all parties? How long are people in the regions to be condemned to high unemployment and low value added jobs because of the Government's obsessive determination to slash public expenditure to levels which will ruin the country?

Mr. Lamont: There will be a full debate on what I have announced today, though obviously the precise details of it will have to be arranged through the usual channels.

This is not the end of effective regional policy. It is the beginning of job-related and effective regional policy. The right hon. and learned Gentleman conceded that there had been a lot of waste in regional policy. He conceded, in relation to Sullom Voe, the expenditure of £130,000 for each job created. That is the problem that we have to tackle. We have tackled it by the cost per job limit and the requirement to create jobs. The cost per job limit and the requirement to create jobs account for half the saving that I have announced. Is the right hon. and learned Gentleman against that?

Mr. Smith: Yes.

Mr. Lamont: In that case the right hon. and learned Gentleman is not in favour of the economies that he professed to want. He is in favour of £130,000 for each job at Sullom Voe.

There is room for economies when regional policy created new jobs in the 1970s at a cost of £35,000 each. Many of those jobs would have come into existence anyway.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman referred to the cost per job limit of £10,000 and suggested that that was too niggardly. It is about twice the level of the average capital intensity of investment in British industry. It will not deny the capital-intensive sector access to regional development grants.

As for the job grant, which has been fixed at a limit of £3,000, it is true that that could be slightly higher under the EC limit, at £3,150. We felt it prudent to be somewhat below that. The fluctuations of exchange rates could place us in a difficult position. But it is not a significant amount below the maximum.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman spoke of an abrupt cut-off. He should know that there are transitional provisions and that in the inner tier where people qualify for regional development grants, provided those assets are made available in the next 12 months, they will still qualify for them. There are generous transitional provisions.

As for what the right hon. and learned Gentleman said about Birmingham—I am sure that other right hon. and hon. Members will be referring to it—our review of the map has been based on the same principles as the map of the Labour Government. That was based on travel-to-work areas, and that is what we have done as well.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman condemned the taking out of replacement investment. That again is common throughout the EC. We are required to do it, and it was announced in the House before today.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman asked whether hotels and tourism would be included in the service activities. Obviously we gave this matter considerable thought. After consulting the industry, we decided that we would not include them. It was made clear to us that most of them preferred to benefit from the national scheme under section 4 of the Development of Tourism Act 1969, where they have their own money available for the development of tourism.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman ought to get his facts right when he says that the decline in investment makes the timing of my announcement inopportune. Precisely the opposite is true. Investment in manufacturing is rising so strongly that we are able to make these savings. It is rising this year by some 14 per cent. or 15 per cent., which is the best rate seen for many years.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. In relation to what I said a few moments ago, I would normally allow about half an hour for a statement and questions to the Minister making it. In view of the importance of this one I propose to allow questions to go on until five o'clock. I hope in that time to be able to call every right hon. and hon. Member seeking to catch my eye, but I ask for brief questions, please.

Mr. David Mudd (Falmouth and Camborne): As a west country Member of Parliament, I listened with delight to my hon. Friend's statement. However, it seems that in tidying up the problems of west Cornwall he has created a far greater anomaly in the Truro travel-to-work area. One area, United Downs, which has encouraged massive input from the Department of the Environment and the Manpower Services Commission, is to be discouraged as a focal point for industrial development because it has fallen foul of a line on the map. I hope that I shall have my hon. Friend's assurance that these lines on the map are not mandatory and will be negotiable in the light of local circumstances.

Mr. Lamont: Much as I would like to oblige my hon. Friend, I fear that I am unable to give him that assurance. He will know that our building block for the assisted area map is, as it has always been, the travel-to-work area. That is based on common sense. People may argue about the formation of an individual travel-to-work area, but it makes sense, when the policy is aimed at reducing imbalances in unemployment throughout the country, to look at it in terms of areas where people, as statistically measured, travel to and from work. That is the basis of the travel-to-work areas, and that must be the only basis upon which a policy designed to iron out levels of unemployment can be established. Therefore, I am afraid that what my hon. Friend says about Department of the Environment money going into a smaller area does not undermine the basis of the policy. We have to stick to the basic building block of the system.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Does the Minister not understand that, by his announcement today, he is excluding, not only from British but from European regional aid, some of the areas with the highest unemployment? Why did he stick to the travel-to-work area as a building block, when that has led to the inclusion within aid of some areas with low unemployment to the exclusion of areas such as Amble in my constituency, with the highest unemployment? Does he realise that this slap-dash map, drawn by somebody sitting behind a desk in

London, demonstrates that not only does he not care about the levels of unemployment, but that he does not even know where they are.

Mr. Lamont: The hon. Gentleman is wrong in what he says about the European regional development fund. As a result of our changes, far larger parts of the country will qualify for access to the ERDF. The total map has been enlarged from some 27·5 per cent. to 35 per cent. The outer tier is now 20 per cent., compared with 5 per cent. before. Many areas will now qualify for ERDF assistance. That was one of our main motives in enlarging the outer tier.

Sir Raymond Gower (Vale of Glamorgan): In pursuing that matter, has full account been taken of the fact that the regional development status of an area governs the likelihood of it obtaining EEC aid? What will be the impact of these changes on areas such as Wales?

Mr. Lamont: The position as I have just explained to the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), is that many more areas will qualify for ERDF assistance. Of course, it depends on those individual areas being able to generate the projects themselves. As regards the effects on Wales, we had to make difficult decisions based on impartial criteria, and Wales has been treated fairly. Half the total savings are coming from England, one third from Scotland, and one fifth from Wales.

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): Is there not a case for more help for many more parts of Greater Manchester than is proposed? Taking its population as a percentage of the north-west as a whole, should not Greater Manchester have higher priority? Is the Minister aware that in many parts of the city in Manchester there are male unemployment rates of over 50 per cent., and in some localities over 66 per cent. of young people under 25 on the dole? Does that not just speak but shout of the need for more help for Greater Manchester?

Mr. Lamont: The right hon. Gentleman says that inner Manchester has high levels of unemployment, which it has. He then goes on to say — I do not follow the "therefore" in his argument — that Greater Manchester should have assisted area status. The right hon. Gentleman should be grateful that Manchester has been partially included. I know what Labour Members are interested in. This is the only travel-to-work area that has been split. It is on the borderline of the 35 per cent. maximum coverage that we could have. We had to negotiate that with the EEC and we could not go beyond 35 per cent. To be frank, we are lucky that we have part of Manchester in, and there is not a strong case for saying that the whole of the Manchester area should be included.

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): Does my hon. Friend realise that many people, who have never been included in development or assisted areas but who live in pockets of considerable unemployment, will be pleased to see that they will now be treated in the same way as most of the rest of the country? Therefore, from their point of view, this is an excellent statement. Will he make it clear that the intermediate areas that are not shown on the map and therefore are not clear will benefit from the European grants?

Mr. Lamont: The intermediate areas are listed in the order, and will qualify for ERDF. I am grateful for my hon. Friend's first remarks, and he is quite right. Today we have done something that will lead to fewer anomalies, less job shuffling and fewer distortions

Mr. Michael Foot (Blaenau Gwent): How much of the alleged £300 million saving is attributable to the abolition of the special development areas? How much is attributable to Wales? What is the calculation in employment? Does the hon. Gentleman not understand that if this means any cut at all, he is hitting the areas that have already been hit hardest by the Government?

Mr. Lamont: I explained that half of the saving will come from the taking out of replacement investment and the requirement to create jobs. The rest of it comes from changes in the map and in the rate of grant. The right hon. Gentleman will understand that there are many changes in what I have announced today, compared with the previous map and system, and therefore it is extremely difficult to say precisely which saving is attributable to which particular thing. It is like comparing apples and oranges. They are different.

I do not accept that this will lead to more unemployment. The reverse is true. We are getting better value for money in terms of creating jobs. When we are spending so much money on regional policy, it must make sense to tie it more closely to the creation of jobs. What is the purpose of regional policy otherwise?

Sir Hector Monro (Dumfries): How are we to get regional infrastructure forestry grants if most of the United Kingdom afforestation is outwith the assisted areas?

Mr. Lamont: As my hon. Friend knows, only those areas that are assisted areas will qualify. As regards the European dimension, I have said repeatedly that it will be much easier for people to qualify because the map of the assisted areas is larger.

Mr. Gordon Wilson (Dundee, East): The Minister has obviously been able to treat the Secretary of State for Scotland with the contempt that he deserved, with a cut of £100 million in the Scottish budget. However, does he not understand that the Scots will bitterly resent this despoliation and rape of their country, and being treated as a Third world colony? Furthermore, will the Minister take on board the fact that unemployment in Scotland is still increasing? Scotland has so far donated about £30 billion in oil revenues to the United Kingdom. How can he justify to the Scottish people this transfer of jobs and money to the English west midlands?

Mr. Lamont: The hon. Gentleman has an 18th-century attitude to these things. He thinks that money should be doled out on the basis of political pork barrelling and nothing else. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] I shall wait with interest to hear hon. Members' opinions, but the map has been drawn on the basis of objective criteria, and unemployment, long-term unemployment, job opportunities, industrial structure and peripherality, have all been taken into account. It is nonsense to say that Scotland has been badly treated. It is increasing its share of the inner tier, and maintaining its share of the outer tier.

Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Will my hon. Friend accept that the fact that at long last some recognition has been paid to the problems of the west midlands by the application of schedule 2 of the order published today will cause some small cheer? We have tried to hammer home to the Government over the past

[Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark]

year or so that we have the highest long-term unemployment in Britain. Therefore, we think that the core of Birmingham, where we have lost 190,000 jobs, should be looked upon as schedule 1. How will the increased selective assistance be judged and by whom, because it will be important that Birmingham does not find itself losing business to Stratford and the more lush areas because they are also covered by schedule 2? Will he guarantee that he will not pay firms to move within the area so that people will get grants at Birmingham's expense yet again?

Mr. Lamont: My hon. Friend is right. In the past, regional policy has done great harm to the west midlands and has directed industry away from the west midlands and Birmingham. Even when Labour Governments were in power, unemployment in Birmingham was for many years higher than the national average, but they did nothing about giving it assisted area status. Although Birmingham has higher than the national average unemployment, this is the first time that it has been given any assisted area status.

We have also taken measures to prevent mere job shuffling within the assisted areas. That will mean that people will not be able to get grants merely for moving an operation from one assisted area to another, from one part of the Birmingham travel-to-work area to another, or from the inner tier to the outer tier. Mere job shuffling will not be possible.

Selective assistance will be determined by the West Midlands Industrial Development Advisory Board. It will take into account the special needs of the inner area of Birmingham. That is also properly the objective of the urban programme. Birmingham has a partnership area. No city in the United Kingdom receives more urban aid than Birmingham, which is receiving £24·5 million.

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): It is bigger.

Mr. Lamont: All right—it is bigger, it has needs and it gets the largest amount.

Mr. Jack Dormand (Easington): Will the Minister confirm that this policy will almost certainly mean a reduction in assistance for the northern region? As the north has the highest rate of unemployment outside Northern Ireland, what possible justification can there be for this action? Is this not the best example we have yet had of so-called consultation being an utter sham? Is not the real reason for this action the desire for a reduction in public expenditure at any price in human terms?

Mr. Lamont: That is emphatically not the case. In fact, the northern region has done relatively well in this review of regional policy. Of course, there are savings coming from the northern region, but they are savings from the heavy, capital-intensive industries. Even the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) admitted that there was a case for making those savings. His answer seems to be to exclude the chemical industry completely from regional development grants—to exclude the industry from the standard industrial classification. I do not believe that the chemical industry will like being completely excluded from obtaining access to regional assistance. We have applied the policy fairly and objectively to all areas. Obviously, the northern region will have to have selective assistance rather than automatic assistance for the most capital-intensive projects. The region has been treated fairly.

Sir Paul Bryan (Boothferry): Is my hon. Friend aware that he has given some good criteria as the basis for his decisions? It is apparent that the only reason why Goole is not assisted is that it has been put into a travel-to-work area—as has Selby recently—which means that average unemployment has been reduced. Unemployment in Goole was just as high as in Scunthorpe and other places. I brought a delegation to my hon. Friend the Minister to explain to his Ministry that this is exactly what has happened.

Mr. Lamont: I appreciate my hon. Friend's concern. Obviously, many hon. Members are worried about the composition of individual travel-to-work areas. The travel-to-work areas are compiled by the Department of Employment on the basis of observed facts — how people travel and work. I know that sometimes people find it difficult to accept reclassifications, but they are conducted on the basis of objective criteria. They are based on how people work and live. The minimum requirement is that 70 per cent. of the people who work in an area should live in it and 70 per cent. of those who live in an area should work in it. The reclassification has been done objectively.

Mr. Bruce Millan (Glasgow, Govan): Is the Minister aware that every representative of Scottish organisations who has commented on the White Paper has said that the total of regional aid should not be reduced. That fact has been ignored, and the Minister has come here today with a statement that will cost £100 million in Scotland. Is he aware that this action will be devastating to Scotland? Given our record levels of unemployment, his statement is deeply offensive and an insult to the unemployed.

Mr. Lamont: That is very dramatic language — [HON. MEMBERS: "It is true."] Smaller amounts of money can be equally effective in creating jobs. Much of the money that was deployed previously was doing nothing to create employment. Sometimes, by subsidising the most capital-intensive projects, that money was doing the opposite and creating problems within areas. Many of the representations that we received stated that there was ample room for savings in regional policy.

Mr. John Corrie (Cunninghame, North): I thank my hon. Friend for including my entire constituency in the special development area. Is he aware that, when he drew up this report last week, unemployment in my constituency was 31 per cent. and that a further 200 men at the steel works had been made redundant, pushing that level beyond 31 per cent.? Does he agree that the maximum amount of finance should be spent in such areas to reduce unemployment?

Mr. Lamont: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his comments. Obviously, if a project in my hon. Friend's constituency qualifies for and is deserving of selective assistance, we shall consider it.

Mr. Roy Mason (Barnsley, Central): Is the Minister aware that, during the past five years, there has been much investment in the coal industry in Barnsley and south Yorkshire, resulting in major technological changes underground and thousands of redundancies and lost job

opportunities? In these small, mono-economy coal-mining towns, it is obvious that the Minister has not taken that technological factor into account. He has not considered also the fact that, after the strike is over, the unemployment trends in those coal-mining towns will increase. There is an urgent need for a re-examination of his statement to give those towns the development status they will require to offset job losses in the pits and lost job opportunities.

Mr. Lamont: I appreciate what the right hon. Gentleman says. He must realise that we have to look at this matter overall. We must look in terms of not only of the unemployment throughout an area but where that unemployment has come from and the industries that have caused it. Decisions which have applied to the travel-to-work area in the right hon. Gentleman's constituency have been based on those statistics and the material available.

The right hon. Gentleman may know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy today announced a further increase in the money available for NCB industries to help alleviate the difficult problems caused by closures in these areas.

Mr. Kenneth Warren (Hastings and Rye): Although I welcome my hon. Friend's step forward, I had hoped for a much more radical approach. As unemployment is, unfortunately, a characteristic of the whole country, did my hon. Friend look at the benefits that could arise by decreasing industrial taxation as a method of creating jobs rather than leaving us with what is becoming an antiquated regional policy support system?

Mr. Lamont: I am interested in what my hon. Friend has to say. We are attacked from one side of the House for having made far too savage cuts, but some hon. Members feel that we could have gone further and been a bit more radical. I noticed that a writer in *The Times* this morning —I hasten to say that I had nothing to do with the article—in a rather accurate guess about what would be announced today, thought that we could have had a much more radical policy and gone further. My hon. Friend is right to believe that many of the jobs that have come into existence through regional policy would have done so anyway. Much of the policy has involved just shuffling jobs around from one part of the country to another. By lessening or stopping that we are benefiting the whole country.

Mr. Ian Wrigglesworth (Stockton, South): Is this statement not the final confirmation, if it were needed, of the fact that the Conservative party has completely abandoned its commitment to the one-nation philosophy? Is not the bottom line of the Minister's statement the £300 million that will now not go to the regions? Does the Minister recall that during the debates on the Co-operative Development Agency and Industrial Development Bill I and other Opposition Members demanded that the Minister tell us the scale of cuts that would occur under that legislation? Despite denying it then, only weeks and months ago, the hon. Gentleman has delivered a statement cutting £300 million from the regions. That action will further polarise and divide the country. Is it not a scandal that this is a further hammer blow on the unemployed and poorer regions?

Mr. Lamont: At no time did I deny that there would be cuts in regional policy. The measure has been expected. The hon. Gentleman is not paying attention to the proposals. We are making this policy much more job-related. In the past, the policy has not created jobs. About 500,000 jobs over 20 years at a price in excess of £30,000 per job is not many jobs to have created with this policy. During the past 12 years, £4 billion has been spent on RDGs. What do we have to show for it? Nothing. We cannot solve the unemployment problem by regional policy. We can solve it only through general economic policy—by getting interest rates and inflation down—and that is what this policy is designed to help.

Mrs. Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): My hon. Friend will appreciate that this news comes as a great disappointment to my constituents and to those of my hon. Friend the Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (Mr. Lennox-Boyd). We find it difficult to know how my hon. Friend has interpreted the criteria he gave, particularly that of peripherality. In his statement my hon. Friend said that he would have to rely on areas to generate applications for European funds. By cutting from this scheme those who have great experience of the system and are able to do that, we could well be depriving the United Kingdom of substantial funds, particularly from the European Investment Bank, as we pointed out when we came to see him.

Mr. Lamont: I appreciate my hon. Friend's anxiety. She has fought hard for her constituency. However, with the criteria that we used—unemployment is only one of the criteria that come into play—it was difficulty to justify intermediate area status for the travel-to-work areas within her constituency. Her constituency will not be eligible for ERDF, but it is not right to say that the country generally will miss out on ERDF.

Mrs. Kellett-Bowman: And EIB.

Mr. Lamont: And EIB. The extension of the map and the changes we have made in the structure of the grant —the removal of replacement investment—will make it possible for us to obtain more money out of Europe not less. That was one of the considerations in our mind.

Mr. Laurence Cunliffe (Leigh): How can the Minister justify the phoney and biased policy measures that he has announced today, which will result in cuts of £140 million over the next five years in the north-west region? Because of this Government's senseless economic policies, it is a region that has already lost 250,000 jobs since the Government came into power. Will he further confirm that the criteria mean that many skillcentres within the affected areas will have to close, thus confirming that the Government are not interested in producing potential technologists for the future growth industries of this country? Does he further agree that the criteria on which he bases the policy discriminate, because it is a financial imposition, against mostly working class and distressed areas?

Mr. Lamont: I do not accept that it will have the draconian and the drastic effect on the north-west that the hon. Gentleman suggests. One of the ways that the north-west could benefit from these changes is through the fact that we are extending the grants to services. That change should be welcomed in the House. It means that many activities where there is a prospect of a real growth in

[Mr. Lamont]

employment and which have never had encouragement or benefited from regional policy in the past will now receive it.

Mr. Fred Silvester (Manchester, Withington): May I congratulate my hon. Friend on walking carefully though his minefield? Although the north-west wants more public expenditure, it does not want ineffective public expenditure. I thank him for breaking away from the tyranny of travel-to-work areas in Manchester. However, is not the £10,000 capital limit rather low in terms of the number of jobs that can be provided by capital-intensive industries?

Mr. Lamont: I do not know whether I have tiptoed through the minefield. I think that I have hit one or two mines. But I am grateful for my hon. Friend's comments. I agree that we do not want ineffective public expenditure. I am grateful for what my hon. Friend says about the treatment of Manchester. Manchester was the only TTWA to be treated in that way, for the special reason that I explained earlier. I said that the £10,000 will enable us to give automatic grants to projects that are double the rate of the average capital intensity in British industry. I do not believe that it is niggardly, but even if it were, it is still open to us to assist those projects with selective assistance in addition to automatic assistance. We are increasing selective assistance. There will be an increase of some 35 per cent. in selective assistance so, when the new scheme is fully operational, that will be available in addition to automatic grants. We shall have the discretion to aid projects when we believe that it is right to do so.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): Will the Minister accept that great resentment will be felt in my constituency about the fact that less money is being spent, although it is tempered by a little relief in Tameside and Denton that some of the assistance that they had under a Labour Government is being restored to them? The Stockport part of my constituency will be completely bewildered. It has the highest level of unemployment in my constituency. The Brinnington area has over 25 per cent. unemployment. Those areas have not been included. Will he study the boundaries, because it is crazy that the people who live in Denton will have the best chance to look for jobs in some of the development sites which are available in Stockport?

Mr. Lamont: As I have explained to many hon. Members already, the policy has inevitably been based on the travel-to-work area concept. As regards the hon. Gentleman's first point, I am sure that he will do his best to ensure that the maximum resentment is felt about the fact that less money is being spent on his constituency. I wonder whether he ever asks his constituents to consider whether money could be better spent rather than that more should be spent.

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Bristol, East): My hon. Friend's statement will be welcomed by my constituents in Bristol, because they are fed up with jobs being poached from Bristol, with Government assistance, and taken over the Bristol channel into Wales, and with the destruction of industry in Bristol by industry in Wales, again with Government assistance. Can we hope that in time we shall see an end to all the economic distortions that are caused by this type of assistance?

Mr. Lamont: I cannot go as far as my hon. Friend, but there will be less distortion. I know that there have been very strong feelings in Bristol about the effect of assisted area status and the poaching of industry and jobs. Bristol will plainly not be so badly affected in future.

Mr. Stephen Ross (Isle of Wight): Did the Minister even consider the case of the Isle of Wight? Does he appreciate the problems of an offshore island? Does he know that in some parts of the constituency male unemployment is over 30 per cent.? *[Interruption]* I lost a tooth this morning, that is the reason for that. Is the Minister aware that further redundancies are in the pipeline? What help can he offer, because we desperately need some assistance from the Government to restore our economy?

Mr. Lamont: Of course we studied the hon. Gentleman's constituency, but I am afraid that the blunt truth is that on the objective criteria his constituency does not merit assisted area status.

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): Does the Minister accept that the figures he gave of saving £300 million and leaving a budget, as I understand it, of £400 million, represent a cut of virtually 50 per cent. in regional aid? That was never forecast. Why is the Minister so rigidly tied to travel-to-work areas for Birmingham, whose travel-to-work area now includes Stratford-on-Avon, which dilutes the unemployment figures? Has the Minister reneged on the commitment that he gave last week to visit Birmingham and see for himself the inner core area where 300,000 people live? On his Department's figures, that is now the largest centre of concentrated urban deprivation in this country — bar none. His statement completely ignores the position in Birmingham, and if I were a Tory Back Bencher, I should resign the Whip tonight because the Government have failed to help Birmingham.

Mr. Lamont: The hon. Gentleman might be trying to convey a message to someone. The figures that the hon. Gentleman gives about the cuts are correct. The figure will be cut from £670 million to £400 million in 1987-88. We believe that that cut is justified and sensible. As regards the problems of the inner city of Birmingham, I have already explained that the area has partnership status, and the urban aid programme is designed specifically to deal with those inner city problems. Birmingham is receiving over £24·5 million to deal with it. The Birmingham area as a whole does not qualify for inner tier status on the basis of unemployment; 21 per cent. of the country has worse unemployment than the Birmingham travel-to-work area. It is a fact that 21 per cent. of the country has unemployment worse than the whole Birmingham travel-to-work area, and we cannot, any more than the previous Labour Government did, depart from the travel-to-work area principle.

Mr. Roger Gale (Thanet, North): Will my hon. Friend recognise that in Thanet, in the south-east, I represent the travel-to-work area with the highest unemployment rate not included in an assisted status area? We believe that in that area we can create employment through private enterprise and private investment, but we cannot do it with one hand tied behind our back.

Will my hon. Friend accept that many Conservative Members believe that in thanking him for what he has done today we must take the opportunity to remind him that he

has gone nowhere near far enough? Instead of regional aid, we should like to see sectoral aid, which would help industry nationwide.

Mr. Lamont: I note what my hon. Friend said. He will appreciate that we have moved a long way from the principle of giving automatic assistance. We have moved towards meeting the suggestion made by many of my hon. Friends that we should have not sectoral aid but more discretionary aid, rather than automatic aid. We have moved a long way in that direction.

At present, 65 to 70 per cent. of regional aid is automatic and the rest is discretionary. When the new scheme is established, the proportions of automatic and discretionary aid will be about fifty-fifty.

My hon. Friend's constituency can also be helped by section 4 money for tourism. We shall do all we can to see whether there are projects in his constituency worthy of support.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): Is the Minister aware that on Merseyside and no doubt elsewhere there will be deep disappointment in the construction industry? If the Minister is serious in wanting to apply aid to the creation of jobs, he can do no better than encourage the construction industry.

Will the Minister speak to his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment about the utter failure of partnership policies in the inner city of Liverpool, which has been deprived of most of the regional aid so far given to Merseyside?

Will the Minister look again at the boundaries of the new Merseyside development area, which takes in large parts of rural north Wales and Cheshire?

Mr. Lamont: The hon. Gentleman is being somewhat unfair. Merseyside emerges relatively well from the changes that have been announced. Liverpool retains its SDA status and the partnership—*[Interruption.]* I mean its DA status—its inner tier status. It will also qualify for selective assistance. Merseyside and the adjoining areas have done relatively well out of the package.

Mr. Tony Speller (Devon, North): Will my hon. Friend accept, as I have always done, that development status in its various forms has depended first on employment and secondly on location? If so, why has he permitted the Department of Employment to massage figures so that areas in the west country and in places such as Ilfracombe, with 35 per cent. unemployment, are merged with larger areas, and all of them losing their status?

Can my hon. Friend give any reasoned explanation why those areas on the periphery of Britain which do not have the rateable values to finance their own infrastructure are to be left wholly destitute of Government funds, in aid of I know not what—except perhaps the game of pass the parcel?

Mr. Lamont: I appreciate my hon. Friend's disappointment, but 35 per cent. of the country will still be covered by assisted area status. I do not think that it would make any sense to raise that percentage to 40 or 45 per cent. It would be nonsense to have almost half the country covered by assisted area status. Even taking account of its location and of peripherality, it is difficult to make out a case for the travel-to-work area which covers my hon. Friend's constituency.

I appreciate my hon. Friend's feelings about the composition of the travel-to-work area. *[Interruption.]* Of course it was not a fiddle. He will appreciate that some changes in travel-to-work areas are of benefit to people in qualifying for assisted area status, and some are not. Inevitably, there are both winners and losers.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): How can the Minister say that jobs will not be lost as a result of the cuts when British industry is to lose £300 million out of its budget each year?

Mr. Lamont: It will not be lost, because the policy will be aimed much more specifically at the creation of jobs. British industry will benefit from the strengthening of our financial and economic policies which results from the package.

Mr. Churchill (Davyhulme): Is my hon. Friend aware that his statement will be warmly welcomed in Greater Manchester, specifically in regard to ending the unfair and discriminatory system which previously operated?

I thank my hon. Friend and his colleagues for having listened to the representations made to them by industry, trade unions and the local authority concerning Trafford Park. His help is much appreciated.

Mr. Lamont: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. As he knows, the inner area will also continue to qualify for support from the Department of the Environment.

Mr. Bernard Conlan (Gateshead, East): Will the Minister tell the House how he will ensure that the £10,000 capital grants will lead to what the Prime Minister used to describe as real or permanent jobs, as against transient jobs? Will he abandon the nauseating charade that the exercise has anything to do with jobs? It is related to cuts in public expenditure.

Mr. Lamont: The hon. Gentleman is not quite right in speaking of a £10,000 capital grant. It is a capital grant on which there is a £10,000 cost per job limit.

The hon. Gentleman asked how we shall ensure that the jobs last. The normal provisions that applied previously to regional development grants in regard to the recovery of grants will apply.

I cannot accept the hon. Gentleman's assertion that it is a charade and nothing to do with creating jobs. We made it clear in our White Paper that we felt that it made no sense that the large sums of money employed on regional policy — and they are large sums — were not related specifically to the creation of employment. What else is the purpose of the policy?

Mr. Keith Raffan (Delyn): Will my hon. Friend confirm that 90 per cent. of the Welsh people will be covered by some form of assisted area status? Will he also confirm that, contrary to the Opposition's assertions, the levels of grant will still be quite sufficient to attract internationally mobile investment?

Mr. Lamont: Taking account of the activities of the Board for the Development of Rural Wales, a large part of Wales will be covered and eligible for assistance of one kind or another.

We shall be able not only to give automatic regional development grants for inward investment. We shall be able to award selective assistance on top of those to attract the internationally mobile projects that we want here.

Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse (Pontefract and Castleford): Is the Minister aware that there is such an area as west Yorkshire? Apart from Bradford, he seems to think that it does not exist. Is he aware that in the past three years there have been eight colliery closures in west Yorkshire?

Is the Minister aware of the very serious situation that has developed in the Castleford travel-to-work area? I think that he must be, because I have frequently drawn it to his attention. There appears to have been a complete fiddle on the reassessment of the boundaries, because the rural areas have been included to cover up the black spots in the travel-to-work areas. That has happened in Castleford. We enjoyed intermediate area status prior to 1981. As the situation is now much worse than it was then, why have we not qualified?

Mr. Lamont: Both the travel-to-work area and our decision on it were based on objective criteria, taking into account occupational structure, long-term unemployment and industrial change.

The hon. Gentleman says that the travel-to-work area is too large, but it is related to where people live, where work is available, and where they travel to work. That was the building block used by the previous Labour Government for regional policy.

Mr. David Gilroy Bevan (Birmingham, Yardley): I deeply regret that my hon. Friend has not paid more heed to the devastation caused in Birmingham by unemployment. In dealing with Manchester, why has he used a different basis of adjudication? Does he realise that the policy of including the travel-to-work areas in the west midlands will mean including Stratford-upon-Avon, Sutton Coldfield, Solihull, Redditch and other areas where equal external investment can be drawn from abroad into Birmingham?

What does my hon. Friend propose to do to overcome the problem? Unemployment in the area has risen in the past 13 years by twice as much as in Wales and Scotland put together. What instructions will he give to the industrial advisory body that he mentioned to look particularly at the inner areas of Birmingham and other large cities?

Mr. Lamont: The case of Manchester raises a different question from that of Birmingham. The question about Manchester was simply whether part of it could qualify for outer tier status. As I explained, we were absolutely on the margin of the 35 per cent. that would have been approved by the European Commission and we had the prospect of getting only part of Manchester in. It was a question only of whether part of it could qualify for outer tier status, whereas what has been said in respect of Birmingham is that a large part of the central core should have qualified for inner tier status, which would be a different matter. With regard to what we shall do to try to secure inward investment, I shall ensure that the West Midlands Industrial Development Advisory Board takes account of the special problems of the inner core of Birmingham. I shall ensure that there is the closest possible co-operation between my Department and the Department of the Environment. Of course, the strong support from the Department of the Environment in dealing with the problems of inner Birmingham will continue.

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson (Coventry, North-West): This is a black day for the regions of the United Kingdom—

Mr. Beith: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: What is the point of order?

Mr. Beith: I should like to ask you humbly, Mr. Speaker—with no vested interest—on behalf of many hon. Members, whether you agree, given that the business to follow the statement is open-ended and can go on to any hour, that there should be further time for questions on the statement.

Mr. Speaker: I fully realise the importance of this matter. The House has heard the Minister say that there will be a debate on it. Motions have already been tabled in respect of several of the orders and there will be further opportunities to discuss the matter. I shall bear in mind the right hon. and hon. Members whom I have not been able to call during questions on the statement. I have given slightly over an hour to it, which is more than double the normal time. I think that in fairness to the succeeding business we should move on.

Mr. A. E. P. Duffy (Sheffield, Attercliffe): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Several Hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am taking the point of order from the Opposition Front Bench.

Mr. Williams: Will you confirm my impression, Mr. Speaker, that towards the end of the statement over 40 Members were still trying to catch your eye? If you confirm that, may I, through you, draw that fact to the attention of the Leader of the House and ask whether it is regarded as confirming our request that more than one day should be given to a debate on this subject?

Several Hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Speaker: All right. Let us have all the points of order together.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Unfortunately, you did not manage to call any Member from the black country. This is an area that suffers the most serious social deprivation imaginable and I must express my surprise that not a single black country Member was called.

Mr. Duffy: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I remind you that not one Member from Sheffield was called? It is a great city, and it is covered by the statement. We know that the Government are exercising a policy of political vengeance against Sheffield. I know that you would not risk being thought a party to that policy, but the overlooking of Sheffield is a repeated occurrence on such occasions in the House.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. In view of the fact that after questions and answers on the statement have finished we shall move on to the Elections (Northern Ireland) Bill, and that the chances are that, if Second Reading is anything to go by, the House will be occupied by 20 Members at the most and that for the votes there will be about 120 against 14, and that the Bill itself is nothing more than a dog's dinner, would it not make sense—just a little sense—to give another half an hour to allow hon.

Members to make their points? I have not been rising in my place because I have been to another meeting, exercising some influence there—*[Interruption.]*—rather successfully, I may add. Therefore, it does not really matter whether we lose half an hour from the Committee stage of the Elections (Northern Ireland) Bill. Let us get on with this very important matter.

Mr. Jack Ashley (Stoke-on-Trent, South): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate your difficulty on such an occasion. It is exceedingly difficult. I never question whom you call, and I do not mind not being called, but today several Members from Liverpool, Birmingham and Manchester were called, but hon. Members representing Stoke-on-Trent, the most neglected and deprived industrial city in Great Britain, have not been called. I submit to you with all respect, Mr. Speaker, that an opportunity should have been offered to Members representing Stoke-on-Trent to express their point of view.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate your difficulty but there is a particular point that Members from the north of Scotland wish to put to the Minister about the Highlands and Islands Development Board area. I appreciate that perhaps you were not to know that there might be a peculiarity in that, but if the time for questions were extended, that point might be elucidated by the Minister.

Mr. Robert C. Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, North): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. My hon. Friend the Member for Warley, East (Mr. Faulds) said that no one from the black country had been invited by you to take part in questioning the Minister. Is it not a fact that every hon. Member who has been called represents part of a very black country today?

Mr. Michael Meadowcroft (Leeds, West): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. It would also be helpful if you called members from the city of Leeds. No one from Leeds has been called, and there are points that we should like to raise. It seems that hon. Members on both sides of the House would welcome the opportunity of a few more minutes on the statement, so that they could question the Minister.

Mr. Speaker: I fully appreciate the feelings of hon. Members who have not been called. There are about 650 hon. Members in the House. If we take away 100 members of the Government, that leaves 550, and it is literally impossible to call every hon. Member. With regard to the succeeding business, I must say in fairness to Northern Ireland Members that they are as much Members of the House as anyone else.

Mr. Skinner: They do not want the Bill.

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is rare for Northern Ireland Members to have the opportunity of debating early in the day. I think that the House should take that into account.

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: This is a black day for the regions of the United Kingdom. Is the Minister aware that nothing that was said today changes the simple fact that the Government have dealt a mortal blow to regional policy? Not satisfied with the reduction in regional assistance of 35 per cent. compared to assistance under Labour Administration, the Government have today chopped a further £300 million per annum from regional assistance. Will the Minister confirm that that is a 42 per cent. cut in the present reduced level of regional assistance and an enormous reduction of 77 per cent. since the Government came to office?

Is the Minister aware that behind the beguiling and specious propositions of cost-effectiveness and a greater link to jobs lies the stark truth, the harsh reality, that all that the Government are interested in is a reduction of public expenditure? The map of the outer tier areas has been widely drawn to enable eligibility for European funds. We welcome that. However, other areas have been downgraded and the Minister will be under no illusion about how deeply that will be resented in the House and the country.

Does the Minister not realise that European funds are no El Dorado for the United Kingdom regions? The ERDF will account for only 5·6 per cent. of the EC budget this year while the United Kingdom's net contribution to the EC budget this year is equivalent to the total ERDF regional assistance.

Some areas are to be designated which were not designated before. The west midlands is a welcome, if limited example. Nevertheless the inner core of Birmingham, with 230,000 people—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I hope that the hon. Gentleman is about to ask a question. This not a debate.

Mr. Robinson: I am asking the Minister why the inner area of Birmingham with 230,000 people and 30 per cent. unemployment is not included in the inner core.

Is the Minister aware that his statement marks the end of regional policy as developed by successive Governments but that a Labour Government will renew regional policy and rebuild the regions of this nation?

Mr. Lamont: In Committee on the Bill which put in place the structure for the detailed announcements made today, the Opposition admitted that many worthwhile savings could be made, especially on heavily capital-intensive projects. Those form a large part of the savings that we now intend to achieve.

The ERDF is significant for regional policy and we hope to get about £300 million per year out of it.

This is not the end of regional policy. It is the start of a more cost-effective, more job-oriented regional policy. We believe that, pound for pound, we can get more jobs and better value for money.

BALLOT FOR NOTICES OF MOTIONS FOR FRIDAY 14 DECEMBER

Members successful in the ballot were:

Mr. Roland Boyes
Mr. Andrew Hunter
Mr. Francis Maude

SCOTTISH AFFAIRS

Ordered,

That the matter of Regional Policy as it affects Scotland, being a matter relating exclusively to Scotland, be referred to the Scottish Grand Committee for its consideration. — *[Mr. Durant.]*

Orders of the Day

Elections (Northern Ireland) Bill

Considered in Committee [Progress, 20 November]

[MR. HAROLD WALKER *in the Chair*]

Clause 1

VOTERS TO PRODUCE PRESCRIBED DOCUMENTS

5.15 pm

Mr. J. Enoch Powell (South Down): I beg to move amendment No. 25, in page 1, line 12, leave out from beginning to end of line 14 on page 2 and insert

'in any case where the provisions of Rule 35, as amended by this section apply, unless the presiding officer decides, after taking into consideration any document produced to him, that there is no reasonable doubt that the voter is the elector or proxy he represents himself to be.'.

The Chairman of Ways and Means: With this it will be convenient to take the following amendments:

No. 3, in page 2, leave out lines 7 to 9 and insert—

'(1B) With a view to reaching his decision under the foregoing paragraph, the officer or clerk may invite the voter to produce to him a prescribed document or more than one prescribed documents and shall, if the voter complies, take that document or documents into consideration in reaching his decision, without prejudice to consideration of any other evidence which the voter may produce'.

No. 24, in page 2, line 16, at end insert—

'(2A) The following shall be inserted after rule 36 (challenge of voter)—

"(36A) At the time a person applies for a ballot paper, a candidate or his election or polling agent may require the presiding officer or clerk to produce to him any document which that person has produced to the presiding officer or clerk under the foregoing provisions of this section.".'.

No. 26, in page 2, line 16, at end insert—

'(2A) The following shall be inserted after Rule 35(3)—

"(4(A)) The presiding officer may, and if required by a candidate or his election or polling agent shall, require any person applying for a ballot paper at the time of his application, but not afterwards, to produce to him a prescribed document.

(4(B)) Notwithstanding the foregoing paragraph the presiding officer shall be entitled to take into consideration any document produced to him by the person, which is not a prescribed document but appears to the presiding officer to be relevant to the question whether the person is the elector or proxy he represents himself to be.".'.

Mr. Powell: As the House, or what is left of it, proceeds to address itself with joyous anticipation to spending the whole of the remainder of today's sitting until the early hours of tomorrow morning on legislation for Northern Ireland, it is perhaps permissible to remind or inform hon. Members that this arises from no wish of hon. Members representing the Province but from the practice of successive Administrations, which still belatedly persists, of seeking to treat Northern Ireland separately and in isolation from the rest of the United Kingdom. It is as a result of that fact that a day of parliamentary time which other hon. Members might think could have been better used is not available for their purposes.

Your perspicacity, Mr. Walker, has noted that amendment No. 26 and amendment No. 25 form a single proposition. In your wisdom, you have also grouped amendments Nos. 3 and 24 with those amendments. You will be aware, however, that they raise substantially, if not entirely, different issues. I hope, therefore, that you will agree to my dealing with them separately in my speech and that you will accept a formal application at this stage for amendments Nos. 3 and 24 to be called separately for Division when the time comes in view of the fact that they raise substantially different issues.

The Chairman: Is the right hon. Gentleman asking for two Divisions or just one Division on amendments Nos. 3 and 24?

Mr. Powell: I was being greedy, Mr. Walker. Both amendments involve separate issues germane to themselves. I hoped, therefore, that you would be willing to allow them to be called for Division in due course.

The Chairman: It might be sensible for me to see how the debate goes and to reach a decision in the light of that.

Mr. Powell: I am much obliged to you, Mr. Walker.

Amendments Nos. 25 and 26 represent a serious attempt by my right hon. and hon. Friends and myself within the general scope of the Bill to meet the two major difficulties that the legislation presents. One is a constitutional difficulty and the other a practical one.

The constitutional difficulty is that the Bill as it stands creates a new qualification, in Northern Ireland only, for the exercise of the franchise. If the vote can be exercised only on production of a specified document whether or not there be any real doubt as to the identity of the voter asking for it, the legislation in effect creates a new and additional condition for the franchise being exercised at all in that part of the United Kingdom. The fact that it is specific to just one part of the United Kingdom will no doubt arise later in our deliberations when we reach the debate on clause 7 stand part.

Our other objective in framing the amendment is of a practical nature. We fear that this requirement imposed automatically on every voter, irrespective of the circumstances and irrespective of the fact that the vast majority of voters are not merely who they represent themselves to be but are well known to be such persons, will not only cause resentment and loss of votes at many polling stations in Northern Ireland but will result in congestion of proceedings at the polling stations, which itself will cast discredit on the validity of the results of any election. We have therefore sought—within the general concept of the Bill, and accepting for the purposes of these amendments the concept of prescribed documents—to make amendments which will meet both the constitutional and the practical difficulty. In short, what we propose is that it should be competent for the polling agent to insist, and open to the presiding officer in his discretion to decide, that the presiding officer should demand one of the prescribed documents from a voter as regards whom the question has been raised whether he is the person shown on the electoral register. Upon that challenge being made, or that doubt being entertained by the presiding officer, the document would have to be produced. Otherwise, the suspected voter would not be issued with a ballot paper. A ballot paper would be issued only if the presiding officer decided that there was no reasonable doubt that he was the voter indicated in the electoral register.

This is a procedure to which we on this Bench do not come fresh. On Second Reading the Minister referred to

certain consultations which had taken place earlier, and in particular to propositions put forward in the spring of 1982 outlining the thoughts which at that time were unformed in the Government's mind but which eventually led to the drawing up of the Bill. He suggested—by, I think, an unintentional error—that the proposition of prescribing mandatory documents had been accepted on behalf of the Ulster Unionist party.

It might therefore be right for me to put on record what we actually said in a letter written to the former Secretary of State by my right hon. Friend the Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux) on 6 July 1982. I do so not in order to trespass upon the patience of the Committee, but because my right hon. Friend's words expressed very precisely the arrangements which in the amendments we are trying to introduce into the Bill. My right hon. Friend wrote:

"It is already, in our belief, the duty of the presiding officer not to issue a ballot paper except to a person who he is satisfied is an elector specified on the register who has not received a ballot paper already . . . We consider that presiding officers should be fortified with advice from the Secretary of State as to the manner in which they should be so satisfied. We do not consider this advice need be given in the form of law."

We are therefore pressing an amendment which is entirely in line with the advice that we tendered to the Government when consulted on this question some two and a half years ago.

As regards our proposal that the polling agents should be given the new right and function of challenging the production of documentary evidence if they are in doubt as to a voter's identity, it is interesting that the previous Secretary of State wrote to my right hon. Friend on 10 March 1983 as follows:

"The presiding officers will be reminded of the importance of confronting suspected personators and the RUC stand ready to make arrests and prevent intimidation"—

that is a matter that we shall consider in relation to later amendments—

"but they cannot act"—

the right hon. Gentleman was referring to the law as it then existed and now exists—

"until polling agents challenge."

That is what we propose in the amendment, in connection with the documentary procedure. The right hon. Gentleman continued:

"I appreciate that this is sometimes difficult because of the risk of intimidation in certain areas, but it appears to me that the presence of polling agents in areas where personation is likely to be most prevalent, together with vigorous challenging of suspected personators, should make a substantial difference."

It cannot, therefore, be argued that our amendment throws upon the personation agents, as they are called, or polling agents, in certain areas of the Province or in general, an unreasonable onus. On the contrary, it is useful because it does not deprive the presiding officer entirely of discretion. It nevertheless shields him from the direct imputation of any partisanship — of picking on a particular elector to require that he should produce a prescibed document.

We ask the Government at this stage most sincerely and carefully to consider whether they need to incur the risks of fouling up the electoral process at forthcoming elections, and whether they need to perpetuate the addition of a new qualification for elections in one province only of the United Kingdom, when the alternative is as acceptable and as practicable a procedure as is set out in the amendments.

I will not seek to gild the lily but will invite the Minister —who has, I believe, had a day or two to study the amendments—to address his mind without prejudice to the possibility of following this course of action.

I appreciate that the amendment removes the automatic necessity of a prescribed document in the case of every voter. I make no apology for that, because it is that universal mandatory requirement of a prescribed document which in our view creates the two serious points of criticism, constitutional and practical.

To my right hon. and hon. Friends, that is the major point in these amendments. I now move on to consider amendment No. 3, which deals with the situation when the presiding officer is presented with a prescribed document which does not perfectly match the circumstances of the elector whom the voter represents himself to be. I am afraid that this has become the Upper Bann case in the course of our debates, because of the lamentably out-of-date condition of the medical card which it might fall to my hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann (Mr. McCusker) in such circumstances to produce as a condition of exercising his franchise and being able to vote for himself.

In response, we have been told that the presiding officer would use his common sense. That is the phrase which has more than once fallen from the Minister's lips. We asked what common sense embraces. The result was far from satisfactory. The Minister said at one stage that of course the presiding officer would know my hon. Friend by sight, and would therefore give him his ballot paper despite the fact that the prescribed document showed the wrong address. That is not satisfactory, because there might be someone in exactly the same situation as my hon. Friend, but who had recently moved from another part of the Province or the United Kingdom and was therefore not so well known to the presiding officer.

Another situation might arise which falls within the scope of common sense but which we believe should be specifically recognised and legislated for in the interests of fairness and of the proper guidance and control of the actions of the presiding officers. Let us suppose that the elector comes along with a prescribed document which, on the face of it, could raise some doubt. The address, for example, might be out of date. The elector has provided himself with the means of rebutting any doubt which such a defect might raise—he has in his pocket, among other things, a rent demand and some letters that have been addressed to him at his new address. He might even have a polling card which shows his name against the new address. As we read the clause, it would not be in the power of the presiding officer to use his common sense and to take note of the extra documents provided by the voter, however genuine the voter might be or however relevant those extra documents might be to the point at issue. As we read the clause, the presiding officer will be obliged to say, "No. I am looking at the document and it is not good enough and you will not get your vote."

5.30 pm

We do not believe that that is satisfactory legislation. We believe that it should be relaxed in the manner suggested in amendment No. 3, which would permit the presiding officer to take into account another document or other documents, and to consider other evidence which the voter might produce. Surely, if this matter is to be governed by common sense, and if we do not want persons

[Mr. Powell]

openly acknowledged to be the elector purported to be deprived of their ballot, we have to give some such specific discretion to the presiding officer. Let not the Minister say, "Oh, that would expose the presiding officer to all kinds of intimidation and complaints of partiality," because we are already inviting him to come to a reasonable conclusion. Yet, on the face of the wording of the clause, we are depriving him of the means by which any reasonable man would seek to arrive at a reasonable conclusion on the basis of the prescribed documents which were presented to him.

Perhaps this result could be achieved more economically and deftly by other drafting than that which appears on the Order Paper. I hope that the Minister will be able to recognise that there is a difficulty here and that the nature of the common sense which he invoked on behalf of the presiding officer should be more precisely defined in the wording of the clause. I understand that we have another stage of the Bill to come and that there will be an opportunity for this matter to be considered further. I hope, therefore, that the Minister will give further attention to the wording of clause 1(2)(1B) to avoid apparently exclusive attention to the document which is enjoined by it.

That leaves me with amendment No. 24, the subject of which is essentially different. It in no way involves the amendment, about the acceptance or otherwise—either of the wording or of the principle—of which I have just been addressing the Committee. It is a separate point which stands in its own right. It is that the polling agent —I say the polling agent, but technically the candidate and his election agent are all always included in these functions—may have a sight of a prescribed document which is produced under the terms of the Bill. I ask you, Mr. Walker, to envisage the circumstances in which the polling agent is convinced, from his own personal knowledge, that the person asking for the ballot paper and producing the prescribed document is not the elector whose name appears on the electoral roll. The prescribed document is produced and the presiding officer, without apparently batting an eyelid, proceeds to hand out a ballot paper to that elector. It seems perverse that we should leave matters in that condition and that the polling agent ought not to be able to say to the presiding officer, "Sir, I demand the right to see the prescribed document which has been produced to you." It might well be—in the majority of cases it would no doubt be—the case that there was no ground for reasonable doubt on the face of the document.

Alternatively, there is the case in which the presiding officer rejected a document presented by a person whom the polling agent well knew to be Mrs. So-and-so, whose name appeared on the register. Surely it would be right for him to say to the presiding officer, "I should like to have a look at that before you make your decision to refuse a vote to Mrs. So-and-so." It is an invidious position in which the Bill as it stands places the presiding officer. He is faced with a document that no one else can see and of which nobody else has any notion. They do not know which of the prescribed documents it is. With that and nothing else in front of him he says, "Go away. I shall not give you a ballot paper." Alternatively, he hands over the ballot paper with no possibility of challenge. That cannot be regarded as reasonable and I therefore hope that the Minister will consider that the case for giving polling agents access to the evidence of on which a voter is identified or not is logical and that to concede it would make the duty of the presiding officer under this legislation less difficult than we apprehend that it might otherwise be.

Mr. William Ross (Londonderry, East): I find it strange and rather sad that the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume), whose party is alleged to have suffered most in recent elections from vote-stealing by Sinn Fein, should be absent from the debate rather than here to ensure that, through a much improved Bill, he will not suffer in that way again.

It is alleged that most of the vote-stealing takes place in relatively small areas, that in those areas it is highly organised and that it is extremely difficult to stop. We have already been through most of the arguments about that, but there is no harm in preaching a good sermon a second, third or fourth time in the hope that the Minister will have borne in upon him the fact that those of us who have experienced these things and have had to be on our guard against them know rather more about it than most of those who read only the newspapers in offices and try to formulate ideas and practices that will defeat the people who do these things.

Some of us are so anxious about what the Government have proposed precisely because of our personal knowledge. We are therefore keen to improve the Bill. So far, the Government have been decidedly reluctant to listen to the real experts. They have preferred to listen to what I describe, with the greatest respect, as interested amateurs. We who have suffered and been engaged in preventing these things believe that what the Government have proposed will not do the job. We are therefore most anxious that amendments such as those which have been proposed be accepted and that the problems of vote-stealers be much increased.

This group of amendments attempts to identify an applicant for a ballot paper as accurately and as quickly as possible. There is no point in having a system which, because of snags, snarls up the process, leads to long delays and, if not in the first election then in later ones, would double or treble the number of boxes required for a corresponding increase in the number of officials. Sometimes it is difficult to obtain a sufficient number of officials to man the polling stations and to ensure that everyone entitled to vote gets a ballot paper and is able to do so.

The difficulty of identifying the individual according to the name on the electoral register will arise again and again in our debates. Even if we do not convince everyone in the Department, I believe that by the time we end those debates we shall have convinced the Minister, who I think is fairly well convinced already, that we are not that wide of the mark.

As well as trying to identify the applicant as quickly and as easily as possible—and trying to make the voting procedure as quick and as simple as possible—we are trying to give some discretion to the various officials involved. That discretion is completely wiped out by the Bill, and it is necessary that they be given some freedom to act. They simply do not have that freedom at present. We are asking for an increase in the power of polling agents simply because we who have had long experience of these matters see them as one of the principal factors

in the front line. They are the infantry down in the trenches, fighting the battle and doing their best to stop the evil practices that are now occurring.

Our amendments propose a system that will avoid the considerable danger in the Bill of denying ballot papers to thousands who are entitled to them, but are barred from receiving them only because of the severe restriction on the number of prescribed documents. The Government are as anxious as we are to stop this malpractice, but are surprisingly reluctant to take the vital steps that are necessary to achieve that. In the absence of an identity card, nothing will beat local knowledge. People who live in the area, be it town or country, who know their neighbours and a large proportion of the electorate, are best able to stop such malpractice.

Only those willing to accept this job will act as polling agents. One cannot ask voluntary organisations or call for volunteers to do something which they do not want. People will go into the polling stations to act for party and candidate only if they are committed and prepared to take the risks associated with their mere presence in those polling stations. If people refuse point blank to do this job, we must look for someone else.

I have occasionally had bitter experience of trying to man difficult polling stations, and I know the difficulty of getting people to sit there all day and perform their duties. No one has said that it is easy to get people to take a stand, essentially against the gunmen and their front men. It is not easy to ask someone to make a target of himself in a dangerous area. It says a lot about the courage of those involved that they are prepared to take the risks associated with this occupation to do what is necessary to defend democracy. They should be given the fullest opportunity to carry out that defensive task.

Those who object to polling agents being given this right do not understand what is involved. Such a person must have a detailed knowledge of the area and population, and must be able to identify those who are most likely to indulge in these practices.

5.45 pm

My right hon. Friend the Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) explained that if polling agents were given this right it would shield the presiding officer, clerk or any other official in the polling station. This is especially important in areas such as west Belfast, the west bank of the Foyle in Londonderry and certain villages where these practices occur most frequently. In such areas the theft of votes by Sinn Fein is rampant, and it is in those areas that we need public-spirited people who believe in the democratic principle enough to sit all day to defend that principle.

When they do so, they cannot be accused of doing something wrong. Everyone knows why they are there, and by and large there is no real objection to their presence. However, if the presiding officer, who may be the headmaster or a teacher from the school being used as a polling station, lives in an area where Sinn Fein vote-stealing occurs on a massive scale, the only people to whom he will object will be those who indulge in vote-stealing on behalf of Sinn Fein. Inevitably such a presiding officer will be seen as taking a stand against that party and its supporters. He will be accused of doing so and will be placed in a difficult position in the community. That charge cannot be levelled against the representatives of the parties, who will be at the polling stations because they are partisan. Their job is to represent their parties and candidates. They are expected by all concerned to take the risks and to issue such challenges. There is no good reason why they should not be given the right of challenge, which is basically a mere extension of the right they already possess.

I appreciate that some people will object to polling agents seeing these documents on the grounds that they contain private information which the holder does not wish to be made public, but genuine electors, who have nothing to fear, will not be unwilling to allow their medical card to be seen. What is on a medical card or driving licence which is so private that it cannot be made public? I cannot think of any such information, and I cannot think of any real objection to allowing polling agents to see such documents.

A lady may say that she is 21 when, in fact, she is slightly older, but that should be fairly obvious before the card is produced. That is the only objection which could be construed as valid, but that should not be allowed to stand in the way of those who are determined to stop this Sinn Fein activity.

As we said earlier, only Sinn Fein will practise such vote-stealing in future. The benign personation which has taken place previously will thoroughly become a thing of the past. We are dealing with the hard core who are militant, violent and vicious and the amendments set out the approach that the Government must take in their efforts to stop Sinn Fein continuing its illegal practices. That is what we are asking for and we see no reason why the Government should not accept amendments in an effort to put the blinkers on Sinn Fein for ever.

Mr. Harold McCusker (Upper Bann): My hon. Friend the Member for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross) is concerned that the Bill might not do the job for which it is designed and I am concerned that it may contribute to improvements but in so doing cause more problems than it solves. Like my hon. Friend, I shall rehearse some of the arguments that I advanced when we considered the Bill previously.

In any election in Northern Ireland, between 500,000 and 750,000 vote. We are concerned about 10,000 or, at most, 20,000 votes being abused by being stolen or personated. I shall echo what my right hon. Friend the Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) said. By introducing the Bill, the Government appear to be taking a sledgehammer to crack a nut. We are being asked to lay an onus on 600,000 or 700,000 to prevent 10,000 or 20,000 votes being stolen. A voter acquires a vote by dint of producing a document as distinct from proving that he is a person who is entitled to vote. We are all in favour of assisting the Government to end abuse and we believe that it should be ended by the person who wants to vote being called upon to produce identification and evidence that he is that person, as distinct from merely producing a document.

The hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) has made it clear that he is as concerned about vote-stealing as Unionist Members. He implied that he acknowledges the distinction between personation, as we have known it in the past, and vote-stealing. He intervened in the Minister's speech to make that point. I am sure that he would be happy to see personating eliminated, but he was expressing his concern especially about vote-stealing.

[Mr. Harold McCusker]

What does vote-stealing amount to? Remember it is vote-stealing to which the Bill is addressing itself. If there had been the same concern about the other form of personating, we would have legislated before now. Vote-stealing has challenged the democratic process in Northern Ireland, or it is threatening to do so.

A vote-stealer has disregard for the democratic process and for the officials who administer elections. He is prepared—this happens usually early on in the day and at specific polling stations—to enter a polling station to demand someone else's vote. He is given that vote without having to produce any evidence.

The Government are saying, "If we force the potential vote-stealer to produce some evidence, that will deter him." I dispute that. If, in essence, there is vote-stealing at the point of a gun, even if the vote-stealer does not have a gun in his hand, the presiding officer will be conscious of the indirect presence of the gun. I address myself specifically to amendment No. 26. If someone is dedicated and determined to steal votes and to continue to do so, he will have with him in the polling station a small buff card. He will present it to the presiding officer, who is probably the local headmaster or headmistress or teacher of the school where the voting is taking place. The presiding officer will probably be a teacher in that school. Alternatively the officer will be a local person in the village. The officer will have a small buff form presented to him and at the same time two eyes will be drilling into him. Those eyes will imply that unless he accepts the document that is offered as a prescribed document and gives the potential voter a vote, there will be something else drilling into him. The presiding officer will deliver the vote.

I suggest that the real deterrent lies with the police officer behind the presiding officer. The piece of buff paper may or may not be a medical card or it may resemble one. It may or may not belong to someone else. It may be a piece of paper that is the size of the medical card with certain information on it. In the present circumstances, the presiding officer has to keep such a document secret. How will he tell the police that it is a false document without putting himself at grave risk? I do not know how he will do that. If the onus is on him to make a judgment on the basis of a piece of paper that is four and a half inches by three inches, with or without printing, he will probably look at it, look at the individual confronting him and hand over the ballot paper. To expect him to do otherwise would be to expect a great deal.

We should be under no illusions about the people with whom we are dealing. A year ago they killed an elected representative. The year before that they killed a Member of this place. In the meantime they have killed other democratically elected representatives. They have shown over the past 15 years that they are prepared to kill anyone who stands in their way. A presiding officer may be confronted with what purports to be a prescribed document. It may be put before him by someone whom he knows to be a paramilitarist or an associate of one. The implied threat on presentation is, "Give me a ballot paper or you will get your desserts". Most presiding officers will hand over a ballot paper in those circumstances, and we cannot blame them for that. We cannot blame polling agents, whether SDLP or Unionist, if they are prepared to let that go by as well.

The practice that I have described is happening. I saw voters entering a local rural primary school in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis). The teacher who was acting as presiding officer knew full well one of the persons who applied for a vote in a particular name. She knew that she was delivering to him someone else's ballot paper. That young woman was not prepared to risk saying anything. She handed over the ballot paper and that was all that she had to do as the law stands. I saw a Unionist polling agent refusing to issue a challenge in similar circumstances. He told me afterwards that he was scared stiff and that there was nothing that he could do.

Even by incorporating in the Bill the powers to allow polling agents to see cards, the system will not be 100 per cent. foolproof. However, if it does not eliminate the abuse it will certainly deter some from practising it. Not every Unionist or SDLP polling agent will be prepared to challenge, depending on who is offering the confrontation, but in many areas there will be those who are prepared to do so. If they are not prepared to go that far, they might at least be prepared to ask a question. A pointed question might just be enough to do what the Minister knows is the important thing, which is to trigger the attention of the police officer. The teeth that are offered in the Bill are police officers in polling stations. We are concerned about the mechanism that is required to excite their interest.

It is unreasonable to ask the presiding officer to present a challenge. Indeed, it would be unreasonable to ask the polling agents to do that. However, by showing concern about something that has been presented, an alert policeman would know that the presiding officer or polling agent had reservations. The policeman might intervene then, or wait until that person was leaving the polling station. He could demand proof of identity, and if that was not provided action could be taken. Even such a limited intervention could not occur if the buff bogus document was presented solely to the presiding officer who would have to exercise his discretion. Confronted by a gunman with murderers for accomplices, the presiding officer would act sensibly.

6 pm

Mr. William Ross: Does my hon. Friend agree that if the legislation is passed in its present form, because the medical card is so easy to forge and because many people will be applying for new medical cards, the presiding officer will be presented with fairly large numbers of documents that are new and look very much like proper documents, and will not be able to distinguish between the real and the bogus?

Mr. McCusker: We know, and I think that the Minister knows, that the medical card is the weakest prescribed document. It has little real validity in the whole exercise. It is the document most likely to be held by most people in Northern Ireland. I do not believe that the terrorists will print innumerable medical cards with the intention of stealing votes. I do not believe that they will obtain, as has been suggested, a machine to produce identity cards, or that they will try to obtain numerous identity cards and alter them. Those activities would put them at risk and might leave them vulnerable to police action under clause 3. They do not need to do those things because they rely on their ability to enter a polling station and intimidate the staff, especially the presiding officer.

We are mainly talking about west Belfast, Fermanagh and South Tyrone, Mid-Ulster and Foyle. In those communities the people know the IRA, its accomplices and those acting on their behalf. If a presiding officer is confronted with a piece of paper that resembles a medical card he will accept it. The terrorists may print one or two medical cards, but they do not really need to do that. Indeed, my medical card is in such a decrepit state that it would not require a great deal of effort to duplicate it.

Mr. Peter Robinson (Belfast, East): I agree with the hon. Gentleman that the threat or implied threat to the presiding officer will be the weakest link. The hon. Gentleman referred earlier to the role, if any, of the members of the security forces who might be standing near. Such a person would represent the only fear that the personator would experience at that stage. What does the hon. Gentleman see as the role under the Bill for the RUC men? Can they act independently? Are they asked to intervene only by the presiding officer, or can the agents attract their attention?

Mr. McCusker: My understanding—I am willing to be corrected—is that the RUC officer can act at any time if he is suspicious of what is happening. However, there will be some instances when he will need to be given some sign. If there were over-diligent policemen stopping many people who were not personating, there could be allegations of victimisation, harassment and so on. While the police will know some of those who are personating and can act independently, they will also need some assistance. It is asking too much of a presiding officer in Washine Bay and parts of west Belfast to say, "This is not a medical card; get out." To do that would be to push the person into the arms of the police, and it is obvious what will happen to the presiding officer if he does that. If Sinn Fein is prepared to terrorise and smash windows in the houses of the supporters of the SDLP—people such as Austin Currie — who are trying to take part in the democratic system, what will it do to a presiding officer who has caused the arrest of one of its people?

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that in such areas there are threats prior to election day? Strong-arm men visit homes and say, "You do not need to vote, give us your poll card." Could they not also say, "Give us your medical card"? It would be freely given to them.

Mr. McCusker: We are underestimating the character of our people, whether Unionist or nationalist. There is a degree to which our people will allow themselves to be pushed around by the paramilitary or politicians of all colours. However, there are limits when it comes to voting. They might, in many instances, be prepared to hand over a poll card. In sympathetic houses, there may be a willingness to produce a medical card. However, I do not think that 20,000 medical cards will be handed over. Indeed, I do not believe that everyone will be able to produce a medical card. The terrorist may demand one, but the person will tell him what he would tell the presiding officer, "I am sorry, I cannot find it." They will not be handed over on the scale envisaged by the promoters of the Bill.

I do not think that the terrorists will manufacture 20,000 identity cards. They would have to go through the register, weeks in advance, and identify the votes that they want to steal. They would have to produce either medical cards or identity cards with the names of those whose votes were being stolen, alongside their photographs. The terrorists are not in that sort of business — they intend to steal votes through paramilitary threats.

The amendment seeks to widen the possibility of showing that matters might not be what they appear, so that the police constable is alerted. It might be simply by the raising of an eyebrow or by a Unionist making a gesture as he says, "Let me see that card. What is that card?" Such a gesture might alert a policeman without inciting the gunman that night to blow out the brains of the person who put the finger on him. The amendment would allow the polling agent to see the document, and that is essential if we are to gain anything from the exercise.

As I have said, 600,000 people will bear the burden of producing a prescribed document, even though that is wholly unnecessary. We must keep the matter in perspective. Those people are entitled to vote. They will go to a polling station where they will be well known by either the presiding officer, his clerk or any one of a range of three or four polling agents. I do not doubt for one minute that if the Unionist agent did not know the person, the SDLP agent would. If there was any dispute about identity, the polling agent could say, "He is who he claims to be."

The simple production of a poll card would end a great deal of the abuse. There is a danger that the Bill will devalue the poll card. I think that we should be considering ways to enhance it. I accept what the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) said, but the suggestion is that poll cards can be accumulated under threat. The bulk of poll cards are not accumulated under threat, but are volunteered. They belong to the dead, those on holiday, the sick or those who are not interested in voting — a person may have moved home and his poll card may have arrived at his old home. Such a card may be thrown into the party organisation.

However, poll cards of people who are personated may never be in the hands of the party benefiting from the personation. Such cards are not always handed over, for example, by the relatives of the dead. Some people may refuse to hand over the poll card, yet despite that the vote is cast because it is not necessary to produce a poll card. Some thought should be given to the suggestion that the production of a poll card would be a useful means of establishing the right to vote. It is not conclusive. In County Antrim, in parts of County Down, County Armagh and Belfast the production of a poll card and another form of identification should be sufficient to convince a reasonable presiding officer of a person's right to vote.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels (Leicester, East): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is easy to obtain poll cards? His point is defeated because people from certain parties will follow a postman or go into an easily entered block of flats and pick up a mass of poll cards and use them as proof of identification. Does he agree that such people are then more likely to be believed than if they had to produce a document with a photograph on it?

Mr. McCusker: I am emphasising the 500,000 people who are legitimately entitled to vote. We should seek to reduce obstacles to their exercising the franchise. As was said, they may be known personally. I seek to move towards the Minister's position of requiring specific

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documents and of expecting some identification from a potential voter if there is a query. In many cases such a document may not be required because the voter is known, and his right to vote is not questioned.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Is it not a fact that the production of a poll card with a proper address would create the balance if the medical card did not show the present address, and that therefore the presiding officer's reasonable doubts would be swept away?

Mr. McCusker: That is what we are aiming for. I take my poll card with me anyway because it makes life easier for the presiding officer. The production of a poll card, which shows my name and proper address and, if the presiding officer insists, which I hope he would not, the production of a prescribed document, such as a medical card, would be a combination that would satisfy him. We seek to build in a means of verification for the hundreds of thousands of legitimate voters and something which will also help to eliminate the benign personation which takes place on the fringes. The production of the Bill itself virtually eliminates benign personation.

I assure the Minister that at every meeting of my constituency association I say that I do not need personated votes. I have a majority of 20,000, and I do not need any more votes, nor do I wish to incur any penalty. I tell them that, no matter how enthusiastic they are or how much they enjoy it, they must not do it — I will issue written instructions so that I do not fall foul of the any of the worst aspects of the Act when it comes into operation.

That brings us back to a person who has the potential to steal. He will be deterred by the prospect of arrest. Our approach and amendments may not be perfect, but I hope that the Minister will consider that the bulk of people wish to vote with least bother to themselves and the staff at the polling station. I hope that it is possible to have a deterrent against benign personation and to smooth the path of democracy for the majority in Northern Ireland. We must involve as many people as possible at the point of delivering the vote, so that more than one person will bear responsibility if the police must arrest a person. We must consider our amendment in that light.

6.15 pm

Mr. Peter Archer (Warley, West): Like every right hon. and hon. Member who has spoken during any of the debates on the Bill, I wholly support its principle and purpose. The stealing of votes is a pollutant that fouls the entire electoral process. If that principle and purpose were in dispute, I would not consider any moment spent in debate as other than well worth while. But all hon. Members agree on the principle. It is the method by which the purpose of the Bill is to be implemented which is in dispute.

The essential question, as the hon. Member for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross) pointed out, is whether the presiding officer should have a wide discretion or a narrow one. That does not seem to constitute a vital issue of principle. It is a mistake to debate every issue as though it were part of the eternal cosmic struggle of good against evil. Then there is no margin for marking out the genuinely vital issues of principle.

There can be legitimate disagreement on the matter. It merits a debate and right hon. and hon. Members are entitled to deploy their arguments. But I hope that the House will forgive me for suggesting that three full debates on the issue is one egg more than the pudding requires. Northern Ireland is denied its proper share of parliamentary time. We spend too few days on the problems which beset its people. We were reminded earlier today that some of our colleagues who, because they have pressing constituency problems, resent even the little time we spend on Northern Ireland. Also, as Mr. Speaker reminded us, Northern Ireland business is too rarely taken early in the day.

I cannot help reflecting on the Northern Ireland matters which we could have debated during these hours — for example, the tragedy of unemployment, the priorities for the budget that the Treasury allocates to the Northern Ireland Office, the balance between maintaining security and intruding into civil rights, the report of Sir George Baker, and the expectations which were dismissed so unceremoniously by the Prime Minister after the summit meeting. We may disagree about the subjects which we should like to discuss, but we can all find topics which merit greater attention than they receive. I hope that the House will understand the spirit in which I say that a full and long day's business after two previous debates on this issue may seem to the public to be a little disproportionate to the issue involved.

The issue is whether a presiding officer is to have general discretion to refuse a ballot paper when he smells a rat, whether he should make up his mind from the accumulation of evidence available to him through his eyes and ears, his memory, his sixth sense and what the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) called his common sense — or whether his function should be confined to applying certain well-defined tests, and, according to their results, to act precisely as prescribed by the rules. I do not believe that the rules give rise to all the absurdities which have been postulated by hon. Members and to which the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) alluded. If a presiding officer knows that a person is the elector whom that person purports to be, there is no reasonable doubt in the presiding officer's mind. At the risk of becoming tiresome, I repeat that, if there is no doubt in his mind, the document produced by the elector cannot have given rise to a doubt, and the condition spelt out in subsection 2(1)*(b)* is not satisfied.

Mr. J. Enoch Powell *rose—*

Mr. Archer: I shall give way to the right hon. Gentleman, but I hope that my next remarks will assist him. I suspect that the reverse position that was predicated by the right hon. Gentleman is not so satisfactory. If no doubt arises on the face of the document, it seems that the presiding officer cannot refuse a ballot paper whatever doubts he may entertain from other sources and for other reasons. I should be grateful if the Minister would confirm that

Mr. Powell: I am grateful for the right hon. and learned Gentleman's support of the wording of amendment No. 25, which is that

"the presiding officer decides, after taking into consideration any document produced to him, that there is no reasonable doubt that the voter is the elector or proxy he represents himself to be."

If I have followed the right hon. and learned Gentleman's argument correctly, he would appear completely to agree with that formula.

Mr. Archer: I was trying to say that perhaps the amendment is not required because it is already spelt out in the subsection. Perhaps I made a mistake in interrupting my argument to interpose a parenthesis, because I was saying that some of the problems which have been postulated during our debates do not arise in any event.

Mr. McCusker: Is the right hon. and learned Gentleman suggesting that I need not bring a prescribed document when I vote?

Mr. Archer: The hon. Gentleman must bring a prescribed document, but whatever the content of that document, if he is known to the presiding officer—as he clearly is—the presiding officer does not entertain a doubt and, therefore, the document does not give rise to doubt.

I entirely agree with the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. McCusker) that the real sanction is the policeman at the door. If he is suspicious, he may arrest a claimant, which may be an effective way of ensuring that he does not vote. As the hon. Gentleman said, a policeman can act at any stage and on his own initiative; and I do not dissent from the argument that polling agents should have the right to intervene and to draw the attention of the police officer to suspicions which they might entertain. Perhaps I will embarrass the hon. Member for Upper Bann by agreeing so much with him, but I also agree that if the police became too enthusiastic and arrested many claimants who later transpired to be the electors whom they were claiming to be, the fat might be in the fire. Some might argue that the enthusiasm of the police had affected the result of the election.

Whatever solutions are offered in the Bill, there will be problems on one side or the other. The argument that I was seeking to propound is that the essential question is the extent of the discretion of the presiding officer. I believe that there are persuasive reasons for limiting it as the Bill seeks. If a presiding officer is given wide dicretion, as the hon. Member for Londonderry, East pointed out, having been required to exercise his discretion, he may be accused of exercising it so as to favour a particular candidate or candidates. However objective or fair he tries to be, it is almost inevitable that such an allegation would be made. It follows that the more his discretion can be limited, the better. It could be said that the presiding officer was too ready to refuse ballot papers, at least to those with certain surnames, or that he was too gullible and handed ballot papers to all and sundry as though they grew on trees.

However, there is a more formidable objection, which was propounded by the hon. Member for Upper Bann, although he drew a slightly different conclusion from it. If the presiding officer has a wide discretion, some may try to persuade him to exercise it in a certain way. If he resists their suggestions, he may be in serious physical danger. The House should not lightly expose presiding officers to such duress. Is it not better to prescribe a clear criterion with inevitable consequences so that the threats to which the presiding officer may be subjected can hardly affect what happens? Of course, if the threats reach the stage of requiring the presiding officer to ignore any rules and to hand out ballot papers irrespective of the documents produced, the Bill can provide no safeguard. But, short of that, the narrower his discretion, the less subjected he will be to such threats.

Mr. McCusker: Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman accept that at the previous election presiding officers must have handed thousands of ballot papers to people in the certain knowledge that they were not the right people? If that happened at the previous election, what will be different at the next election if a person comes in with what purports to be a prescribed document? If the same presiding officer is there, why should he say, "I will not give you a ballot paper because that is a false document"? I do not believe that that will happen.

Mr. Archer: I am not clear whether the hon. Gentleman is advancing a counsel of despair. If he says that we have reached the stage where no rules can affect the presiding officer, there is no point in legislating. As I said, the best sanction will be the policeman on the door, I hope that we will not reach the stage of saying, "Let us give up any attempt to legislate beyond that," because it is something to which the House must direct its mind.

Mr. J. D. Concannon (Mansfield): Why have elections?

Mr. Archer: As my right hon. Friend says, if we reach that stage, why have elections at all?

I have listened to the debate with an open mind, and I believe that the discretion of the presiding officer should be limited in the way described in the Bill. I accept that the price that we must pay is that the rules will sometimes seem artificial. We shall deliberately limit the powers of presiding officers to act on evidence outside the documents even when common sense suggests otherwise. We shall restrict the range of questions which a presiding officer is permitted to ask. But I think that he should have power to ask for an explanation of apparent discrepancies in the documents. If someone is required to produce a document to the presiding officer, it would be odd if he were not permitted to ask why the address on the document did not tally with that on the register. I hope that the Government will consider that suggestion as the Bill progresses.

The Opposition support the Government's general approach to this matter. Unless I hear before the end of the debate more convincing arguments from those who moved the amendments, I shall advise my hon. Friends to vote with the Government, on the balance of the argument, with no great passion, and certainly without pretending that the debate is in any sense an Armageddon.

The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Ernest Armstrong): It might help the Committee if I were to say now that the Chairman has decided that amendments Nos. 3 and 24 will be called for Division if required.

Rev. Ian Paisley: It has already been said in this and previous debates that there is no difference of opinion among those representing Northern Ireland on the Government's goal. We all want elections to be run properly; we want the scourge of personation to be removed; and we want those who engineer and control personation to be subjected to the law. But if we are to have realistic legislation to achieve that goal, the Government should know that there are two ways in which it can be done. The first is to proscribe and outlaw organisations that practise personation, and the second is to have sufficient safeguards so that the arrangements for the identification of voters at polling stations are made as

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watertight as possible. It does not seem to me that the action that the Government propose to take in the Bill will achieve its aims.

6.30 pm

At the beginning of the debate I understand that some strictures were cast upon me by the hon. Member for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross) because I was not present.

Mr. William Ross: No.

Rev. Ian Paisley: That was my understanding, but I apologise to the hon. Gentleman if it is not so. I made it clear to the Leader of the Unionist party that a colleague and I had to meet the Secretary of State at 5 o'clock. I had expected this debate to start sooner than it did. I was in the House for a long time before it began and in fact I contributed to the discussion that preceded it.

Mr. William Ross: The only strictures that I directed were at the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) who, as the hon. Gentleman can see, is not present even though he said in the House recently that he and his party had suffered severely from the abuse that the Bill is aimed to correct.

Rev. Ian Paisley: I accept the hon. Gentleman's explanation. I am glad that I have not been mixed up with the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume), because his political views and mine are not exactly in agreement.

I must also tell the Minister that I am not convinced that 20,000 votes were personated at the last election. If they were, I wonder where they came from, because they must have come from people who were never registered at all. I invite the Minister to consider the balance in the areas where votes are likely to be personated—Belfast, West, the Foyle, Mid-Ulster and perhaps Fermanagh and South Tyrone, It could not possibly be done.

I have had some experience both as an election agent for the Official Unionist party and as a candidate for my own party. The idea that it is possible to turn out in the morning, run thousands of people through the polls and personate them is ridiculous. It cannot be done. There are limits to it—*[Interruption.]* I make that statement about the numbers which can be put through the polling stations, but in the council elections in May, where there can be close-run decisions, it is very important that no votes are stolen. We had an election for the city council in west Belfast, and only a handful of votes decided it. For that reason it is very important that we deal with this abuse, and I support the Bill's objective.

In my view, the presiding officer needs to have a great deal of discretion. He is the man who will sit there and take the decisions. He is a trusted official, a man of some substance and standing in the community and he is not there not to exercise his common sense, knowledge and discretion. He is entitled to use his common sense and discretion. If he knows a person and can swear that he is whom he purports to be, why must he have a prescribed document produced to him and, if the document bears an inaccurate statement, why must he act on that information alone?

It is only right that, as amendment No. 25 says, the presiding officer should have the opportunity to use his intelligence and say that the would-be voter is the person whom he purports to be and that even though his medical card bears the wrong address, it does not matter because people change their addresses, and that he should be entitled to his vote.

I am still extremely worried about the honourable and decent people on both sides of the religious and political divide who want to vote and who come out to vote. It is often said that everyone in Northern Ireland thinks that voting is great and will all come out to vote, but I can tell right hon. and hon. Members that it is difficult to get people out to vote in Northern Ireland, especially as the ballot box in large measure has been debased by the House because no longer do majorities count in the internal politics of Northern Ireland. Many people ask what is the use of voting.

Those who believe in the democratic process and its continuance must be encouraged to vote. When they come to polling stations every safeguard must be provided for them so that they can get in their legitimate votes at the same time as every safeguard is provided to keep illegitimate voters out. We need balance in the Bill in that respect, and I hope that the Minister will apply his mind to that.

The two parts of Antrim do not vote in large percentages. It is difficult to get people out to vote. If a decent law-abiding citizen comes to vote and either he has not the necessary document or there is some query on the one that he produces, he will be challenged. Although the presiding officer knows him and perhaps even taught him at school, he must say, "I am sorry. You cannot vote." If that happens that person will not go back. He will never vote again in Northern Ireland. He will say to himself, "What is the use? I am sick, sore and tired. I have been denied my vote."

There will be some fun in polling stations between presiding officers and those who will be really sore about this provision. The Minister needs to apply his mind to what is likely to happen on polling day when a presiding officer says to a would-be voter, "I know you and was brought up with you, but you haven't the required document," or, "The document that you have produced gives me cause for doubt because your proper address does not appear on it."

These amendments are simply saying loudly to the Minister that the presiding officer should be allowed to use his intelligence and make sure that he is satisfied. If he is satisfied about anyone's identity, that person should be allowed to vote.

Mr. William Ross: Has the hon. Gentleman also considered the possibility that the application of this law, by lowering the percentage of decent people who have always voted but not really reducing the Sinn Fein vote all that much, means that the Sinn Fein vote will appear as a larger percentage of the total votes cast than it has in the past?

Rev. Ian Paisley: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. I believe that the Bill could be self-defeating. Insted of accomplishing what we are setting out to do, the result could be entirely different. We could end up with a bigger percentage of Sinn Fein voters. People who wish to vote Sinn Fein are entitled to, but we are not talking about them. We are talking about people who are stealing votes and personating people who are enemies of the Sinn Fein movement. I want the Minister to tell the House what

safeguards he can provide in his Bill which will defend the legitimate voter as well as dealing with the illegitimate one.

There is also a problem about where the police come into this. I wonder what use a representative of the candidate is under the Bill. What does he do? He can no longer sit at the table. If he does, he will see the documents that are produced. Where is he to be put? What is he to see? What is the use of swearing him in and having him there? I understand that the purpose of having him there is that he can see that the person who goes to vote is a legitimate voter, that his name is on the roll, and that he is the person whom he purports to be. He is there to safeguard against personation. Under the present law he is one of the people who are present to safeguard what we are trying to safeguard even more. Is it intended to take away his role? His role should be that which has been suggested. He, too, should be able to see any document that is produced and be satisfied, and he should be able to see how the presiding officer comes to his decision. The Minister needs to apply himself to that.

What role does the Minister see the representative of the candidate playing? Does he see him playing any role? In the past, the representatives of the candidates have been able to check personation, and they have been able to challenge people. If they do not do that, it is because of fear. A Unionist can challenge a Republican, or a Republican can challenge a Unionist, and that still goes on. However, an SDLP representative will be afraid to challenge a Sinn Fein supporter because he knows that there will be a reaction, retaliation and punishment. The Minister needs to tell us why the agent should not have the opportunity of getting the law in the polling station, as represented by the RUC, to support him, as the police need to be involved at that stage. The responsibility of the presiding officer and of the people around the table depends on the police officer.

I assure the right hon. and learned Member for Warley, West (Mr. Archer) that the RUC is not enthusiastic to stop people on polling day. It does as little as possible on polling day to interfere. I have found arguments carried on about who got their caravans first before a polling station, and the RUC has left it to be fought out among the arguers. I cannot see the RUC arresting hundreds of people in the polling station. I have not heard a loud outcry against it, even in Republican areas, on election day. The RUC has acted responsibly, so it should have the opportunity to exercise its authority. That is why my hon. Friend and I shall be voting for these amendments.

Mr. Clifford Forsythe (Antrim, South): I support much of what my right hon. and hon. Friends have said. The object behind the Bill is commendable, and one that everyone would support. Personation should be curtailed and done away with, not because of the things that have happened in certain areas or because of a certain party but because of the democratic principle that a person's vote should be his vote and it should not be used by someone else. It is unfortunate that many things have been said outside the House on the lines that it is fear of the Sinn Fein party and its fellow travellers that has led to the Bill. It is a terrible thing if a Bill has to be brought in because of murderers and those who travel down the same road, and the so-called political party.

In our anxiety to ensure that right is done — the democratic right of every voter to have his or her vote — we must not forget the right also of those who have never personated and who wish to vote in a democratic way, as in the rest of the United Kingdom. In those areas of Northern Ireland where we do not have the same trouble — as has been said, in some constituencies no extra signed votes have been required — we may be disadvantaging some people. Older people and others will resent the fact that they have to provide identification to get what they regard as their God-given right to vote. There will be those who, if there are any difficulties, will refuse to vote in future, and will storm out of the polling stations after creating rows and trouble. Who can blame them for that, especially as the rest of the United Kingdom is treated in a different manner? In certain constituencies it is already difficult enough to get the voters out to vote without putting any further obstacles in their way.

6.45 pm

I draw the attention of the Minister and the Committee to what will happen if and when the Bill is introduced, and if it is not introduced properly with the required safeguards. What will happen when the next election is over and there is no difference in the voting pattern? It has been said in this debate, and by the Minister on other occasions, that a party is the cause of bringing in the Bill. If that party still maintains its position in the voting pattern because of discrepancies in the Bill which allow personation to continue because it has not been brought in properly, that party will be able to say, quite legitimately, "You see, you were all wrong. We did not have personated votes. This is the actual support that we have in Northern Ireland." The end will be worse than the beginning. That is the terrible danger of the Bill if the Minister and the Government do not bring in proper safeguards so that we do not have such difficulties.

When the Minister last spoke, he did not answer my point about the case of the chap who is working but has none of the prescribed documents. He does not drive, so he does not have a driving licence. He does not have a passport and he does not need a current book for allowances or pensions. He does not have his medical card or he has lost it, or perhaps it shows the wrong address. How will that person obtain his vote?

Rev. Ian Paisley: He should get his marriage lines.

Mr. Forsythe: In those circumstances, there is something to be said for the polling card, because at least most people receive it. Therefore, there may be some support for such a proposal. I shall be interested to hear from the Minister how that person will obtain his vote.

Mr. Peter Robinson: I support amendment No. 25 and the others grouped with it. Two substantial matters are contained in that group and have to be faced by the Government. It is not enough for the Government to turn their back on responsible and reasoned arguments and chase through the Lobby their ranks of supporters to ensure that the Bill proceeds without amendment. The Minister may not want to accept the drafting of these amendments, although I have no objection. They are better than some of the amendments tabled in my name. In any case the Minister will have to introduce the two substantial principles contained in these amendments at a later stage.

I ask the Minister to address himself particularly to two matters. The first is the principle contained in amendment No. 25, which deals with the sensible argument of

[Mr. Peter Robinson]

allowing some back-up material. The Bill, as worded, requires the presiding officer to do no more than accept, on the basis of the document in front of him, that the person presenting the document is the person on the electoral register. The presiding officer may have some doubts because the person's features on the photograph differ or because the address has changed over the years. It would seem to be a simple, common-sense measure to provide that the person about to vote should produce any evidence he can, whether in the form of a House of Commons pass, as the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. McCusker) was prepared to do, a Civil Service pass or any other documentation. The Committee would be happy if the Under-Secretary of State were prepared to concede that the principles in the Bill are not prejudiced by allowing the presiding officer to have that degree of flexibility in accepting certain back-up material from the voter.

I am greatly concerned about the position to which personation agents have been relegated. Until now at elections in Northern Ireland, the personation agents were, to all intents and purposes, the only guard against personation. The Under-Secretary of State may argue that the Committee would not be debating this Bill today if the personation agents had done their job. I would argue that hon. Members would have debated this legislation a long time ago if those agents had not been doing their job. Their presence, apart from any action they take, deters many who seek to personate. I suspect that the people whom the parties choose to be personation agents have local knowledge and expertise that outweighs that of the presiding officer, his clerks or officials.

The Under-Secretary of State has not yet overtly stated the Government's intention towards personation agents. He has said that they will not be allowed to look over the shoulders of the presiding officer to see how much Mrs. Jones is getting in supplementary benefit, to find out about Mr. Murphy in a prescribed Republic of Ireland or United Kingdom passport or to see whether a person's Great Britain driving licence has endorsements. I can understand the Government's sensitivity in not wanting those documents to be seen easily. If there is some doubt in the mind of the personation agent about the identity of the person on the electoral register, it is reasonable that he should have the right to question that person. That may not be necessary in every case. That is a reasonable request, and I hope that the Government will accept the tenor of that argument.

I hope that the Under-Secretary of State will address his attention to the RUC's role. The personation agent will have only half the evidence, because he will see the person going into the polling station and will not be able to check his documents. Can the personation agent ask the RUC to intervene to check a voter's credentials? Will only the presiding officer be allowed that right? The Under-Secretary of State should inform the Committee about those matters so that we can have a more informed debate. I trust that he will accept the general tenor and validity of those arguments.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Mr. Nicholas Scott): We have rightly had a long debate, because this group of amendments, is central to the Government's approach to the Bill. No doubt, when discussing other amendments, we shall hear more about a number of the points raised during the discussion, particularly the RUC's role. That is the time at which I should wish to deal with those points.

I am grateful to the right hon. and learned Member for Warley, West (Mr. Archer) for the general support he has given to our approach on this front. Like him, I am anxious to make as rapid progress as possible, but I do not think that we should be disappointed that we have engaged in discussion in some depth on this first group of amendments.

The right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) explained clearly and fairly the effects of his amendments. There is no difference between us about the effects if the amendments are carried. We recognise the sincerity and care that has been taken. We are at one in trying to deal with the evil which the Bill is designed to tackle.

Despite that, the Government have thought hard about the approach taken by the right hon. Member for South Down in these amendments and, in general, have come to a different judgment about their desirability. The amendments would alter the basis on which the Government have founded the Bill to deal with personation—the principle of universality of application of the requirement to produce documents to obtain a ballot paper. These amendments would remove the mandatory requirement upon all those voting at polling stations to produce one of those listed documents to obtain a ballot paper.

In a sense, nothing in these provisions would be very different from the electoral procedures that apply now, except that new circumstances would be created by amendment No. 26. According to that amendment the presiding officer at his discretion might, or, if required by a candidate, his election agent or polling agent, must, require a voter to produce a prescribed document. The presiding officer could then take that document into account together with any other document in deciding whether the voter was the person on the electoral register he was presenting himself to be.

It is clear that the effect of amendment No. 24 would be to confer upon party political representatives or appointees the same powers of access to personal documents enjoyed by presiding officers. I do not believe that such a provision is necessary, since I see no reason to usurp the powers of electoral staff in this matter. Nor do I think—I have given this careful thought—that it would be desirable to intrude on individual privacy without good reason. I imagine that many voters would resent in principle having a personal document scrutinised by representatives of various political parties. In the special context and circumstances of Northern Ireland, some electors might feel apprehensive about disclosing certain personal details, such as benefits or allowances, to members of a political party which they view unsympathetically or which they believe would regard them unsympathetically.

Mr. McCusker: Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that, if a polling agent has good cause to think that the document produced was false or bogus or was not a document that belonged to the individual involved, he cannot interject in any way to obtain an assurance that it is a prescribed document?

Mr. Scott: A personation agent can still challenge. He cannot ask to see the document. By issuing his challenge,

he alerts the constable of the RUC who is present. That right to challenge has not changed because of the Bill. I hope that the personation officers' role has been reinforced by the Bill's provisions. For the reasons I have outlined, I do not believe that it would be right to give personation officers the right to inspect documents. They can alert people and then the presiding officer has to make the judgment.

The effect of these amendments would be to create a new climate of uncertainty among the Northern Ireland electorate. Far from stopping the fouling of the process —that was the phrase used by the right hon. Member for South Down—they would create a new uncertainty. The electorate would not be sure whether they would be required to produce prescribed documents at a polling station before they were issued with a ballot paper or sure about what other evidence they might be expected to produce to support that evidence.

Mr. J. Enoch Powell: Will the Minister be good enough to deal with the matter that he raised tangentially just now when referring to the access of polling agents to a document? What is the interpretation that is placed upon the word "produce"? Do I "produce" a document if I hold it out so that the face of it can be seen by the person to whom I am producing, or is it not produced unless I hand it over so that he can go through it and turn it upside down? That is material to the point the Minister was making about the benefit of a document and this might be a useful moment to clarify it.

7 pm

Mr. Scott: It has to be produced to the presiding officer in such a way that enables him to inspect the document. The presiding officer will form his own judgment as to whether looking at the face of the document is sufficient evidence. In the case of a passport, he will presumably want to open the document to inspect the page that contains the photograph. It will depend upon the judgment of the presiding officer whether he is in a position satisfactorily to inspect the document produced to him.

If the amendments were accepted, electors could not be certain whether they would be issued with a ballot paper, whatever document they produced, as the decision would depend on the presiding officer's discretion. I believe that this is a formula for confusion among the electorate and could be applied inconsistently by presiding officers in different parts of the Province. Some hon. Members may feel that the provisions might invite and encourage vexatious challenges by polling agents or those who mignt have a vested interest in disrupting the electoral proceedings. They significantly increase the risk of allegations of acts of partiality by presiding officers and of consequent litigation. They provide a great temptation for those determined to undermine the democratic process to secure partiality in their favour.

I have no doubt that if the amendments were accepted they would create a greater deterrent for the legitimate voter than the Government's proposals, and would thus increase the possibility, which has been mentioned in earlier debates, of producing a lower turnout.

In contrast, I maintain that the Government's proposals in clause 1 reduce to the minimum the discretion which is to be exercised by electoral staff so that the electoral procedure will be conducted consistently in every polling station across the Province. All voters in all polling stations will be required to produce one of the prescribed documents to obtain a ballot paper. All presiding officers and all clerks will, in those circumstances, be required to deliver a ballot paper unless they decide that the document raises a reasonable doubt as to whether the voter is the person on the register whom he claims to be.

I reinforce the point made by the right hon. and learned Member for Warley, West (Mr. Archer). I made the same point on Second Reading. If the presiding officer or the clerk knows a person to be the person whom he represents himself to be, no document can then raise a reasonable doubt in the mind of the presiding officer or clerk as to identity of that person.

If we take into account the provisions of clause 3 with those of clause 1—there is a mandatory requirement upon a voter to produce a prescribed document to obtain a ballot paper — all personators and would-be personators know that they risk arrest for the offence of going equipped to personate. The hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. McCusker) mentioned that point. If a personator or would-be personator now goes into a polling station, he runs the risk that the presiding officer may decline to give him a vote; the presiding officer may ask the statutory questions; the personation agent may challenge him; and the police, if alerted by the presiding officer or by the personation agent, or on their own initiative, can move in to effect an arrest under the provisions of clause 3. That will be a substantial deterrent to those who would engage in personation.

I am advised that presiding officers are moved around wherever possible into polling stations where they are not well known to local electors so as to provide a form of protection against intimidation from the local paramilitaries.

Mr. McCusker: I do not know about the last point; it is something that the Minister can investigate. The Minister spoke about the necessity for consistency of treatment. I am sure that the Minister will accept that hundreds of thousands of voters in Northern Ireland who go to the polls are just like voters in his constituency. How does he feel his electorate would react—I am talking about the ordinary run-of-the-mill elector—if to vote for the hon. Gentleman they were asked to produce one of the documents?

Mr. Scott: I was coming to that point. I well understand the burden that this places upon the vast majority of legitimate voters. We considered this matter seriously. The Government listened to the representations made to them by all the constitutional parties in Northern Ireland. We made our own assessment of the growing threat of personation, in particular vote-stealing as it has been described, which subverts the whole democratic process, and came to the view and hold it firmly that that is a price that we must ask the vast majority to pay to eliminate this poison from the electoral system in Northern Ireland.

Rev. Ian Paisley: I was interested in the aside that the Minister made when he said that presiding officers are moved around. Will the Minister study that point and find out how many have been moved around? I know that no one has been moved in my area. They have presided there for a long time. I have experience of what might be called the "dicey" areas. During the EEC elections, my agent

[Rev. Ian Paisley]

said the same thing. He introduced me to the presiding officer and said, "This man has been doing this for 20 years in this area."

Mr. Scott: They have been moved around in the past, and, with the new arrangements provided for my the Bill, I am sure that those who arrange the appointment of presiding officers will bear in mind the position of those who come forward to offer their services in that role.

Mr. Roy Beggs (Antrim, East): Surely the presiding officer is of great benefit to the community when he recognises those who come forward to vote. If he is placed in an entirely different community, the voters are all strangers to him and he may recognise no one. Any documentation could then apply to anyone presenting it.

Mr. Scott: Presiding officers' discretion, under the terms of the Bill, will be limited. The personation agents will still be there and will still have the right to challenge. The RUC will be there. I think that that will be a balance. I am sure that in making his dispositions the chief electoral officer will take those matters into account.

I am conscious of the care that has gone into devising these amendments, and I am aware of the anxieties felt by the right hon. Members for South Down (Mr. Powell) and for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux) which gave rise to the amendments. I must reiterate that they contain a high potential for confusion and disruption of polling stations and do not provide the formidable deterrent against the personation which clauses 1 and 3 taken together provide as they stand. Those provisions are certain and fair, and they will apply universally across the Province. I therefore must urge the Committee to reject the amendments.

Mr. James Molyneaux (Lagan Valley): The right hon. and learned Member for Warley, West (Mr. Archer) seemed to bemoan the fact that we were devoting prime time in the House of Commons to discussing this constitutional measure. I do not deny that there are other matters that we might profitably discuss, but because this is a constitutional measure it is right and proper that it should be taken on the Floor of the House of Commons. I am sure that, on behalf of the official Opposition, he would not seek to deny that.

Mr. Archer: I wish to make the position clear. I am not complaining that this is being taken on the Floor of the House of Commons. I was only venturing to question whether an issue which has been debated twice already should occupy so much of the time which is so happily available to us today.

Mr. Molyneaux: I suppose that if it had been left to the initiative of my right hon. and hon. Friends, we could have chosen to devote time to certain other matters, but we know that the pressure for this measure came not from our party or even from the Democratic Unionist party but from the party represented by the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume), who is not here in the flesh. The initiative for the pressure came from what in Northern Ireland is called constitutional nationalism, because it was thought that the hon. Member's party was incapable of holding its own against Sinn Fein. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross)—who at the moment is engaged in his studies beside me—I too regret that the hon. Member for Foyle is not with us, not just because his views would have been of great benefit to the Committee but because, after all, his party is likely to be the main beneficiary of the Bill.

The nationalist spokesmen in recent days, both lay and ordained, have been telling the world that they are alienated because they are excluded from the decision-making processes in the parliamentary system. The opportunity exists here today. We shall do our best in the absence of the two hon. Members elected to represent the minority in this House—the one who will not come and the other who will not stay.

My right hon. Friend the Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) opened by recording that we had diligently sought to improve this portion of the Bill. In fairness to the Minister, his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and their Department, I place on record the fact that they too have sought some way of meeting our wishes with a view to making this a more effective piece of legislation. So far the Government have not felt able to move sufficiently far in our direction, but we are travelling hopefully. I hope that before we come to the end of the deliberations, the gulf will be less wide and less deep.

It will come as no surprise to the Committee to know that we on this Bench, who have consistently adhered to the line that we took in 1982, before the Bill was drafted, maintain that position. My right hon. Friend has quoted from my letter to the Secretary of State dated 6 July 1982, in which we advocated less rigid requirements on the matter that we are discussing in the amendments. With long experience of the conduct of elections, we instinctively felt that there was a need to tighten the procedures and to make certain restrictions more effective, but we did not feel that there was any need for a fundamental change in the rules and procedures governing elections in any part of the United Kingdom.

For the whole of the period since the former Secretary of State first wrote to me in April 1982 we too have engaged in consultations, and we have found that there was a remarkable consensus on the desirability of candidates' polling agents taking a more robust part in the proceedings. The Representation of the People Acts, which govern all elections that really matter in the United Kingdom, provide for that participation. I believe that polling agents will be much less effective under the proposed arrangements. To be effective, they have to be given whatever information is available, and I cannot understand the justification for refusing to give polling agents such information.

Has it been entirely overlooked that all polling agents make a solemn declaration of secrecy, in the presence of a justice of the peace, before they can be admitted to the polling station to take up their duties? I have to ask how many examples there are of occasions when that declaration of secrecy has been dishonoured or breached in any way.

The Minister, in the light of what he has just said about the undesirability of disclosing personal documents to polling agents, will know that it has been the custom and practice of presiding officers in polling stations to make known what information is at their disposal by way of calling out to the party representatives the name and the number of the elector approaching the table to ask for his ballot paper.

It has to be understood that in polling stations there is far more co-operation and team work than parliamentary

draftsmen would imagine. By making the regulations too rigid, I fear that we shall destroy the teamwork which has up to now made the machine work.

7.15 pm

I have seen cases where there has been confusion over duplication of names — the same name has been duplicated on two different pages. The presiding officer, not being certain who is standing before him, will on many occasions seek the advice of the appropriate party agents, and all of them together, to the complete satisfaction of the elector, will come to the conclusion that he or she is the person whose name appears on the register as so-and-so.

There has been objection to the bringing in of polling agents on the ground that they would be intimidated, but by narrowing the field surely we achieve the reverse effect, concentrating the fire entirely on the unfortunate presiding officer, because he is the only one who will make decisions. Good soldiers are always taught that fire is ineffective if it is scattered over a range of targets. There is much to be said for widening the field and thereby sharing the risk over a range of people who would voluntarily take that risk.

I think that the former Secretary of State would agree with what I have just said, because he made it clear in his letter to me that he accepted the view that the co-ordinated effort should make "a substantial difference". That was co-ordination among all those present in the polling station.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): As I understand the position, the Government's view is that polling agents should not be able to see the documents. My right hon. Friend has been talking about co-operation. Is he aware that there is a tendency for some presiding officers not even to call out the name and the number, so that it is more difficult for polling agents to do their job? Is that the pattern that my right hon. Friend believes the Government are now inculcating through the returning officers in the various constituencies?

Mr. Molyneaux: I hope that the Government are not engaging and are not likely to engage in any such exercise. My hon. Friend will remember that on Second Reading I said that there was a certain patchiness in the practices observed, and that some of it stemmed from the fact that elections in Northern Ireland are split between the Representation of the People Acts under which we get ourselves elected to this place for our sins, and the Stormont electoral law.

I suspect that the chief electoral officer and his various subordinates seek refuge in the passages of whichever Act seems to be of most benefit to them at any given time. I would deplore any tendency on the part of the chief electoral officer or presiding officer or deputy returning officer to limit in any way the participation of the polling agents who, as I have illustrated, have been of real help in making the machinery work in times past. That is borne out by the fact that there is very seldom any friction within the polling stations.

On occasions I have visited polling stations after having been warned by security officers not to go there. On arrival, I have proceeded to shake hands with everyone at the table, as I imagine you do in your constituency, Mr. Dean. The Sinn Fein representatives invariably stood and courteously shook hands. It was the members of the moderate Alliance party who put their hands under the table and refused to shake hands.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels: Has the right hon. Gentleman carefully considered the role of the electoral registration officer in regard to the electoral roll? One of the most important steps is to check the accuracy of the electoral roll with and in conjunction with the polling officers. Surely that helps to overcome some of the problems that the right hon. Gentleman is highlighting.

The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Paul Dean): Order. Before the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux) is tempted down that road, he will recognise that that question seems to be a little far from the amendment.

Mr. Molyneaux: In fairness, I do not think that I did the leading on this occasion, but I shall refrain from answering the question by the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Bruinvels) in the expectation that the hon. Gentleman will be able to find a way of raising it when we debate another amendment.

I was going to say that over the past few years the participation of polling agents had admittedly lessened to some extent in certain areas, but only in certain areas. Although I appreciate the validity of the remarks by my hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann (Mr. McCusker), that was not entirely due to overt intimidation in the sense of violence, but was far more attributable to a collapse of morale on the part of what might be termed establishment parties or perhaps one party on the nationalist side. There is a good deal of validity in what my hon. Friend said, but that latter consideration was probably the more significant.

However, that does not in any way relieve members of political parties of their responsibility to fight their own battles and stand on their own feet. If our amendments were accepted, that would go a long way towards achieving and encouraging that. However, those people will stand on their own feet only if morale is high, and that can be achieved only if parties have the drive, initiative and confidence in their own existence without outside assistance or any form of life support system.

Earlier I paid tribute to the Minister and his officials for doing their best to improve this part of the Bill, but for us the difficulty is—I think that the Minister appreciates it —that they have not succeeded. Consequently, not only has there been no reduction in our fears about the inadequacy of the Bill as it stands, but we have greater fears that the measure may result in confusion and chaos at polling stations.

Regrettably, in view of the gap that continues to exist between the Government and ourselves, I have no option but to press the amendment and invite the Committee to support it in the Lobby.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 21, Noes 180.

Division No. 25] **[7.22 pm**

AYES

Beggs, Roy
Bermingham, Gerald
Clay, Robert
Duffy, A. E. P.
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Loyden, Edward
McCusker, Harold
Maginnis, Ken
Maynard, Miss Joan
Michie, William
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Nellist, David
Nicholson, J.
Paisley, Rev Ian
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Powell, Rt Hon J. E. *(S Down)*
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Robinson, P. *(Belfast E)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smyth, Rev W. M. *(Belfast S)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. A. Cecil Walker and
Mr. William Ross.

NOES

Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashby, David
Ashdown, Paddy
Baker, Nicholas *(N Dorset)*
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Beith, A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Bevan, David Gilroy
Blackburn, John
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Boyson, Dr Rhodes
Braine, Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brinton, Tim
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Bruinvels, Peter
Budgen, Nick
Butterfill, John
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S.)*
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Couchman, James
Cox, Thomas *(Tooting)*
Cranborne, Viscount
Dewar, Donald
Dorrell, Stephen
Dover, Den
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Evennett, David
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Fallon, Michael
Faulds, Andrew
Favell, Anthony
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fletcher, Alexander
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Gummer, John Selwyn
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Harvey, Robert
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hawkins, Sir Paul *(SW N'folk)*
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, J.
Haynes, Frank
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Henderson, Barry
Hickmet, Richard
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holt, Richard
Home Robertson, John
Hooson, Tom
Howarth, Alan *(Stratf'd-on-A)*
Howell, Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Howells, Geraint
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hume, John
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Kellett-Bowman, Mrs Elaine
Kershaw, Sir Anthony
Kilroy-Silk, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Gregory *(Derby N)*
Knowles, Michael
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lester, Jim
Lloyd, Peter, *(Fareham)*
Lyell, Nicholas
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McQuarrie, Albert
Mates, Michael
Mather, Carol
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Meadowcroft, Michael
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Murphy, Christopher
Neale, Gerrard
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Tony
Normanton, Tom
Page, Sir John *(Harrow W)*
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Parris, Matthew
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Penhaligon, David
Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Pollock, Alexander
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Robinson, Mark *(N'port W)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Silvester, Fred
Skeet, T. H. H.
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Spence, John
Spencer, Derek
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steel, Rt Hon David
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Martin *(Fulham)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, J.
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Tracey, Richard
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Waddington, David
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Whitfield, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wiggin, Jerry
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Michael

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John Major and
Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd.

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr. Peter Robinson: I beg to move amendment No. 13, in page 1, line 12, leave out 'a' and insert 'the'.

The Second Deputy Chairman: With this it will be convenient to take the following amendments: No. 14, in page 2, line 1, leave out 'a' and insert 'the'.

No. 15, in page 2, line 7, leave out 'a' and insert 'the'.

No. 16, in page 2, line 10, leave out 'a' and insert 'the'.

No. 22, in page 2, line 16, at end insert

'No document shall be required to be produced for voting purposes other than a document issued by or with the authority of the United Kingdom Government.'.

No. 17, in page 2, line 16, at end insert—

'(I.F.) References in this rule to producing the prescribed document are to producing the document issued by the Chief Electoral Officer which shall bear the name, address, date of birth, signature and photograph of the registered elector.'.

Mr. Robinson: These amendments have properly been linked. Only amendment No. 22 stands on its own feet, as it were, and I shall deal with that separately.

Our purpose is clear. Substituting the definite article for the indefinite article has the effect of requiring just one document to be produced of the type prescribed in amendment No. 17 for issue by the chief electoral officer.

In debates on the Bill so far I have not been impressed by any evidence of willingness on the part of the Government to accept reasonable amendments. The Government bulldozer was put into top gear to reject an earlier, thoroughly rational amendment. That suggests that, however convincing the argument, the Government have no intention of accepting any amendments, that they wish the Bill to go forward exactly as it was presented to us some weeks ago and that the rest of us can like it or lump it. I became slightly optimistic on the basis that the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux) must know something that I did not, because he said that he was travelling hopefully. I think that hope is about all that we can have, however, as there is little evidence to suggest that our hopes are likely to be realised in the form of changes in the Bill.

The purpose of the amendments is to have a uniform identification card produced by the chief electoral officer. That would remove much of the confusion which, as earlier debates have shown, will arise on election day if the forms of identification suggested by the Government in the notes on clauses are used.

The drafting of the amendments may not be of the neatest. A cursory glance suggests that amendments Nos. 14 and 16 should have referred to leaving out the second "a" and inserting "the". Nevertheless, the intention is clear and if the Government shock or rock me by accepting the principle I am sure that the draftsmen can make appropriate changes to tidy up the drafting.

The weaknesses of the prescribed documents suggested by the Government are clear. I could speak at length on each of the documents suggested but there is little point in rehearsing arguments that have been made several times already.

A passport bears no address, is not available to everyone and does not allow the presiding officer to check whether the person on the electoral register is indeed the person standing before him. It merely allows him to check that the person before him is the person who rightly owns the passport. As no address is given, the person holding the passport might live at any one of 100 or 150 addresses in Northern Ireland. The person on the register is thus not sufficiently clearly identified.

A driving licence is also not available to everyone and a Great Britain driving licence carries no photograph. Of all the documents suggested by the Government, a Northern Ireland driving licence is perhaps the best, except that it is not readily available to many voters.

The least said about medical cards, the better. As has been pointed out, it is the document least capable of fulfilling the task assigned to it by the Government. There is no photograph on the card, and the address on it is hardly likely to be the address where the elector currently lives. In many cases only the initials may be given, or the name may differ from that in the electoral register. The medical card therefore presents a number of problems, apart from the fact that many of us may not be able to find our card.

I shall leave aside the arguments about the abuse of benefits and the availability of benefit payment books to people who are not entitled to them, and say only that the document does not carry a photograph and that not everyone has such a book.

All those documents have weaknesses, and I suggest to the Government that the arguments for consistency and uniformity are so great that there is no sound reason why the Government should not introduce a document to serve the purpose of an election. The document that we suggest would contain a photograph and would therefore immediately identify the holder with the person standing in front of the presiding officer. It would state the name and address, so the presiding officer could check it against the electoral register.

We suggest two additional features which would extend the information available to presiding officers: a signature, and the date of birth. Those two features can appear on the form submitted by every family to the chief electoral officer when he compiles the register of electors. I understand that in the United States it is possible to have the date of birth and a signature on some forms. It would be very easy for the presiding officer to check a signature. Signatures are much more difficult to forge than any other piece of identification.

Thus far, the Government have given only two hints about why they would not be prepared to introduce a purpose-made identification card. First, the Minister suggested in a by-the-way fashion that it would be costly. He also suggested that some people might not be prepared to present themselves to have an identification card made. Who might those people be? I suspect that they would be the very people who try to have one vote more than they are entitled to, and whom the Minister is attempting to frustrate.

Other people might not wish to apply for an identification card because the police were hunting for them, and because if they presented themselves so that a card could be issued they might find members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary preventing them from leaving the premises. It is well known that people on the run in Northern Ireland still manage to vote. I suspect that such people would not be keen to present themselves lest they should run into the arms of the law.

Given all the evidence available, there is no sound reason why, if the Government intend to make personation more difficult, they should not take the ultimate step of having a purpose-made identification card. On Second Reading and so far in Committee—admittedly we have not dwelt specifically on the subject—the Government have not given any good reason why there should not be such a card. Given the situation in Northern Ireland, I urge the Committee to consider the amendment. If the Government are right in saying that there is a rate of personation of 20 per cent., they will want to make it more difficult, and it has already been made clear to the Government that there are grave weaknesses in the documents that they suggest should be used.

At the back of the Government's mind may be the thought that the identification card might be used for some other purposes. I am not sensitive about that. I would not argue against the card being used for other purposes. If the Government are concerned about the expense, the fact that the card was of value for security purposes might help to offset the expense very quickly. I urge hon. Members to vote for the amendment.

7.45 pm

Mr. J. Enoch Powell: My right hon. and hon. Friends are in sympathy with the arguments which led the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) to propose the amendment. If we vote on the amendment, we shall support him. However, the amendments highlight the difficulties that the Government have created for themselves by the principle of universality. On amendment No. 9, we shall consider the range and identity of the prescribed documents. They all have two things in common. None of them proves what it is required to prove, and of none of them can it be said that every citizen needs to possess it. It is therefore both unreasonable and oppressive to require of every citizen that, as a condition of casting his vote, he should present one or more of those documents.

The hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends have gone to the logical point of saying that we should have a document which is as probative as it can possibly be made—they have not suggested a thumb print, but I cannot think of anything else that they have omitted — and that the document should be dished out to everyone on the electoral roll, under the auspices of the chief electoral officer. They say that, if a document is to be required from everyone, this is the form that the document should take.

The hon. Gentleman's reasoning is impeccable, but we should not blind ourselves to the fact that in practice the arrangement might prove difficult and disadvantageous. The chief electoral officer is under an obligation to issue a polling card to every person whose name appears on the electoral register, but I do not know what proportion of the polling cards arrive at their proper destination—and I am not thinking of malpractice.

I have it in mind that one of the purposes of political organisation and electoral organisation is to ensure that one's supporters get a reminder to vote and information about where to vote—even if they have not received a

[Mr. J. Enoch Powell]

polling card. The polling card is liable to miscarry and, if the person concerned has moved, it is extremely unlikely to be sent after him. I am therefore afraid that this document — ideal though it may be for purposes of identification—could not be assumed to be in the hands of every elector on polling day.

Those comments do not refute the hon. Gentleman's arguments. I am simply entering a caveat that ought to be entered in case we might be supposed to have discovered the philosopher's stone in search of which the Government have set us off by their demand for universality.

Rev. Ian Paisley: We have considered that point carefully. However, we were thinking of the document being issued when the person was photographed, in the same way as a pass is issued in this House. After one is photographed, one is given the pass.

Mr. Powell: I appreciate that if all the electors were summoned for the purpose of being thus identified, that would deal with the danger that the document would not be conveyed to the person who should receive it. However, I am afraid that the procedure would place large obstacles in the way of electors who wished to vote, especially if the election occurred within a relatively short time of the electoral list coming into force.

Mr. McCusker: Would not that mean that the person would have to present himself for a photograph during the qualifying period or immediately after it?

Mr. Powell: The difficulties which are thrown up by the amendment prove the impracticability of fairly attempting a universal demand for a prescribed document. By treading the labyrinth of trying to get the documents produced and into the hands of every legitimate elector, we are exploring once again the ground that we covered when we discussed previous amendments and in earlier stages of the Bill—the consequences of making the right to a ballot paper depend on the production of a document and making that production a universal requirement for all electors. I simply do not think that it will be possible to do that. My right hon. and hon. Friends and I have just registered in the Lobby our belief to that effect and we shall have no objection to re-registering it when this matter goes to a vote.

I do not know whether it was inadvertently that the hon. Member for Belfast, East did not refer to amendment No. 22 or whether you, Mr. Dean, have decided that it should be debated separately.

The Second Deputy Chairman: The right hon. Gentleman is correct. I announced that amendment No. 22 was debatable with the other amendments in this group.

Rev. Ian Paisley: On a point of order, Mr. Dean. Amendment No. 22 was left to me to deal with at a later stage in our proceedings.

Mr. Powell: As I have been assisted by those interventions, and as my right hon. and hon. Friends and I were not proposing to make a meal of this group of amendments, perhaps I might allude briefly in advance to amendment No. 22.

As one who has strenuously and for some 35 years protested whenever he had an opportunity, against the franchise being enjoyed in Britain by those who are not of British nationality — including those who hold Irish passports and no other — I should not be acting in accordance with that point of view. Although I can see the logic of arguing that, since that is the electoral law, an Irish passport ought to be a prescribed document, I shall give expression to my prejudices on this subject, so long maintained and expressed, by supporting amendment No. 22 should it also go to a vote.

Rev. Ian Paisley: As I said in our discussion on the previous group of amendments, we can do one of two things in this Bill. Either we can try to find as strong a way as possible to help the legitimate voter and hinder the illegitimate voter or, if we proceed, as is proposed in the Bill, with many diverse documents, we shall hinder the legitimate voter and make it possible for the illegitimate voter to succeed in voting.

I agree with the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) that there are great difficulties associated with getting a system and a machinery that fits the bill perfectly. There should be the strictest possible supervision of the presiding officer during voting and, as the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. McCusker) said, voters should bring their polling cards with them. Such suggestions are helpful. The same is true of the suggestion made by the absent hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume), who suggested that, at registration, everyone should sign and give their date of birth. Such information could be given in duplicate so that when an elector went to a polling station, the presiding officer could ask him to sign his name and provide his date of birth and compare that information with his copy. The Government might have taken that suggestion on board.

Identification cards could be produced during the qualifying period during which time the elector could be photographed. If people are keen on voting they would have to make that sacrifice. After all, everyone in America has to register personally. I realise that there are difficulties, but if the Government are to achieve what they want to achieve, they must pursue a suitable method.

As to amendment No. 22, I am not having passports from the Irish Republic being produced in Northern Ireland, as that gives credence to the people who want all the benefits of British citizenship and then repudiate it. That is part of the problem of Northern Ireland. Such people will accept every privilege that they can get as a British citizen and then repudiate that status.

I remember going on a deputation from the first ill-fated Northern Ireland Assembly—the hon. Member for Foyle who has just entered the Chamber knows that this is correct —with two of his colleagues who were Ministers of the Crown. When we arrived at passport control they had to go to the foreign passports desk to present their Eire passports while we presented our British ones at the other desk. They were supposed to be Ministers of the Crown in Northern Ireland. I am totally opposed to the production of an Eire passport as a document of credence in an election. If such people cannot produce a British passport and do not like British passports, there are other documents available to them. If they are keen to vote, they could have an ID card.

We feel strongly that if the job is to be done it should be done properly. The proposal advanced by the hon. Member for Foyle that people should register their signature and date of birth is sound. We should not leave gaping loopholes — which are present in the Bill — for Sinn Fein to exploit vigorously as has been the case in the

past. What will the Secretary of State do with presiding officers who are members of Sinn Fein? He had better consider that and examine presiding officers and election workers, who are recruited by the chief electoral officer, who are known to be members of or workers in Sinn Fein. How will he deal with them?

Mr. Peter Archer: I apologise to the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) for my absence at the beginning of his speech, especially as I propose to disagree with his thesis. If it helps to mitigate my offence, might I say that I thoroughly agree with the suggestion that he properly ascribed to the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) that the date of birth and signature of each elector should be given on the returns from each household and be available to the presiding officer.

I see nothing shocking in the principle of requiring people to carry identity cards. I do not believe that it would be the beginning of some Orwellian nightmare, even though the year is 1984. So far as I know, it did not occasion any civil liberty problems when applied to Britain during the second world war, and it does not shock our fellow member states of the EEC.

As I ventured to say earlier, we do not have to debate every issue as though it was a vital matter of principle. Sometimes a question may turn on balancing effectiveness against inconvenience. To me it does not seem to matter that an elector should be asked to produce a document which he or she is not required by law to carry, pace the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell), provided that that document is available to produce. A medical card still appears to me to be reasonably good evidence of identity, even though a person is entitled in law to tear it up and burn the pieces.

What alternative should be available as evidence for someone who cannot produce a medical card, and what questions a presiding officer should be allowed to ask about discrepancies, are matters to be decided pragmatically.

8 pm

Nor does it trouble me that among the documents which electors may produce to identify themselves there may be documents issued by foreign Governments, provided that they are a reasonably accurate means of identification. The hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) sometimes debates these matters as though they related directly to a cataclysm, but there is nothing wicked about possessing a document issued by a foreign Government. I do not agree that this is a question of fundamental principle. It seems to me that it is a question of what is sensible evidence.

The question confronting the Committee is whether, in order to meet the problem of personations at elections, it is sensible to introduce a requirement that everyone shall carry an identity card, thereby embarking on the whole business of printing them, inviting applications, checking them and issuing them. That is not something on which we should embark lightly if there is an acceptable alternative. As the right hon. Member for South Down said, the difficulties about getting them into the hands of electors seem to be so formidable as to invite us to dismiss the proposal.

If we fear that some electors, who do not spend every waking moment reflecting on the conduct of elections, may arrive at the polling station without their medical card or with a driving licence bearing a wrong address, that does not allay my fears that some people may have lost their identity card, which it is hoped they will not be asked to produce every day of their lives. They may have lost it within the last seven or eight months without having noticed, or they may simply arrive at the polling station having left it in the pocket of their other coat. I therefore doubt whether, in the words of the hon. Member for Antrim, North, the amendments will help the legitimate voter.

I have listened carefully to hon. Members who have argued for these amendments, because it grates upon my every instinct to find myself repeatedly supporting a Government with a record like the present one. But, the argument ad hominem is dangerous. We must decide each of these matters on their merits, and again I shall advise my hon. Friends to vote against the amendments.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Douglas Hurd): The hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) and the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) have from the beginning of our discussion been consistent in arguing that the right method of dealing with the problem of personation — which all hon. Members acknowledge—is the issuing of identity cards to electors. Their scheme for dealing with the problem differs in some respects from that of the right hon. Members for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux) and for South Down (Mr. Powell), although they have acknowledged the merits of each other's scheme. It also differs from that of the Government.

I note from amendment No. 70 that the proposal now before the Committee is not that a general purpose identity should be issued but that the chief electoral officer should issue an electoral identity card bearing the photograph, name and address, date of birth and signature of the registered elector.

As the right hon. and learned Member for Warley, West (Mr. Archer) has just said, this option should not be ruled out a priori. It is not so objectionable in principle that it should not be considered by a sensible Government or a sensible Committee of this House. That option was very carefully considered by my predecessor and his colleagues and also by me, and I should like to explain the reasons for coming to the conclusion that this should not be a path that we should tread and that the scheme which would be erected on that basis would be less likely to produce the result we are aiming at than the scheme in the Bill.

That would be regarded as a radical departure from the tradition of the liberty of the individual and the right to privacy. I readily admit that the scheme in the Bill imposes upon the elector a restriction and requirement which does not now exist and which some will find inconvenient, even difficult. However, the scheme embodied in the amendment would multiply those difficulties.

There is also a genuine practical problem about enforcement and about making such a scheme work without disfranchising a considerable number of electors. Under the amendment, a person wanting to exercise the franchise would be obliged to apply to the chief electoral officer with a passport-type photograph in order to obtain an electoral identity card. If he failed to produce a photograph, details of date of birth and a signature, that would entail disfranchisement.

The right hon. Member for South Down, while supporting the amendment and preferring it to the Government's scheme, courteously drew attention to some

[Mr. Douglas Hurd]

of the difficulties that would result from such a scheme. In practice, such a measure would require the willing co-operation of the elector. Those hon. Members representing Northern Ireland seats will clearly perceive that it is not difficult to see how this measure could, for propaganda purposes, be turned against Government and democracy by having sinister motives ascribed to it. It could easily be alleged that the purpose of introducing such a measure was not to do with the right to vote or the need to deal with personation but had more to do with security. The hon. Member for Belfast, East dealt with that point fairly, because he said that he would not object if the electoral identity card was used for other purposes. With that remark, he illustrated the narrow line that we are treading.

I know perfectly well that many hon. Members believe that the libertarian argument against identity cards has been overstated, or that it is out of date, and that most of our electors might be willing to accept identity cards, not just for the purpose stated in the amendment but much more widely. I understand the argument to that effect, but I do not believe that this Bill is the place in which it should be enshrined, because I believe that it would have to be argued more generally in a United Kingdom context.

There would be a worry about a possible mass boycott of the system which the amendment would erect. It would be alleged that the measure was a deliberate Government attempt to disfranchise those who for civil liberty reasons refused to apply for identity cards. If the effort to arouse a boycott were successful, many voters might effectively disfranchise themselves. That would clearly distort the result of subsequent elections, thereby frustrating the purpose of the Bill and, indeed, the purpose of every democratic party in this House. One cannot prove that this would happen but I think that it is a real danger.

There was another argument that weighed with the Government in reaching our decision. We hope—we have never disguised the fact—that we shall be able to take action against personation in the next electoral contest in the Province. The House of Commons will be aware that the district council elections will take place in May 1985. The system that the amendment proposes would be expensive but I do not dwell upon that. It would be cumbersome and it could not be in place in time for the elections in May 1985. A partially implemented system would be arbitrary and unfair and would seriously distort the results. However, we are anxious in the next electoral contest to prevent the distortions which personation brings and the invasion of democratic rights which personation, without the Bill, would possibly and probably bring about.

Having examined carefully the possibility that lies behind the amendment, we concluded that the right course would be to require voters to produce one of a number of specified documents.

We should all be ready to learn from experience. The phrase about launching into uncharted waters has been taken up by some Unionist Members. We should not be reluctant to admit the need for change when that need is proved. The right hon. Member for Lagan Valley may be right—I hope that he is—in supposing that as our debates proceed it will be shown that we have been impressed by some of the arguments which have been brought before the Committee while the Bill has been considered.

We believe, after much careful thought, that the scheme in the Bill is the soundest one that can be put before the Committee at this stage. If, in the light of later experience, it proves to need change, it should be changed. All hon. Members who represent Northern Ireland constituencies will be alert to that need and to that experience. However, we believe now, having listened to all the arguments with care, that the scheme in the Bill is preferable to the one in the amendment.

Amendment No. 22 forms part of the group of amendments that we are considering but, as the hon. Members for Antrim, North and Belfast, East have said, it raises a somewhat different issue. It would be unnecessary if the other amendments in the group were accepted. If there were only one prescribed document, the point of amendment No. 22 would have been met. I understand the argument that the hon. Member for Antrim, North produced and which the right hon. Member for South Down is prepared to sustain. That is an argument about the franchise, but the Bill is not concerned with that. I have no doubt that there will be other opportunities to discuss whether those who might under the Bill use an Irish passport as one of the prescribed documents should have the vote, but that issue is not before the Committee. I realise that that is an argument that we shall hear from time to time.

In the course of considering the Bill, I do not think that it would be sensible to make it exceptionally difficult for those in that position to exercise that right. I understand the strength of the argument and the feeling behind it. The right hon. Member for South Down used the word "prejudice" but I would not have used it myself. I am aware of the strength of feeling that underlies the drafting of amendment No. 22 and the support for it, but I do not think that that has a part in our consideration of the Bill. For these reasons I ask the Committee not to accept the amendment.

8.15 pm

Mr. Peter Robinson: I am tempted to repeat the comments that I made when introducing the amendment. The Committee will recall that I talked about the Government's bulldozer being in top gear and suggested that the Bill would be pushed through come what may. One might have expected a crumb of comfort from the Secretary of State. He might have said, for example, "We are not prepared to have purpose-made identity cards as the only prescribed document, but we recognise that there are limitations with the documents that we have suggested and we shall be prepared to include purpose-made identity cards as one of the prescribed documents for those who cannot readily put their hands on any of the others." Not even that crumb of comfort was offered to us.

I am not sure whether it is amazing or amusing that the Secretary of State argues for a Bill that seeks to set out for the people of Northern Ireland rules and standards that are different from those that apply in the rest of the United Kingdom and then complains that the amendment is a "radical departure". If there are radical departures, the Bill is the most radical of all. It seeks to treat one part of the United Kingdom differently from another. If it is enacted, electors in one part of the United Kingdom will be treated differently from those in others. I do not accept that the expense will be such as to cause Government to turn away

from the idea. Similarly, I do not accept that the delay that might be experienced before May is a good enough reason far turning down a better way of dealing with personation.

If we intend effectively to tackle the problem of personation, there is no point in proceeding in a half-hearted way. If we are not positive, people will have to suffer for no net result. I urge the Government to consider, even when the Bill has been discussed in Committee and when they are presenting it to the House of Commons for further consideration, allowing purpose-made identity cards to be used in some small measure. If they are used as just one of the prescribed documents, the benefits of having them will soon become apparent, and other of the prescribed documents might be removed at a later stage. In due course identity cards might become the only prescribed documents. With the Secretary of State displaying his "Not an inch" approach, I am forced reluctantly to press the amendment to a Division.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 10, Noes 144.

Division No.26] **[8.18 pm**

AYES

Beggs, Roy	Ross, Wm. *(Londonderry)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*	Smyth, Rev W. M. *(Belfast S)*
McCusker, Harold	Walker, Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Maginnis, Ken	
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James	Tellers for the Ayes:
Nicholson, J.	Mr. Peter Robinson and
Powell, Rt Hon J. E. *(S Down)*	Rev. Ian Paisley.

NOES

Alton, David	Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Ancram, Michael	Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Archer, Rt Hon Peter	Franks, Cecil
Ashby, David	Freeman, Roger
Ashdown, Paddy	Gale, Roger
Baker, Nicholas *(N Dorset)*	Galley, Roy
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony	Garel-Jones, Tristan
Beith, A. J.	Gow, Ian
Benyon, William	Gower, Sir Raymond
Bevan, David Gilroy	Gregory, Conal
Blackburn, John	Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Bottomley, Peter	Harris, David
Boyson, Dr Rhodes	Harvey, Robert
Braine, Sir Bernard	Haselhurst, Alan
Brandon-Bravo, Martin	Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Bright, Graham	Hawkins, Sir Paul *(SW N'folk)*
Brinton, Tim	Hawksley, Warren
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*	Hayward, Robert
Bruce, Malcolm	Heathcoat-Amory, David
Bruinvels, Peter	Henderson, Barry
Budgen, Nick	Hickmet, Richard
Campbell-Savours, Dale	Hicks, Robert
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*	Holt, Richard
Chapman, Sydney	Hooson, Tom
Chope, Christopher	Howarth, Alan *(Stratf'd-on-A)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*	Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Conway, Derek	Howells, Geraint
Coombs, Simon	Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Cope, John	Hume, John
Couchman, James	Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Cranborne, Viscount	Hunter, Andrew
Dorrell, Stephen	Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Dover, Den	Johnston, Russell
Duffy, A. E. P.	Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Dykes, Hugh	Kennedy, Charles
Eggar, Tim	Kershaw, Sir Anthony
Evennett, David	King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
Eyre, Sir Reginald	Kirkwood, Archy
Fallon, Michael	Knight, Gregory *(Derby N)*
Favell, Anthony	Knowles, Michael
Fenner, Mrs Peggy	Lang, Ian
Fletcher, Alexander	Latham, Michael
Fookes, Miss Janet	Lawrence, Ivan
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark	Soames, Hon Nicholas
Lyell, Nicholas	Spence, John
Major, John	Stanbrook, Ivor
Mates, Michael	Steel, Rt Hon David
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin	Stern, Michael
Meadowcroft, Michael	Stevens, Martin *(Fulham)*
Miscampbell, Norman	Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Morrison, Hon C. *(Devizes)*	Stradling Thomas, J.
Nellist, David	Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Neubert, Michael	Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Norris, Steven	Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Page, Sir John *(Harrow W)*	Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*	Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Patten, Christopher *(Bath)*	Tracey, Richard
Pawsey, James	Waddington, David
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth	Walden, George
Penhaligon, David	Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon	Wallace, James
Roe, Mrs Marion	Waller, Gary
Rowe, Andrew	Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Rumbold, Mrs Angela	Watson, John
Sackville, Hon Thomas	Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy	Whitfield, John
Scott, Nicholas	Whitney, Raymond
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*	Wiggin, Jerry
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*	Wood, Timothy
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*	Woodcock, Michael
Silvester, Fred	
Skeet, T. H. H.	Tellers for the Noes:
Skinner, Dennis	Mr. Tony Durant and
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*	Mr. Peter Lloyd.

Question accordingly negatived.

Amendment proposed: No. 3, in page 2, leave out lines 7 to 9 and insert—

'(1B) With a view to reaching his decision under the foregoing paragraph, the officer or clerk may invite the voter to produce to him a prescribed document or more than one prescribed documents and shall, if the voter complies, take that document or documents into consideration in reaching his decision, without prejudice to consideration of any other evidence which the voter may produce'.—*[Mr. Molyneaux.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 12, Noes 136.

Division No. 27] **[8.27 pm**

AYES

Beggs, Roy	Powell, Rt Hon J. E. *(S Down)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*	Robinson, P. *(Belfast E)*
McCusker, Harold	Skinner, Dennis
Maginnis, Ken	Smyth, Rev W. M. *(Belfast S)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James	
Nellist, David	Tellers for the Ayes:
Nicholson, J.	Mr. A. Cecil Walker and
Paisley, Rev Ian	Mr. William Ross.

NOES

Alton, David	Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Ancram, Michael	Chapman, Sydney
Archer, Rt Hon Peter	Chope, Christopher
Ashby, David	Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Ashdown, Paddy	Conway, Derek
Baker, Nicholas *(N Dorset)*	Coombs, Simon
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony	Cope, John
Beith, A. J.	Couchman, James
Benyon, William	Cranborne, Viscount
Bevan, David Gilroy	Dorrell, Stephen
Blackburn, John	Dover, Den
Bottomley, Peter	Duffy, A. E. P.
Boyson, Dr Rhodes	Dykes, Hugh
Braine, Sir Bernard	Evennett, David
Brandon-Bravo, Martin	Eyre, Sir Reginald
Bright, Graham	Fallon, Michael
Brinton, Tim	Favell, Anthony
Bruinvels, Peter	Fenner, Mrs Peggy
Budgen, Nick	Fletcher, Alexander
Campbell-Savours, Dale	Fookes, Miss Janet
Carlile, Alexander *(Montg'y)*	Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*

Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gower, Sir Raymond
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Harris, David
Harvey, Robert
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hawkins, Sir Paul *(SW N'folk)*
Hawksley, Warren
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Henderson, Barry
Hickmet, Richard
Hicks, Robert
Holt, Richard
Hooson, Tom
Howarth, Alan *(Stratf'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howells, Geraint
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hume, John
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Johnston, Russell
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Kennedy, Charles
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Gregory *(Derby N)*
Knowles, Michael
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Peter, *(Fareham)*
Lyell, Nicholas
Major, John
Mates, Michael
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Meadowcroft, Michael
Miscampbell, Norman
Morrison, Hon C. *(Devizes)*
Neubert, Michael
Norris, Steven
Page, Sir John *(Harrow W)*
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Patten, Christopher *(Bath)*
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Penhaligon, David
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Silvester, Fred
Skeet, T. H. H.
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Spence, John
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steel, Rt Hon David
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Martin *(Fulham)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, J.
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Tracey, Richard
Waddington, David
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Waller, Gary
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Watson, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Whitfield, John
Wiggin, Jerry
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Michael

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Ian Lang and
Mr. Tony Durant.

Question accordingly negatived.

Amendment proposed: No. 22, in page 2, line 16, at end insert—

'No document shall be required to be produced for voting purposes other than a document issued by or with the authority of the United Kingdom Government.'.—*[Rev. Ian Paisley.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 10, Noes 135.

Division No. 28] **[8.37 pm**

AYES

Beggs, Roy
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
McCusker, Harold
Maginnis, Ken
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Nicholson, J.
Powell, Rt Hon J. E. *(S Down)*
Ross, Wm. *(Londonderry)*
Smyth, Rev W. M. *(Belfast S)*
Walker, Cecil *(Belfast N)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Rev. Ian Paisley and
Mr. Peter Robinson.

NOES

Alton, David
Ancram, Michael
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashby, David
Ashdown, Paddy
Baker, Nicholas *(N Dorset)*
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Beith, A. J.
Benyon, William
Bevan, David Gilroy
Blackburn, John
Bottomley, Peter
Boyson, Dr Rhodes
Braine, Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brinton, Tim
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Bruinvels, Peter
Budgen, Nick
Carlile, Alexander *(Montg'y)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Chapman, Sydney
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Couchman, James
Cranborne, Viscount
Dorrell, Stephen
Dover, Den
Duffy, A. E. P.
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Emery, Sir Peter
Evennett, David
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Anthony
Fenner, Mrs Peggy
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fletcher, Alexander
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gower, Sir Raymond
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Harris, David
Harvey, Robert
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hawkins, Sir Paul *(SW N'folk)*
Hawksley, Warren
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hickmet, Richard
Holt, Richard
Hooson, Tom
Howarth, Alan *(Stratf'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howell, Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Howells, Geraint
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hume, John
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Johnston, Russell
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Kennedy, Charles
Kershaw, Sir Anthony
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
Knight, Gregory *(Derby N)*
Knowles, Michael
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lyell, Nicholas
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Meadowcroft, Michael
Miscampbell, Norman
Nellist, David
Neubert, Michael
Norris, Steven
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Patten, Christopher *(Bath)*
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Penhaligon, David
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Skeet, T. H. H.
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Spence, John
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steel, Rt Hon David
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Martin *(Fulham)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, J.
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Tracey, Richard
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Waddington, David
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Waller, Gary
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Watson, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Whitfield, John
Wiggin, Jerry
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Michael

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John Major and
Mr. Peter Lloyd.

Question accordingly negatived.

Amendment proposed: No. 24, in page 2, line 16, at end insert—

'(2A) The following shall be inserted after rule 36 (challenge of voter)—

"(36A) At the time a person applies for a ballot paper, a candidate or his election or polling agent may require the presiding officer or clerk to produce to him any document which that person has produced to the presiding officer or clerk under the foregoing provisions of this section.".'.—*[Mr. Molyneaux.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 12, Noes 126.

Division No. 29] **[8.47 pm**

AYES

Beggs, Roy
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
McCusker, Harold
Maginnis, Ken
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Neillist, David
Nicholson, J.
Paisley, Rev Ian
Powell, Rt Hon J. E. *(S Down)*
Robinson, P. *(Belfast E)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smyth, Rev W. M. *(Belfast S)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. William Ross and
Mr. A. Cecil Walker.

NOES

Alton, David
Ancram, Michael
Ashby, David
Ashdown, Paddy
Baker, Nicholas *(N Dorset)*
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Beith, A. J.
Benyon, William
Bevan, David Gilroy
Blackburn, John
Bottomley, Peter
Boyson, Dr Rhodes
Braine, Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brinton, Tim
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Bruinvels, Peter
Budgen, Nick
Carlile, Alexander *(Montg'y)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Chapman, Sydney
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Couchman, James
Cranborne, Viscount
Dorrell, Stephen
Dover, Den
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Emery, Sir Peter
Evennett, David
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Anthony
Fenner, Mrs Peggy
Fletcher, Alexander
Fookes, Miss Janet
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Gower, Sir Raymond
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Harris, David
Harvey, Robert
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hawkins, Sir Paul *(SW N'folk)*
Hawksley, Warren
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hickmet, Richard
Holt, Richard
Hooson, Tom
Howarth, Alan *(Stratf'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howells, Geraint
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Johnston, Russell
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
Knight, Gregory *(Derby N)*
Knowles, Michael
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lloyd, Peter, *(Fareham)*
Lyell, Nicholas
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Meadowcroft, Michael
Neubert, Michael
Norris, Steven
Onslow, Cranley
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Patten, Christopher *(Bath)*
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Penhaligon, David
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Skeet, T. H. H.
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Spence, John
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steel, Rt Hon David
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Martin *(Fulham)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, J.
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Tracey, Richard
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Waddington, David
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Watson, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Whitfield, John
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Michael

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John Major and
Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd.

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr. Molyneaux: I beg to move amendment No. 4, in page 3, line 1, leave out 'satisfactorily answering' and insert

"answering to the satisfaction of the presiding officer".

This is a probing amendment. It deals with that very narrow ground of tendered ballot papers.

The new rule 40(1B) seems to provide for the case where a vote has already been stolen or alleged to have been stolen and then the real elector turns up to claim his or her vote and presumably produces one of the prescribed documents.

We have to accept that the person who had stolen the vote would also have produced, say, Mr. McCusker's out-of-date medical card or some such document. If the person whose vote has been stolen already then persists in claiming the vote, presumably the presiding officer will put the statutory questions contained in the Representation of the People Act, the first one being:

"Are you the person registered in the register of parliamentary electors for this election as follows,"?

and then he will read the entire entry from the register. He then puts the second question, which is :

"Have you already voted, here or elsewhere, at this by-election, otherwise than as proxy for some other person?"

I am genuinely seeking clarification in this probing amendment. Presumably, at that point the presiding officer is acting on his own initiative and puts the statutory questions on his own initiative, without having any requests from any polling agents.

We take the view that the statutory questions would not add greatly to the presiding officer's store of knowledge. If the person applying for a vote is an imposter and not the genuine voter whose name appears on the register, human nature being what it is, the imposter will not say, "Goodness me, I am not the person whose name appears on the register and for whom I am attempting to vote. I am a very naughty boy." Having stolen one of the prescribed documents from the real voter, the imposter will not forsake his evil ways and confess his crime simply because he is required to give two answers, in which case he would give the answer yes to the first question and no to the second.

9 pm

While the statutory questions were no doubt considered adequate under the procedures and practices applying in times past, and even up till now under previous legislation, they are a little ridiculous in the context of this Bill. I have no wish to delay the Committee, but my right hon. and hon. Friends would appreciate some clarification from the Minister.

Mr. Scott: The right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux) has correctly set out the procedures that will be followed in the polling station up to the point where the statutory questions are asked and a tendered ballot paper is produced for the elector who alleges that his vote has been stolen. He would then be asked to complete a tendered ballot paper and sign it. Those tendered ballot papers would be collected separately from the ordinary votes and would only then have their validity adjudged in the event of an election petition. It would then be for an election court to decide on the identity of the voter and whether he was the person whom he claimed to be. The fact that he has signed the ballot paper should be a substantial additional help to the election court in making

[Mr. Scott]

up its mind whether the person is who he says he is. The right hon. Gentleman is right, in that the presiding officer has to ask the statutory questions of the person seeking to pass a tendered vote.

Mr. J. Enoch Powell: Will the hon. Gentleman clarify a further point? I was not sure which side of this question my right hon. Friend the Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux) was taking. It appears to me that the person referred to in subsection (5) (1C) is a person who has been refused a ballot paper on the ground that the document raises a reasonable doubt whether he is that person. That appears to refer to the person in subsection (5) (1B), next preceding, and that person is the person to whom the presiding officer has refused to deliver a ballot paper.

Mr. Scott: If the right hon. Gentleman looks back earlier in the clause, he will see that that is only on the grounds that someone else has already passed a vote.

Mr. Molyneaux: During this complicated procedure, which is almost a double procedure, in which a document is produced by the real elector as opposed to the personator, and the statutory questions are put, do the polling agents have access to the information? Is that presiding officer entitled to say, "Here is a chap who says that he is John Simpson; what do you feel about that?" It would be difficult for such an operation to take place. The polling agents representing the candidates have some knowledge of the matter. To avoid difficulties at a later stage, it would be useful if we could have clarification on this point. Subsection (5) states:

"The following shall be inserted after rule 40 (1) (person entitled to mark a tendered ballot paper after another has voted)".

It seems to me that paragraphs (1A), (1B) and (1C) all descend from that parentage. Is that the position?

Mr. J. Enoch Powell: I am, perhaps, revealing my incomprehension another stage further. I have difficulty in fully accepting that interpretation. Line 41 on page 2 which states

"Paragraph (1C) of rule 37"

is surely a reference to (1C) in line 7 on the same page, because we have written it into rule 37. An elector who is refused a ballot paper under paragraph (1C) of rule 37 is a person to whom it has been refused because of the reasonable doubt raised by the document. If that is so—I seem to discern certain signs of assent from the Under-Secretary of State—we are apparently engaging in a charade. The person says, "I would like to offer a tendered vote." The presiding officer, who has already told him to his face that he is not the elector in question, proceeds to put the statutory question to him: "Are you the elector on the electoral roll?" Knowing that he can lie as well as tell the truth in answer to a statutory question and that the answer is still deemed to be satisfactory on the interpretation of the statute, the elector says, "Yes." Thereupon, the same presiding officer who has refused him a ballot paper on the ground that he is not the elector in question and who has been lied to in the answer to the statutory question says, "Here is a tendered ballot paper. Fill it out, old chap, and sign it." That seems to be a piece of pantomime.

Mr. Scott: That decision of, and judgment exercised by, the presiding officer can then be overturned in an election court on a petition. That is inherent in our approach. I apologise to the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) for intervening too quickly with my previous answer. The presiding officer has the opportunity to provide that tendered ballot paper and insist that the elector is the person he says he is. Only then can an election court overturn the judgment of the presiding officer.

Mr. Powell: Just imagine Sinn Fein doing all that.

Mr. William Ross: May we carry this a stage further? What happens if there is a large number of ballot papers? My right hon. Friend the Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) has asked: what if Sinn Fein did this on a large scale? That is not inconceivable. Surely that would cause severe problems in the election in question.

Will the Government consider the whole area of tendered ballot papers more deeply than appears to be the case so far? If I recall correctly words spoken in this debate, a record is kept of the number of tendered ballot papers. A record is not kept of the number of people who were turned away when they applied for their vote and either found that it had been taken up, or were challenged in some way or another. If we are to arrive at a real understanding of personation, would it not be a good idea to keep a record of the number of tendered ballot papers and the number of people who apply for a ballot paper but, being refused, simply go away without filling in the tendered ballot paper?

Mr. Scott: Presumably, an "election" petition might be considered only if the number of tendered ballot papers applied for exceeded the majority. That avenue would be open in other circumstances as well. I think that it would be likely that that action would be taken only in those circumstances where the result of the election was likely to be overturned because of the validation and then counting of the tendered ballot papers.

It is open to any elector who arrives at a polling station and finds that his vote has been cast to ask for a tendered ballot paper. A large number decide that the game is not worth the candle and go away. If they have that opportunity, I can detect no useful purpose in having a separate record.

The right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux) asked whether any point was served by asking statutory questions. Someone who could be shown to have falsely answered a statutory question to the presiding officer would then be open to prosecution.

Mr. Molyneaux: I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Mr. J. Enoch Powell: I beg to move amendment No. 9, in page 3, line 13, at end add—

'(7) In this Act "a prescribed document" means one of the following documents, that is to say,

(a) a current GB or Northern Ireland driving licence;

(b) a current United Kingdom, United Kingdom Visitors, or Republic of Ireland passport;

(c) a current book for the payment of allowances, benefits or pensions issued by the Department of Health and Social Services for Northern Ireland;

(d) a medical card issued by the Northern Ireland Services Agency; and

(e) a marriage certificate issued by the Registrar-General for England and Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland, in the case only of a woman married since the qualifying date for the register used in the election;

(8) the Secretary of State may by regulation under section 201 of the 1983 Act remove from or add to the documents listed in the preceding subsection.

The Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Harold Walker): With this it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments to the proposed amendment:

(a), leave out paragraph *(a)*.
(b), leave out paragraph *(b)*.
(c), leave out paragraph *(c)*.
(d), leave out paragraph *(d)*.
(e), leave out from 'woman' to end of line 11.

Mr. Powell: I can be brief in moving this amendment if for no other reason than that the contents of subsection (7), which are the principal part of it, are not of my own composition and are shamelessly pirated from a document provided by the Government—for which, of course, I take no responsibility.

The purpose of the amendment is to do what I submit should have been done from the beginning—to write on to the face of the Bill what the Government intend shall, at any rate initially, be the prescribed documents for the purpose of the Bill.

The purpose of the Bill, as we know exhaustively, is to make it mandatory upon all electors as a condition of casting their vote to produce satisfactorily one of the prescribed documents. Consequently, the nature of the prescribed documents—what they are—is central to the efficacy of the Bill. It would not be satisfactory, in the view of my right hon. and hon. Friends, that they should only be stated by prescription which takes place under regulation. The making of such regulations would not permit of the proper examination of the documents to which they have been subjected hitherto, and your decision, Mr. Walker, that we can at the same time discuss amendments (a), (b), (c), (d) and (e) will facilitate that for the Committee.

I hope that the Government will make an honest woman of the Bill by accepting the amendment. If the amendment is accepted, there will be no additional constraint or limitation upon the Secretary of State's opportunity to modify by addition or subtraction the prescribed documents, because subsection (8) of the amendment gives him the power to do that by regulation under the principal Act.

If experience so dictates, the Secretary of State can, therefore, remove some of the documents or add to them subsequently. I am sure that the Committee was interested to hear the Secretary of State, on an earlier amendment, explaining that following the first experience of the implementation of the Act he would be alert to consider whether amendment of its provisions was justified. Presumably that will include the amendment of this provision, if it becomes a provision of the Bill itself.

It had occurred to some of us that Governments, when they have a Bill on the statute book, are more reluctant to find time for amending it than they were initially to find time for putting it on the statute book. The worry here is that there might be a Secretary of State—one hopes that it might be this Secretary of State—who, after the experience of next May, would say to himself, "Those hon. Members were right in Committee. I must go back to the House of Commons and amend the Bill, in such and such a respect."

I do not believe that a Secretary of State who went to his Cabinet colleagues and the Legislation Committee and asked for an urgent slot in the Government's legislative programme would receive an encouraging welcome. They might be inclined to make snide remarks about his original legislation. They would certainly be inclined to say, "You have had your ration of legislative time for a Session or two. Now keep quiet and put up with whatever it is that you have got on to the statute book." How can that be remedied? It could be remedied — perhaps this is something which we could consider at a later stage—if this legislation, as with so many provisions which apply to Northern Ireland, had a limited time validity so that in any case it would be necessary to come back to Parliament after a lapse of one, two or three years either to renew it or to amend it. That surely would give the Secretary of State a stronger hand, if he had himself come to the conclusion that amendment was necessary.

9.15 pm

However, in the case of a prescribed document, the Secretary of State will not need to legislate if the amendment is accepted, since he can add to or subtract from such documents by legislation. I hope that the value of the amendment will be brought out by the contributions of my hon. Friends.

Rev. Martin Smyth: In speaking to the amendment I should like also to refer to sub-amendment (c), which stands in my name.

I welcome the general tenor of the amendment because, as my right hon. Friend the Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) has said, we believe that it is important to have the provision within the Bill rather than to leave the matter to regulation. My right hon. Friend talked about making an "honest woman" of the Bill. Perhaps in these days of equality it would be just as easy to make an honest man of the Bill.

I believe that one of the main reasons for the Bill is to have the legislation in being before next year's local government elections. Therefore, it is possible that there has not been sufficient time in which to reach a conclusion as to what would be satisfactory documents. For that reason, it is most important that subsection (8) should be added to clause 1. It would give latitude to the Secretary of State in the coming days to make, under section 201 of the Representation of the People Act 1983, a change to more accurate and purposeful documents.

I should like to put on record my misgivings about the reference in subsection (7)*(e)* to

"a marriage certificate issued by the Registrar-General for England and Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland".

I am not altogether convinced that it is needed. I am somewhat befuddled as to why a person whose name appears on the register should then have to give proof of being married. Especially in this age, there are many women who continue to exercise the right, after marriage, to use their maiden name. As long as it is clear that the person is the person on the register, I do not think that the name is so important. I am, however, concerned to know why the qualification should be

"a marriage certificate issued by the Registrar-General for England and Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland".

I understand the argument to some extent, because on Second Reading it was said that it had been decided that it should be a document issued by the registrar general. I cannot speak with authority for England, Scotland and Wales but I understand the tradition in Northern Ireland to be that the certificate issued by the priest, the clerk in holy

[Rev. Martin Smyth]

orders or the minister is, strictly speaking, a document issued by the registrar general. I know that during my ministry there was a small change in that, in that copies of the marriage certificate printed under the title of the Presbyterian Church of Ireland were not accepted by some people. We had to use copies of certificates issued by the registrar general. I am not quibbling with that. I understood that it was said on Second Reading that the certificate had to be issued strictly by a clerk in a council or the registrar general's office. Apart from the problems of getting the records through to those people, which would cause at least three months' delay, I wonder why that restriction is imposed. Is it indirectly casting a slur — I do not believe that that was the Government's intention, but I must tease out the reason for the restriction — on priests, clergymen and ministers? Are the Government saying that they might be prone to issue such certificates too freely without querying whom they were giving them to? If that was the reason for the restriction, it does not stand up to the light of judgment.

As I understand the practice, anyone can go to a registry office and, on due payment of the correct sum, request a copy of the marriage certificate. We shall not curtail the circulation of such certificates to prevent them being misused by people with a malevolent purpose by restricting the issue of the document to a clerk in a council office or the registrar general's office. Therefore, I query why the Government need to make that restriction. I suspect that there is less likelihood of a local priest or minister issuing the document to someone whom he knows is not the person to whom the certificate refers. I have discovered in 25 years of parish ministry that there are such practices in the issuing of death certificates and marriage certificates by council officers. Many people get certificates solely on payment of the appropriate fee.

Therefore, I ask the Government to reconsider the requirement for the marriage certificate to be issued specifically by the registrar general. If it means that the tradition in Northern Ireland, which has been an accepted method of issuing certificates, is no longer acceptable, that is a slur on many fine men and at the same time calls in question the Government's real purpose.

I should like to draw attention to subsection (7)*(c)*, which refers to

"a current book for the payment of allowances, benefits or pensions issued by the Department of Health and Social Services for Northern Ireland."

I can understand that there are those who hold on like grim death to their pension book, social security papers, benefit books and so on, but I am not convinced that these in themselves are sufficient safeguards to prevent people from misusing those documents. I say that for several reasons.

First, the people against whom I understand the Bill is directly aimed, those who have carried on a military campaign of personation, are capable of borrowing such books. It is not beyond their capacity so to do. One might say that people will not give their books away, but they will have little choice if that is done as a military operation. We might be told that the measure will at least allow people to give evidence that the books are being misused—if Paddy Malachy or, to keep it non-sectarian, Willie and Alec turn up and happen to have on them some of those documents. However, in the Ulster situation, it appears difficult to prove that those people had the documents for the purpose of personation. I say that because I know that Ulster people are remarkably friendly. It is a closely interconnected community and an extraordinary number of people draw old people's pensions for them out of sheer kindness. It would be extremely difficult to get anyone to give evidence in a court of law to prove that a pension book had been used for personation because the consequences for people living in the community might well be too horrible to contemplate.

I believe, therefore, that it would be much better to have a defined document. That is why I support the principle of the amendment and I hope that the Secretary of State will agree that the Bill should be altered accordingly. I hope that the Government will confirm that no slur on ministers, priests or clergymen was intended in seeking to restrict the definition of a marriage certificate to documents issued by the registrar general. I also question whether pension and benefit books, which often go astray in the post, are an effective use of identification.

Mr. William Ross: My amendment (a) seeks to delete the reference to

"a current GB or Northern Ireland driving licence".

I understand that there are about 500,000 driving licences in Northern Ireland. The Northern Ireland licence carries the name of the holder and his address at the time of receipt. A photograph is pinned into it and the licence is valid for three years, renewable for a further three years. I understand that it is shortly to be replaced by a 10-year licence. We all change quite a lot in five or six years. Given the type of photograph that usually goes into a passport or driving licence, after 10 years the person may well be unrecognisable from the photograph.

The licence has space for one or two changes of address which are supposed to be filled in and the relevant authority notified as soon as the person changes his address. It should be noted, however, that it is not the authorities who fill it in. The person concerned merely has to notify them. Therefore, anyone getting hold of a licence could fill in a new address to match that on the electoral roll and then present himself at the polling station with the licence, possibly having replaced the photograph. When challenged, he could say that he used to live at the original address but that the new address was shown over the page. Any objection to the document would then vanish.

Many people in Northern Ireland, including my right hon. Friend the Member for South Down (Mr. Powell), have Great Britain driving licences which do not have photographs attached. The idea that a driving licence is in any way proof positive that the individual standing before the presiding officer is the person on the register that he claims to be is simply not correct. It is possible to get hold of driving licences and to alter them in such a way as to make them acceptable, especially in hard-line areas where personation takes place on a massive scale.

I am simply drawing the attention of the Committee once again to the fact that none of these documents are documents which the citizen must possess, and that they are all defective to some degree in identifying the individual.

There is also the possibility that a person might have lost his driving licence, which could be the only prescribed document that he would normally possess. The driving licence could have been sent away for renewal. There

could be half a dozen reasons why the individual may not be in possession of his licence, and he could then be deprived of his right to cast a vote.

9.30 pm

Amendment (e) to amendment No. 9 takes up what the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) was talking about a few moments ago. I should like to ask the Minister whether a marriage certificate means a certified copy of a marriage certificate, or something less than that. It is not difficult to obtain a marriage certificate. One can write and ask for one just as one can write and ask for a birth certificate. As far as I am aware, there is no great difficulty in that and there is no reason for the certificate to be refused.

There is also the problem of the change of name which arises whenever a woman is married between the qualifying date, 15 September, and the date of the issue of the new register, which is 15 February. Hundreds of marriages, or perhaps a couple of thousand, take place in the intervening period, and the women who change their names will have to take along their marriage certificates in order to prove that they are who they say they are. Perhaps that is all very well.

However, let us suppose that, although a woman has lived in Northern Ireland for a number of years, has become a British citizen and is entitled to vote in Northern Ireland, her original home was in the Irish Republic. She wants to get married on Christmas day or shortly thereafter, and she and her husband-to-be go off to County Donegal to get married. Later, she goes to vote, taking notification of her change of address and name, and she is asked for her marriage certificate. Under the Bill, the marriage certificate must have been issued by the registrar-general for England and Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland. This lady was not married in any of those countries. Her marriage certificate is a perfectly valid document but it is not acceptable for this purpose. In that respect, the legislation is defective.

It is astonishing that, although the Government were so anxious to add to the legislation a reference to the passport of the Republic of Ireland, they have not thought of including the marriage certificate of the Republic of Ireland. It seems as though those who were thinking through the legislation stopped thinking whenever they reached the end of *(b)* or perhaps *(d)*.

There are a number of other difficulties. Let us suppose that the girl who gets married after 15 September happens to be aged under 18 on 15 September, which is the qualifying date. If the girl who gets married after 15 September is under 18 and her family move house between 15 September and her marriage, or if her name was omitted from the electoral register and the family moved, it would be possible under existing registration procedure for her to ask to be entered on the electoral register before her marriage. She would then register at her parents' new address. Her parents would still be registered at the old address. Our party agents face such difficulties. How will all that be sorted out if she is married in County Mayo rather than Donegal? There are unforeseen difficulties which the Minister might not like but must face.

Examination of the prescribed documents leads one to the conclusion that the only satisfactory one is an identity card. Anything else runs into severe difficulties. My hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann (Mr. McCusker) has had a sore time ever since he produced his medical card. No doubt the Minister has often looked at his—I have not seen mine for 25 years. It probably looks worn. Although it might be difficult to produce drivers' licences or identity cards, it is not difficult to make many medical cards, which are the simplest and most effective available form of identification. The only possibility of stopping large-scale personation with those cards is to catch somebody with them. That is extremely difficult. On receipt of a blank medical card a person has only to fill it in with information that does not have to be truthful. It need only look truthful.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): That is nonsense.

Mr. Ross: Well, medical cards are simply pieces of printed card showing certain information. That information includes a medical number but there is no medical number on the register of electors so there is nothing to compare it with. It is so much gobbledegook. Nobody will start checking the numbers at 6 pm on election day. The cards will be accepted.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Unfortunately, the hon. Gentleman tempts me. I am quite prepared to accept that it is possible to fill in a medical application form without difficulty and that there is a chance of it being inaccurate or imaginative. However, medical records of people who are on a general practitioner's list are one of the few statistics that can be checked accurately, as they are the basis on which doctors are paid.

Mr. Ross: It is clear that the hon. Lady has not paid attention to the debate or to the issues before the Committee. I am not talking about properly issued medical cards or about medical records. I am talking about forgeries. There is no way in which such cards can be checked, because as soon as someone leaves the polling station, the card will be thrown into the bin and will be lost for evermore.

This card is easy to forge. It is easy to make it look realistic. Like myself, many people will realise that a new medical card is the one document that can be easily obtained, and I suspect that between now and May hundreds, if not hundreds of thousands, of new medical cards will be sought in Northern Ireland for the purposes of this election.

Mr. McCusker: My hon. Friend may be right.

Mr. Ross: It is better to travel hopefully, but no doubt the evil day will arrive in May. When it does, I suspect that the Government Front Bench and the Opposition Front Bench, who have been so assiduous in welcoming the Bill, will have egg on their faces.

Mr. McCusker: If there are any eggs left in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Ross: My hon. Friend says, "If there are any eggs left".

Mr. McCusker: My hon. Friend should not get involved in that argument.

Mr. Ross: I shall follow my hon. Friend's advice, and proceed.

The series of documents mentioned in the Bill will not be completely watertight, foolproof or effective. Some of them can be stolen or borrowed. For example, we are all aware of what happened on the west bank of Londonderry

[Mr. Ross]

in recent elections. People were asked for their poll cards and were willing to give them up, only to find that when they went to vote the only ballot paper to which they were entitled was pink.

These same documents can be handed over to others, and some of them can be forged. The situation will be wide open to abuse, and at the end of the day the honest people will suffer. This will make it more difficult for the honest folk of Northern Ireland. It will no doubt cause some difficulties for the dishonest, but not enough to stop the evil that we are trying to prevent. For that reason the Government have got it wrong. They should look at our proposals and take meaningful steps to amend the Bill to bring it more into line with the thinking of those with real experience of Northern Ireland, and who for three days have tried to advise the Government on the right way to proceed instead of continuing bullheaded down the wrong road.

Mr. Beggs: My sub-amendment (b) seeks to leave out paragraph *(b)* which refers to

"a current United Kingdom, United Kingdom Visitors, or Republic of Ireland passport".

We all recognise the need for Government to take appropriate action to prevent personation and the widespread vote-stealing which has occurred. Some of us take great exception to the comment, which from time to time receives much publicity, that there is nothing new about personation and that it is peculiar to anywhere where there is an Irish population. It has been said that it has happened in elections in Chicago and New York. I do not believe that personation is an Irish-only export. We have heard it said that there should be positive Government action on the mainland and personation should not be attributable only to Irish residents or representatives of the population.

9.45 pm

It is not compulsory for United Kingdom citizens to hold United Kingdom passports and it is probably assumed that more people have United Kingdom passports in Northern Ireland than is the fact. I remember a recent occasion when a school made arrangements for a Continental education tour. The teacher who was to accompany the tour was taken ill and it was found that only one other member of staff in that large school had a current passport. It was that member of staff who made it possible for the tour to take place although it had been planned nearly six months earlier. It was necessary for a teacher to accompany those on the tour to ensure adequate supervision and to assist the tour leader. It seems that in a professional group there are few who have full United Kingdom passports and it is reasonable to assume that those who have less need for a United Kingdom passport, or are likely to have less need, will not have one.

Northern Ireland is not known for high earnings that permit travel to other parts of Europe, the United States or the far east. That reduces the need and demand for United Kingdom passports for foreign travel. The Province goes overboard with British campaigns to the extent that the majority buy British and believe in spending on British soil. The people of Northern Ireland visit England, Scotland and Wales in large numbers for their holidays. Probably a smaller percentage of the Northern Ireland population holds a United Kingdom passport compared with the mainland population.

Most of the elderly who participate in the democratic process do not hold passports. They would not benefit by the inclusion of a current United Kingdom passport in the list of prescribed documents and would be only disadvantaged by its inclusion. When an application for a passport is received a considerable time elapses during which the application is processed, with all the necessary checks and safeguards being carried out, before it is issued. There are seasonal queues for passports. The staff who are responsible for issuing passports would be unable to cope if those who do not presently hold United Kingdom passports were suddenly to apply for them.

I am aware that the United Kingdom passport is highly regarded, but it is not foolproof. There is a belief that some have been successfully forged in the past. The United Kingdom visitors' passport, which is referred to as the quickie passport, is sometimes obtained as a means of jumping the queue or beating the backlog for a full passport. The visitors' passport needs frequently to be renewed and for other reasons is less acceptable than the full passport.

Should passports issued by the Republic of Ireland feature among the prescribed documents? In certain parts of west Belfast, Londonderry and Strabane the production of a United Kingdom passport would identify the holder and perhaps provoke the wrath at a later date of those not sympathetic to holders of United Kingdom passports. There would be resentment in certain parts of Northern Ireland towards those foolish enough to flash around an Irish Republic passport. We must remember that our objective is to assist the democratic process; it is our wish to avoid confrontation.

We must consider the position of the minority in Northern Ireland. Many would conclude that holders of the Irish Republic passport could be supporters of the "Brits Out" campaign. That means every one of us. If we allow our imagination free reign, we might think that some of those holders of Irish Republic passports could also support the bomb and the bullet campaign. That could contribute to conflict in certain areas, which is something that we wish to avoid.

We have no influence on the issue of passports from the Irish Republic. Therefore, we must not place undue confidence in the reliability of that document. Only authentic identity cards produced in Northern Ireland for Northern Ireland electors should be valid and acceptable.

Mr. William Ross: It is possible for a Northern Ireland resident to hold two passports. If he drove to Dublin he could obtain a passport of the Irish Republic, and he could also hold a British passport.

Mr. Beggs: It is important that my hon. Friend's point is noted. What he outlined will contribute to the conflict that we are trying to avoid. It is resented in Northern Ireland that some people could, if the Bill is passed, present an Irish Republic passport and so influence the future of those of us who wish to maintain our British links. Such people may not even live in Northern Ireland or the United Kingdom, yet they could use such a passport to affect the futures of ourselves and our children.

Mr. Clifford Forsythe: Under the Bill the Secretary of State can, by regulation, introduce other documents and

so add to the list. If the Government are not willing to introduce identity cards with a photograph, date of birth, address and so on, could there not be a system of voluntary identity cards for those who wish to use them to prove their identity? They could be registered on the electoral register with stars by their names, and they would have to produce that card if they wished to vote. Various other cards could be provided or made available if people did not wish to have a photograph taken. Cards similar to bank cheque cards could be taken to polling stations and put through a machine, which would show whether the information was correct. A British Airways commuter card is supplied if one sends a photograph.

The object of the Bill must be to make identification foolproof and to ensure that the person coming to vote is the registered person. That must be clear. I remind those who object to the use of identity cards, either voluntarily or otherwise, that people wishing to drive a car in Northern Ireland must apply for a driver's licence which has their photograph and address on it, and that those who wish to have a passport must also apply with a photograph and their details. It seems peculiar that, if we must have them to drive a car or leave and re-enter the country, people should object to identification for polling purposes. Those who wish to have an identity card with their photograph and details on it should be entitled to have one.

Mr. McCusker: The debate exposes the Bill's weakness and the nonsense of some parts of it. My hon. Friend the Member for Antrim, South (Mr. Forsythe) talked about making identification foolproof without introducing identity cards. The entire business of producing a prescribed document is as strong as the weakest prescribed document. The weakest prescribed document is that which is held most generally. Medical cards were included because they were most generally held. Almost everyone can be expected to have a medical card, which is why it is the weakest document. In no sense is it an identity card.

The theory is that a person values that document so much that he will not hand it over easily, and that if a person arrives at a polling station with it it is further evidence that he is the registered voter identified on the medical card. Therefore, the inclusion of passports, driving licences and Department of Health and Social Security booklets are only a bonus. The Minister may argue that that makes it easier for those who have driving licences, passports and so on, but in essence it is only a bonus.

That all boils down to the fact that the medical card should have to be produced by everyone. If that is so, I should have preferred the Minister to say that it was to be the prescribed document. A vigorous campaign could then have been mounted in Northern Ireland to ensure that everyone's medical card was up to date. By having a series of alternatives, we are diluting the possibility of having one card. I regret that we are not basing identification on medical cards or poll cards. The list is a sham. Virtually all of the documents, except medical cards, are available only to a limited number of people. They are included because some of them have photographs, which will help with identification. The medical card does not have a photograph.

This is another evasion of the issue. The Secretary of State has refused to consider issuing identity cards. I look forward to the Minister addressing the point that the clause is as strong or as weak as the weakest document, which is the medical card.

10 pm

Mr. Scott: The amendments under discussion have two purposes. The first is to incorporate——

It being Ten o'clock, THE CHAIRMAN *left the Chair to report Progress and ask leave to sit again.*

Committee report Progress.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at this day's sitting, the Elections (Northern Ireland) Bill may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour. —*[Mr. Sainsbury.]*

Again considered in Committee.

Question again proposed, That the amendment be made.

Mr. Scott: The first purpose of the amendments is to ensure that whatever list of documents is determined is incorporated in the Bill. The second is to provide an opportunity for hon. Members to explore the list of documents that the Government have in mind. We have said since we embarked upon the Bill that, before it completed its stages through the House, the Government would confirm the list of documents that they have in mind, having listened to discussions in the debate. The fact that the list of documents was not incorporated in the Bill did not inhibit discussion, even before we came to these amendments, as to the merits of the documents that the Government propose should be included in an order, which would be debated.

To reiterate a general point, I accept, and have done from the start, that in undertaking this task to protect the integrity of the electoral system in Northern Ireland we are moving into uncharted territory. The Government have tried to produce a list of documents sufficiently wide so as not to disfranchise members of the Northern Ireland electorate, but tight enough to deter and inhibit the widespread vote-stealing that has developed in recent years in Northern Ireland. The present list is not foolproof and we may have to change it, but I am clear that it is the best that can be produced in time for the local government elections in May 1985, and we must stick to it. After careful monitoring of those elections, we can see how it works in practice.

May I respond to some of the points made about the documents? I understand the anxiety of the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) about the problem of marriage certificates issued by ministers of religion, but it is right that the Government should stick firmly to the principle that the list of prescribed documents should include only official documents issued by the Government or by Government agencies. I assure the hon. Gentleman that, in taking this view, we are not casting a slur on those ministers of religion who have the power to issue other forms of marriage certificate or, indeed, marriage certificates that originate from the Registrar General. The immportant aspect is that the document, whether it is the original or a certified copy, should be issued by the Registrar General and should bear his stamp.

The problem is not that ministers of religion would abuse their position and issue false marriage certificates, but that the certificates could fall into unauthorised hands,

[Mr. Scott]

perhaps through burglaries. We must protect the integrity of the system by restricting it to marriage certificates that have been issued by the Registrar General. I hope that I have made it clear that there is no slur intended on ministers of religion of any faith in Northern Ireland.

Rev. Martin Smyth: I welcome the Minister's assurance, but it seems to me that he has missed one aspect of this that I raised, which is that traditionally when a minister or priest issues such a certificate he is acting as an agent of the Registrar General.

Mr. Scott: I accept that, and the Government considered it carefully because it was drawn attention to by the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) earlier in our discussions. But we ended with the result that I have just reported to the Committee, and I hope that the Committee will accept it.

Rev. Ian Paisley: I am amazed that the Government have come to this decision. To get the payment of allowances, benefit and pension books the very certificate that is asked for in some of these cases is a marriage certificate, and a marriage certificate issued by a minister is acceptable, yet a certificate issued by a clergyman or a priest cannot be used as a document which will be accepted at a polling station. It is amazing that it is a proper document to procure another document but that it is not acceptable in these circumstances.

In keeping with what the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) said, when a minister issues a marriage certificate he is acting as an agent for the Registrar General, and it is the Registrar General's certificate.

Mr. Scott: With respect, the hon. Gentleman does not appear to have listened to what I said earlier. There is the possibility of stocks of these certificates held by ministers of religion in Northern Ireland falling into the wrong hands and being used for purposes of personation. It is right to keep this as tightly controlled as we can.

Mr. John Hume (Foyle): Will the hon. Gentleman emphasise that there are many ministers of religion in Northern Ireland who are active elected politicians?

Mr. Scott: I would not impugn the integrity of a minister who was also an active politician, least of all in the company in which I find myself at present.

Rev. Martin Smyth: I welcome that assurance. However, I understood the Minister to say that it was to protect the integrity of ministers of religion. But there is an official stamp on marriage certificates issued by various council officers or by the Registrar General direct, and the others might be stolen. A stamp on such a certificate would not do anything other than protect the integrity of the issuing minister, because he would not be otherwise involved. But will the Minister address his mind a little further to the time lapse? Why do we need such a document? I do not believe that it is necessary if a person appears on the register under her maiden name.

Mr. Scott: It is a long-stop provision for those married women who might have no other way of showing that the change had occurred. It is worth having it there as a long-stop. It is one that we shall want to monitor, as we shall the other documents and their use, as we go through the elections in May 1985.

I understand the point about someone who was married outside the United Kingdom and who is unable to produce a valid marriage certificate. However, there might be other documents that could be produced by that person. What is more, it would be possible for a married woman in those circumstances to apply for a medical card, which could be issued in her maiden name. She would not be committing any offence by making that application.

Mr. Peter Robinson: Why did the Minister persuade his colleagues to vote against amendment No. 22, when the principle contained in that was that the prescribed documents should be those issued with the approval of the Government? The argument that he is now using to advance the case against the document being asked for by the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) is that it is not one that has been issued by the Government or a Government agency.

Mr. Scott: I prefer to stick to the amendment that we are discussing, and to defend the balance of judgment to which the Government have come as to the range of documents upon which we have settled. I do not wish to go back over old ground. I know that there is a temptation, and one to which no doubt the Committee will succumb from time to time, either to leap forward to discuss amendments that we have not yet reached or to go back to ones that we have already discussed. I should like to avoid that temptation if it is humanly possible.

A great deal of fun has been had about medical cards but perhaps I should explain for the benefit of the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. McCusker) that the medical card that he produced in the House on Second Reading is not the medical card that is being issued in Northern Ireland now. We are in the process of changing over from the sort of medical card that he has kept at the bottom of his drawer for umpteen years to medical cards that are produced on computer stationery. They are perhaps not as durable as one would like, but they bear a computer print-out and the details of the bearer, which would make them difficult to forge.

The cards are issued by the Services Agency in Belfast, where the blanks are held in a store protected with restricted access because they are computer stationery. It would be a bold man who ruled out the possibility of the theft of some of that stock, but it should be difficult to obtain cards. It would also be difficult for anybody who tried to personate in an application for a replacement card, because the computer needs the full name and either the date of birth or the National Health number before it will print out a replacement card. Paramilitary groups would have serious difficulty in obtaining stocks of these cards.

Mr. McCusker: As the Minister will recall, I was one of those who said that I did not think that the paramilitaries would try to steal medical cards, or even print a document. Is my medical card a prescribed document or do I require, by 15 May, a new card? In the election next year will one or other of the cards be valid? As that card is the one that does least to identify, in the sense that there is no photograph on it, and it will not be held by a person with the same care as a book that will bring him in funds, but it is most commonly held card, is it not the one document that should have been used as the prescribed document? If the Minister is now telling me that the new document

is a better one than the original, does that not make my point? Should we not have said that that is the prescribed document?

Mr. Scott: Either document will do. There will be a progressive changeover to the new card, but not in time for everyone to have one by the local government elections.

Mr. McCusker: The cards will be issued?

Mr. Scott: Yes, they will be issued in due course. In the meantime, anybody who wishes to obtain such a card can apply to the agency, and will be issued with one. There will be no problems about issuing them in good time for the May 1985 elections for anybody who claims one.

I accept, as I have accepted in the past, that the medical card may be the weak link, but in future it will not be quite as weak as has been supposed, because of the character of the new documents being issued. The old document includes on it the date of birth, so a certain amount of organisation will have to go into ensuring that anybody who attempts to personate with the card at least approximates the date of birth on the card. That may not be as good as a photograph, and I do not pretend that it is. However, it is some restriction on the fraudulent use of the card. Therefore, it is less easy to abuse a medical card than has been suggested on occasions.

Passports have a photograph on them. As I said on Second Reading, I have borne in mind that the franchise for this House includes citizens of the Republic of Ireland. This Bill applies to parliamentary elections and it is right that a passport issued by the Republic of Ireland should be accepted.

I do not agree with the point made by the hon. Member for Antrim, East (Mr. Beggs) that seems to equate automatically anyone who chooses to have a passport from the Republic of Ireland and to commit himself to an aspiration which is perfectly legitimate and respected in the House with those who seek to subvert the constitution by the use of the bullet or the bomb. I do not believe that that is a valid point. Many constitutional nationalists would bitterly resent any suggestion that the possession of a Republic of Ireland passport should do that.

10.15 pm

The point about voluntary identity cards, which was raised by the hon. Member for Antrim, South (Mr. Forsythe), falls against the test that the documents to be produced should be official. As I have said before, going over to a full identity card system raises questions that go far beyond what we are considering in the Bill. In any case, there would be no time to introduce such a system in time for the next election.

We have explored the documents. I have some doubts about the incorporation of the documents in the Bill, but I have listened carefully to the points that have been made. On reflection, I think that it would be right for me to accept the spirit of the amendment moved by the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell). I give an undertaking to bring forward on Report an amendment that will incorporate the list in the body of the Bill. I hope that, in those circumstances, the amendment will be withdrawn. If not, I shall have to advise the Committee to reject it.

Mr. J. Enoch Powell: I am glad, if I may borrow the metaphor of the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson), that the bulldozer appears to have switched off its engine. I am sure that the Under-Secretary of State will not regret having made a better Bill by carrying on its face an indication of what are the prescribed documents.

I accept that, if the Under-Secretary of State is to write the list into the Bill—I obtained the words from the notes on clauses with which he was good enough to provide hon. Members—the hon. Gentleman will need to look more acidly at the definition of each of the documents. I hope that the opportunity will be taken especially to consider paragraph *(e)* — the marriage certificate. I thought that valid points were made during the debate. I hope that this action will provide an opportunity for those points to be considered by the Minister during drafting.

In addition, I hope that the Under-Secretary of State will consider whether the restriction

" since the qualifying date for the register"

is indispensable, since there could well be cases where a woman, married shortly before the qualifying date, would still appear on the list of electors in her maiden name, and thus have the same reason for wanting to use this document.

I a grateful to the Under-Secretary of State for having made this improvement to the Bill. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Question proposed, That the clause stand part of the Bill.

The Second Deputy Chairman: I remind the Committee that we have had a fairly long debate on clause 1, and it would not be in order to cover ground that has already been covered on the amendments.

Mr. McCusker: I do not intend to do that, Mr. Dean. I do not want to delay the Committee any longer than necessary. The Under-Secretary of State will remember that when we discussed the availability of the prescribed documents to the holding agent he produced some convincing arguments to support the case that the documents should not be made available to the polling agents. I suggested to him that paramilitaries may present what purports to be a prescribed document in such a way that only the presiding officer has the opportunity to decide whether it is a prescribed document. Under pressure the presiding officer may accept that it is, take no further action, and simply deliver the ballot paper.

Secretaries of State in the past have given instructions to presiding officers. During the last election or the one before that, presiding officers were directed to ask a person to state his name and address before the ballot paper was given to him. I do not know whether they all do that, but that was the advice tendered or instruction given. To avoid difficulties for the presiding officer, when he is presented with the prescribed document, could he be permitted to display it to the polling agent? After all, we are now making it law that a document must be produced. He could say, "I have a driving licence, medical certificate or passport in the name of—" and read out the name and address. That does not give away any confidential information, but it would avoid him being put under pressure from the paramilitaries.

If the paramilitary produces a document which he pretends is prescribed—we must remember that at some polling stations there will be no polling agent and the only people in the polling station apart from the staff might be the police—the police will not be alerted to the fact that

[Mr. McCusker]

the abuse is going on. If the presiding officer had to display the document to satisfy everyone in the polling station that a prescribed document had been produced, it would immediately eliminate the probability of any abuse.

Mr. Peter Robinson: There was only one matter that was not directly dealt with by amendment but which was referred to in Committee. Unfortunately, the Minister was not present at the time. It relates to the list of prescribed documents. It was suggested that there are those who may fear to use a British passport or a passport of the Republic of Ireland in certain areas, or who may be embarrassed to use a benefit book in front of those who know them, or who may not have any prescribed document. Will the Minister consider adding to the list of prescribed documents a purpose-made identity card, issued through the electoral office, which the individual may voluntarily produce? Everyone would not be required to have it, but it may be more satisfactory for some people to use a purpose-made document rather than one of the documents that they feel might endanger or embarrass them.

Rev. Ian Paisley: I wish to return to the issue of the registrar's certificate. When the Minister considers the list of documents, I hope that he will understand that the certificates are more available to the public in the local registry offices than they are in a clergyman's house, because the public have access to those offices. I have been in the offices and the certificates have been lying around on the shelves. The Minister should think carefully about that. What is more, the certificates that I have seen do not have a stamp. They have the signature of the person who issued them at the bottom. I should like the Minister to consider this carefully because the marriage law in Ireland—we use the old Irish law—is complex and different from that in other parts of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Scott: I am sorry to have to issue at least qualified negatives to each of the three points that have been raised. As I have undertaken to introduce an amendment on Report, we will have an opportunity to consider what the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) said about marriage certificates. I see difficulties, for the reasons that I outlined earlier, with the course that he suggests. I shall certainly consider it, although I am not optimistic that the amendment will incorporate the idea that he has put forward.

I cannot see that it would be possible, in time for the local government elections next year, to go down the road that the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) suggests and have some kind of voluntary identity card. We would want to be sure that anything produced for that purpose, even if one agreed to it in practice, would be uniformly available across the Province. I do not think it would be possible to do that in time for the election.

I also have grave doubts about the presiding officer holding up the document. He is the man who has to make the judgment. We shall be giving advice to the chief electoral officer and he will be giving advice to his staff in due course. I shall look at the point, but I should have thought that it would be a case of taking the matter away from the judgment of the presiding officer, and my initial reaction would be to say that the difficulties would be outweighed by any conceivable advantages.

Mr. McCusker: I am not suggesting that it should interfere in any way with the presiding officer's discretion or judgment. It would be demonstrating to all concerned that a prescribed document was being presented. I do not think that he should be involved in any decision making at that stage. He is just saying that he has been given a prescribed document.

Mr. Scott: I stand by what I said, but I shall look at the matter.

Question put, That the clause stand part of the Bill:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 139, Noes 16.

Division No. 30] **[10.25 pm**

AYES

Alton, David
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Arnold, Tom
Ashby, David
Baker, Nicholas *(N Dorset)*
Bellingham, Henry
Benyon, William
Bevan, David Gilroy
Blackburn, John
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Boyson, Dr Rhodes
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brinton, Tim
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Bruinvels, Peter
Budgen, Nick
Butterfill, John
Carlile, Alexander *(Montg'y)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clegg, Sir Walter
Cockeram, Eric
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon
Couchman, James
Dorrell, Stephen
Dover, Den
Duffy, A. E. P.
Durant, Tony
Emery, Sir Peter
Evennett, David
Favell, Anthony
Fenner, Mrs Peggy
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fletcher, Alexander
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Marcus
Freeman, Roger
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gower, Sir Raymond
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Gummer, John Selwyn
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Harvey, Robert
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Sir Paul *(SW N'folk)*
Hawksley, Warren
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Hickmet, Richard
Hicks, Robert
Holt, Richard
Home Robertson, John
Hooson, Tom
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howell, Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Howells, Geraint
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hume, John
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Kennedy, Charles
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Gregory *(Derby N)*
Knowles, Michael
Lang, Ian
Lawrence, Ivan
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim
Lloyd, Peter, *(Fareham)*
Lyell, Nicholas
Major, John
Mates, Michael
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Meadowcroft, Michael
Norris, Steven
Onslow, Cranley
Page, Sir John *(Harrow W)*
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Patten, Christopher *(Bath)*
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Silvester, Fred
Skeet, T. H. H.
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Spence, John
Spencer, Derek
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Martin *(Fulham)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, J.
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'lch N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Tracey, Richard

Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Waddington, David
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Watson, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Whitfield, John
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Michael

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Michael Neubert and
Mr. Tim Sainsbury.

NOES

Beggs, Roy
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Knowles, Michael
Loyden, Edward
McCusker, Harold
Maginnis, Ken
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Nellist, David
Nicholson, J.
Paisley, Rev Ian
Parry, Robert
Powell, Rt Hon J. E. *(S Down)*
Robinson, P. *(Belfast E)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smyth, Rev W. M. *(Belfast S)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. William Ross and
Mr. Cecil Walker.

Question accordingly agreed to.
Clause 1 ordered to stand part of the Bill.
Clause 2 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 3

OFFENCES RELATING TO PRESCRIBED DOCUMENTS

Mr. William Ross: I beg to move amendment No. 12, in page 4, line 5, after 'of', insert
'or the day next preceding'

The purpose of the amendment is to ensure that those trying to personate on a massive scale and collecting a large number of documents of one kind or another in advance may be challenged. The hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) put down a similar amendment, which was not selected, but I believe that the intention is met rather more neatly in our amendment which refers to "the day next preceding" — in other words, the day before.

There is little point in restricting and making illegal the possession of such documents only on polling day. Past experience has shown that for the documents to be in the possession of the individuals concerned preparations have to be made some time ahead. If people are allowed to go around freely stockpiling documents and making their preparations we shall be ensuring that they are indeed capable of carrying out their intentions on the day. If the amendment is accepted and that is made illegal, the work of the wicked will be very much more difficult. For that reason, we hope that the Government will accept the amendment.

Rev. Ian Paisley: I tabled an amendment similar in effect to the amendment under discussion. This is a very important matter. The day before the election seems likely to be the time when the machinery of personation would be set up. It would therefore be very important that the police should be able to go into the headquarters on that day and deal with the matter. It could even be argued that they should have that right two or three days before the election. How far does one go? The proposition in the amendment is a reasonable one, and I hope that the Minister will be able to accept it.

Mr. J. Enoch Powell: There is one further point that the Minister might consider. I believe that it has been established that the early hours of the poll are often the favourite hours for the purposes of vote-stealing, being a time when the polling agents may not be on the job and the vote-stealers may have relative privacy and immunity for doing their fell work. If there is to be vote-stealing at 7 o'clock in the morning, it stands to reason that the materials for perpetrating it must have been accumulated overnight. That is an additional reason for accepting the amendment.

Mr. Scott: The Bill as drafted makes it clear that the offence can be committed only on polling day. The intention of the Government in drafting the Bill in that way was to make quite sure that the accumulation of the documents was for the purposes of personation. It was thought that it might be difficult to establish that fact before the court if the offence ran beyond polling day. On polling day, especially if the documents were held in close proximity to a polling station, there would not be much doubt that they had been assembled for the purpose of personation.

Another factor helped to determine the Government's approach to the provision. We wanted to strike the right balance between protecting the liberty of the individual and the need for the community as a whole to be protected against the evil of personation. To suggest that the police should have the powers a fortnight before polling day would have been to go too wide. However, the amendment does not do so. I have listened with great care to the points made — especially the point made by the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) about the fact that this work is often done in the early hours of polling day. The amendment could very well be useful to the police and to all those who wish to eradicate the evil of personation from the electoral process in Northern Ireland without unacceptably affecting the rights of the citizen. I urge the Committee to accept it.

Amendment agreed to.

Mr. McCusker: I beg to move amendment No. 10, in page 4, line 7, leave out
'to which this section applies'.

The Second Deputy Chairman: With this it will be convenient to take amendment No. 11, in page 4, line 10, leave out subsection (2).

Mr. McCusker: Subsections (1) and (2) define the new offence which is now to exist, not only on polling day but, thank goodness, on the day before. I believe, however, that the offence is too narrowly defined. Subsection (2) seems to mean that the offence is committed only if the person has in his or her possession one of the five prescribed documents described earlier on. I am sure that that will be sufficient to prove that the person is guilty of or is likely to commit the offence, but there are other documents which will be equally important to anyone trying to organise vote-stealing on a massive scale.

10.45 pm

I have already referred to the importance of the poll card, which could be used more fully in the scheme of things. The clearest sign that massive personation was about to take place would be the apprehension of someone on the day before polling day or on polling day in possession of many polling cards. The advantage of a polling card to the personator is that it is a vote about which he will not be embarrassed. He is fairly sure that the people whose polling cards he has will not be polling that

[Mr. McCusker]

day. It would be much easier for large-scale personators to start the day with as many polling cards as can be accumulated. He will poll as early as possible in place of people whose polling cards he does not have, as they will vote later. The holding of a polling card is as good a sign that the offence will be committed as the holding of one of the prescribed documents.

The Minister will recall that, in the Fermanagh and South Tyrone by-election of two years ago, a van with six or eight citizens of the Irish Republic was stopped. Some came from as far away as County Cork and had a large bundle of polling cards. As they were doing a grand tour of polling stations in that constituency it was clear that they were using those cards. Greater discretion should be given to the police to determine what document is a sign of personation. Polling cards should be included. We are talking of people stealing 10,000 or 20,000 votes.

If the offence is to be committed by both sides of the political divide on a military scale, some records have to be gathered and produced. Polling cards are a fair sign of vote stealing, but so are lists of the dead, lists of those who are training as nurses in the Royal Victoria hospital and lists of people who are on holiday. Someone who is personating systematically is bound to have other documents that indicate a planned campaign. We cannot specify what those documents might be, but they could include polling cards and a well-marked register. Such documentation might not be conclusive proof on its own but, combined with other evidence that might emerge as a result of police investigations, it probably would be. We want to break out of the restrictions of the list of prescribed documents.

Mr. Scott: I must advise the Committee that we are on delicate ground. We have to strike a fine balance between giving powers to the police which might unduly affect the rights of citizens. We have made a conscious decision that the way in which to check personation is to insist on the production of one of a list of documents. If earlier amendments, which would have allowed other documents to be taken into account, had been accepted, this one might have fitted in better. The Committee has rejected that approach and insisted that acquisition of a ballot paper depends on presentation of a prescribed document. In terms of not allowing the powers of the police to go too wide and protecting the rights of the individual and in terms of trying to enhance the chances of successful prosecution, it is best to stick to the narrow list of documents. We shall have to monitor this in the context of the elections in May next year and stick to the list of prescribed documents. We would be on very dangerous ground if we went wider than that for this first attempt, and I advise the Committee to reject the amendment.

Mr. J. Enoch Powell: I was glad to hear the Minister say that during the elections in May an eye would be kept on the case put forward by my hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann (Mr. McCusker). I assure the Minister that the intention of the amendment was in no way to go back on the question of what ought to be the range of prescribed documents. But I equally suggest that he should take seriously the consequences of the institution of the poll card in areas where a serious attempt at vote-stealing on a substantial scale is being made. Even in areas where that is not the case, one often has a shiver down the back on noticing the number of poll cards which are lying about.

It is a common experience of those in an election campaign to be unhappy enough to come across poll cards just lying around, or cards which do not relate to the persons who produced them and who said, "These came through the letter box the other day", or, "My neighbour got these. I do not know what she will do with them. What do you think she ought to do with them?" There is nothing commoner than that experience, and at best the poll card is a two-edged weapon in relation to the integrity of the electoral process.

It was introduced with the intention of superseding the efforts which parties and their organisations could make at an election to alert selected electors to the necessity of going to the poll and how and when to do so. But, as often happens when we attempt to spoon feed and mollycoddle the electors, we find that we have created something to which unsuspected disadvantage is attached. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann was right when he said that those who organised this operation would think themselves exceedingly fortunate and well on the way if they could make a handy collection of poll cards in the relevant ward.

I hope that the Minister will ensure that particular attention is paid to the appearance and role of the poll card in any attempts at personation and vote-stealing which may take place in the forthcoming elections.

Mr. Scott: I can give that undertaking. We must understand that in May we will be in a situation completely different from that which existed in previous elections. Had we not decided to have a list of prescribed documents but had sought to counter personation, we might well have wanted to go down that road. We now have this new scheme, and we are right to test that.

Amendment negatived.

The Second Deputy Chairman: We now come to amendment No. 23.

Mr. Archer: My hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) and I tabled this amendment in a spirit of inquiry to probe the matters about which I expressed some anxiety on Second Reading. However, I would not like it to be misunderstood.

Of course we appreciate that the power of arrest is the cutting edge of the Bill, and we have no wish to remove it. I expressed our reservations at an earlier stage today, and the Committee will not be dismayed to hear that I do not propose to move the amendment.

Mr. Peter Robinson: I beg to move amendment No. 21, in page 4, line 30, at end insert—

'*(d)* within the polling station inspect (in addition to presiding officer and clerk) the prescribed document before or after the ballot paper is delivered to the voter.'.

Like the right hon. and learned Member for Warley, West (Mr. Archer), I could say that this amendment is tabled in a spirit of inquiry, because I seek clarification from the Minister on whether what appears to be implicit in the Bill is fact.

Subsection (3) states:

"If a constable has reasonable grounds for suspecting that a person has possession of a document in contravention of subsection (1), the constable may"

take action within a series of possibilities. It is essential that the constable is able to perform part of the process if

the Bill is to have any degree the effect that we all hope for it. However, there are many who suspect that it will not have that effect.

The reality of life in Northern Ireland is that the presiding officer and the clerks in the polling station often live in areas from which the gunmen come and to which they go. The threat of the gun overshadows many a presiding officer and clerk. When a person has presented himself with a document — it may be a prescribed document — and the presiding officer has not been satisfied that that person was on the electoral register, he has often, at least in the past, been afraid to take action. It is suggested that if he, the clerk or the personation agents for the political parties are afraid to involve the police, there should be an automatic right for the constable to require to see the document before or after a ballot paper has been produced.

The police may be alerted to some of the individuals who would be taking part in personation. However, it would be a deterrent factor if personators could be pretty sure that the Royal Ulster Constabulary would not be afraid to challenge them. That might cause them to think twice before entering the polling station to personate, especially with the penalties that are envisaged in the Bill.

I hope that the Minister will clarify the procedure. How much a part of the procedure in the polling station will the constable be? Is he to play a passive role? Will he move only when the presiding officer or personation agents of the parties indicate that he should? Does the Minister envisage that the constable will challenge those whom he believes are not genuine in putting forward a prescribed document in exchange for a ballot paper?

Mr. Scott: The hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) has expressed the understandable concern that it would be difficult for a constable on duty in a polling station to determine whether someone was a personator unless he had the power to inspect the prescribed document which the voter had produced to a presiding officer to obtain a ballot paper.

The Committee will understand the Government's concern, which is reflected in the careful drafting of clause 3, that the powers given to constables to deal with the new offence should be tightly drawn to avoid the police becoming involved in the electoral process more than is absolutely necessary to prevent personation. I do not believe that the Committee would wish to give the police a general power to inspect prescribed documents whether or not the constable had reasonable grounds for suspicion. Nor would the RUC wish to have such a power, which would be only a step away from insisting that all voters must submit to a police inspection of their prescribed documents before applying for a ballot paper. That would be repressive and alien to the free electoral system that applies in the United Kingdom. It would lead inevitably to allegations of police harassment and partiality.

It is my firm opinion that subsection (3) gives the police sufficient powers to achieve our objectives. It restricts a constable to acting only on reasonable grounds of suspicion. When he acts on those grounds, his powers to inspect the voter's prescribed document is implicit in subsection (3)*(c)*. To include the amendment would cast doubt on whether the power to inspect documents applied outside polling stations. I can assure the hon. Member for Belfast, East that the RUC was closely consulted over the new powers available to it in the Bill, and is satisfied that they are sufficient and that we do not need to cast the net any wider.

I urge the Committee to reject the amendment.

Mr. Peter Robinson: I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Question proposed, That the clause, as amended, stand part of the Bill.

11 pm

Mr. J. Enoch Powell: Those of us who studied the Bill from the time of its publication were under the impression at first that the teeth were in clause 1 and that clause 3 was, in some sense, subsidiary to clause 1. Further study and debate has disclosed the importance of clause 3 so that we probably regard it as the most important and effective clause of the Bill.

As the Minister has explained on a number of occasions, the device — whatever criticism has been made of it and however we would have wished it to be qualified—of the prescribed document does, for the first time, give the constable on duty in the polling station prima facie reason for suspicion of an offence of personation having been committed or attempted, and the document would form the evidence upon which that suspicion would be based. We are, therefore, if we take it seriously, envisaging that the police powers in the clause are very much the effective back-up to the provisions in the earlier part of the Bill. It is on that assumption that I want to put a proposition to the Minister. It is not one that can be expressed in the terms of the Bill, but it is one to which it would be useful if he could offer some form of assent.

I ask the Minister to envisage the circumstances, not in the early hours of the poll to which we referred earlier, but towards the end of the poll—perhaps between half-past 9 and 10 o'clock at night on the polling day of a general election for this House. Let us suppose that that period has been selected for a substantial operation involving the stealing of votes. What will happen is that during that period, one hopes, a series of documents will be tendered and held by the presiding officer because of a reasonable doubt that they were not tendered by the electors specified on the electoral roll.

If one has understood the meaning and purport of the clause, the fact in itself of a presiding officer rejecting a tendered document creates a prima facie assumption that the person who tendered that document meant no good and was trying to use that document for the purpose of personation or vote-stealing.

When the first such instance occurs, it may well be that the member of the RUC on duty will act on his judgment, and having searched and found the document on the person will proceed as set out in the clause. What happens when that is repeated a second, third and fourth time, perhaps within as many minutes—not in the middle of the day, but when all the pressures are on and with genuine electors belatedly seeking the opportunity to cast what may be the vital votes in their constituencies?

Surely it will be necessary for there to be available a back-up of police so that we shall not fail to utilise this clause for lack of police manpower available in the event of a repetition of a whole series of prima facie offences. We are therefore asking the Government to show that they

[Mr. J. Enoch Powell]

will put their boot where their voice is, and ensure that in those areas, which are not difficult to define, where such practices are likely to occur, there will be an adequate availability of police, not necessarily in the polling station but readily available, especially during hours of pressure, to make a reality of the powers contained in the clause. It would be encouraging and helpful if the Minister would say something on that subject.

Mr. Scott: I am happy to respond in supporting the motion that the Committee should approve the clause. As the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) said, it provides the teeth for the entire Bill. I have already mentioned that there have been consultations with the Royal Ulster Constabulary, which is satisfied that it has sufficient powers. I well understand that there is a second leg to that, which is that on the day it should have sufficient resources to fulfil its obligations. I am sure that in the consultations that the chief electoral officer always has with the RUC before an election, it will be impressed on the RUC, especially since this is the first time that we shall be on this territory, that we look to it to ensure that the new law is rigorously enforced. It is an operational matter, and I shall make sure that it is drawn to the chief constable's attention.

Mr. William Ross: I am grateful to the Minister for those remarks, but we should perhaps consider more carefully what the police will have to do, and how many policemen will be needed to do it.

There will be a large number of polling stations and polling rooms and boxes on election day. The number is not the same for all elections. I am considering primarily the position that would prevail at a parliamentary election. It will not be simple in the May election because there will be proportional representation. There will be an abnormal number of boxes and, therefore, many more policemen will be needed to cover it.

If Sinn Fein and its fellow travellers in the Irish Republican Army set out to cause the maximum trouble on election day, they will not confine their activities to polling stations in areas where they are active, but incidents of a terrorist nature will occur in other parts of the Province. That will draw members of the security forces, which will inevitably include many policemen, to those other duties. That could be done with the intention of reducing the number of men available for polling station duties.

It is apparent to all in Northern Ireland that not all parts of the country will be under threat of personation. It will be restricted to a small number of areas. If the police are to be seen as even-handed, they must have an adequate presence in every polling station. I see difficulties not at small rural polling stations but at large polling stations with large numbers of boxes and rooms. They will need two or three policemen in a room with a back-up force, either in the building or immediately outside it, and somewhere to hold individuals who are arrested. It will not be possible to bung them into a police car and cart them off to a police station. If the IRA and Sinn Fein plan personation on a large scale, they will take other precautions to make the life of the police as difficult as possible. We are not talking about only a few men.

Can the Minister tell us how many boxes will be needed in next May's elections, bearing in mind the fact that they are not only proportional representation elections, but that they will be much slower than usual? The number of boxes may have to be increased, which is why I do not agree with the proposed extra cost. Could he also tell us how many extra policemen will be needed to carry out the job? We shall need many more than most people believe. As we must expect Sinn Fein to try to bypass the legislation in every way possible, we can expect the maximum effort from its representatives, which must be matched with the maximum effort of the police to stop them getting away with it.

Mr. Scott: It is not for me to consider the details of the number of boxes required. That is a matter on which the chief electoral officer assured us that the financial provision made in the Bill is sufficient to implement the legislation. For the first time, the police will have the powers that they need to deal with the blatant personation that has characterised elections in some parts of Northern Ireland. I am sure that the chief constable will make the necessary arrangements to deal with it, but I shall ensure that the hon. Gentleman's remarks are drawn to the attention of the chief constable.

It is slightly difficult to believe that an operation at 9.30 am that led to the arrest of many of those people would be persisted with, bearing in mind the penalties to which those who indulge in personation are liable under the Bill. I do not rule it out, but it is unlikely that they would persist. This is new territory. The police have those powers, and I am sure that they will be determined to use them properly.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 3, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 4 to 6 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 7

CITATION, COMMENCEMENT AND EXTENT

Question proposed, That the clause stand part of the Bill.

Mr. J. Enoch Powell: The Question that you have just proposed to the Committee, Mr. Dean, is the only opportunity, in the light of the rules of order and the selection of amendments, which my right hon. and hon. Friends and I have to record in Committee our views on the fact that the legislation will apply to only one part of the United Kingdom—Northern Ireland.

An interesting development — if that is not too complimentary a word—can be traced in the thinking of the Government on this subject. Earlier the Minister recalled the tentative propositions that were put to the parties in Northern Ireland in April 1982 on the subject of the prevention of personation. During a debate on an earlier amendment I quoted at length the response of the Official Unionist party to the proposal of the mandatory provision of documents. On 10 March 1983, the then Secretary of State returned to the subject, and it is interesting to note that his attitude then was different from what it had tentatively been in 1982, and has finally become in the terms of the Bill. He wrote then—and I shall not trouble the Committee with more than the essential quotations:

"There are two broad fronts on which this abuse . . . can be tackled."

The first front was that laid out in the Bill whose consideration in Committee we are just concluding, and I shall return in a moment to what the then Secretary of State said about that.

11.15 pm

The second approach was that we should use the present legislation. The words of the Secretary of State were

"to concentrate on what more can be done within existing legislation."

I want to draw attention to the reasons why, at that time in May 1983, the Secretary of State preferred the latter course of seeing what could be done with the present legislation. It was because he considered that the step of making the production of documents a condition for voting in Northern Ireland would involve

"a major change in the way in which elections are conducted, and if it were introduced for Northern Ireland alone, there would be a significant difference between procedures in Great Britain and Northern Ireland at the same election."

It is pleasant in retrospect to be able to attribute to the right hon. Member for Waveney (Mr. Prior) a sensitivity to the susceptibilities of Northern Ireland Members of Parliament and the Northern Ireland people which was not always strongly marked during his tenure of office. I hope that it may come to his attention that this golden sentence from his letter of 10 March 1983 has been exhumed and displayed in this debate to his credit. Quite evidently the Secretary of State did not consider that it was desirable that there should be a significant difference between procedures in Great Britain and Northern Ireland at the same election. Nor do my right hon. and hon. Friends and I, nor does anyone in Northern Ireland think it desirable that there should be a significant difference between procedures in the same election in Great Britain and in Northern Ireland.

But the word "procedures" in that sentence is an understatement of the difference which the Bill creates. I do not think that it can be disputed that the Bill is appending to the right to vote a condition which will be applicable only in one part of the United Kingdom if the legislation is passed for Northern Ireland.

On the face of it, it is unconscionable that the right to vote should be qualified in one part of the kingdom only. The qualification is an effective restriction of the right of the exercise of the franchise. We are not talking about measures to prevent or to apprehend persons who might be breaking the law. We are talking about a condition which will be binding upon everyone and which must be fulfilled before he can vote. We are saying that that condition shall be applied only to that part of the electorate which is situated in Northern Ireland.

Even if the circumstances in Northern Ireland in this respect were unique—which they are not—it would still be an extraordinary step for the House to take to qualify the franchise in one part of the kingdom and not in the rest. After all, that is what is happening within Northern Ireland itself. The franchise is being qualified in nine tenths of the Province where the Bill is not required for the effective policing of the electoral process. For the sake of the electoral process in one tenth of the Province a new qualification and limitation upon the right to vote is being imposed on the rest of the Province.

It is apparently thought to be right that to deal with the problems of a minority of the area the same restrictions should be imposed upon the population of the whole of the area, that is, the whole of the Province. If the House was anxious about the dangers anywhere in the kingdom of widespread personation and vote stealing, rather than break the fundamental principle of an elected assembly such as this that all its Members are elected by electors who have the same franchise and the same opportunity to exercise it, I should have thought that the House would say that this restriction should be imposed upon the whole of the kingdom.

If we are to change the electoral law, let us change it for everyone. No doubt it will not be required in a large part of the kingdom, but nevertheless we shall have maintained the equitable treatment that is the essence of an elected assembly, which ultimately makes this place in which we are all equals, one to the other, because we have all emerged from exactly the same electoral processes in our part of the United Kingdom.

Northern Ireland is, even now, not unique in this respect. There are parts of the mainland where already the circumstances are such that the identification of voters and the substitution of one voter for another is extraordinarily difficult to prevent. Exactly the same arguments for imposing the precondition of presenting a colourable document could be urged as have been urged for the justification of the Bill. I am not intending at any length to stand in the way of the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Bruinvels) or of other hon. Members from other parts of the United Kingdom who may tender evidence to show that the case of Ulster is not unique. However, if the case of Ulster in not unique, the argument in favour of imposing this restriction on Ulster only is correspondingly weak, and the outrage that it has done to our constitutional principle is correspondingly serious.

I am sure that it would not have been expected that hon. Members returned to represent their constituencies in Northern Ireland, speaking for the electorate of Northern Ireland, would passively accept this discrimination against the Province that they have the honour to represent. We shall vote against this clause being added to the Bill as being the only means at this stage of the Bill by which we can place on record our sense of outrage at what is being done and at the inadequate justification for what is itself unconstitutionally untenable.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels (Leicester, East): I find myself in something of a dilemma because we are called a United Kingdom, but we do not seem to be supporting the idea of one united voting system. As the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) has already said, there are some concerns in Leicester, East, and in the city of Leicester. I agree with him that the Bill will stop cheating and it will stop people voting more than once, but I regret that clause 7 is defective because it is restricted to Northern Ireland. If it were widened, and made to incorporate the rest of the United Kingdom, it would be a far more easy Bill to understand and accept.

I should not have to give examples of what I describe as voting early, voting often, which occur in other parts of the United Kingdom. What happens is not necessarily vote-stealing, but polling cards are collected and distributed to another party's headquarters. People go in to vote at least twice. Another example is when the turn-out in one polling box amounted to 96 per cent., which is obviously scandalous and unbelievable. I feel that I am not the only hon. Member who can say with certainty that personation occurs.

[Mr. Peter Bruinvels]

Therefore, we must ask ourselves why Northern Ireland should be treated any differently from the rest of the United Kingdom. My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Leicester, South (Mr. Spencer) had a majority of seven. The result could have been the other way. We just do not know how the voting went there. In Northern Ireland there are certain constituencies with very small majorities. Yet again, we do not know whether the democratic process has been interfered with in those cases by the use of personation. While the Bill is acceptable in that it aims at correcting the democratic process so as to treat people more fairly, and attempts to stop other people from taking advantage of presiding officers and polling agents, it is defective, no matter how one looks at it. I regret that we cannot have a Bill for the rest of the United Kingdom. We must ask ourselves whether the abnormally high turn-outs in Belfast constituencies should worry us. We should ask ourselves also about the position in the United Kingdom.

With great regret, I find myself in a dilemma. I have to support clause 7, but I can do so only to a limited extent because I hope for more to come. I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary will take account of this debate and the Committee's views so that it will be possible to bring forward a Bill on behalf of the rest of the United Kingdom enabling constitutionally elected Members of Parliament to be elected fairly without the need for any kind of double voting.

Mr. Scott: I fully understand the depth of feeling of the Official Unionist party about this matter. Those right hon. and hon. Members feel strongly that a Bill which touches the franchise to this extent should apply to only one part of the United Kingdom. I respect that point of principle, but the fact is that the Bill was brought before Parliament to deal with a specific threat to the electoral process in Northern Ireland. Despite the energetic and not unpersuasive remarks by my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Bruinvels), I have to repeat what I said on Second Reading: the Government have no evidence that widespread personation is practised in Great Britain. Unlike Northern Ireland, there have been no formal representations——

Mr. William Ross: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Scott: Not at this moment.

Mr. Ross *rose*——

Mr. Scott: I shall give way in a moment. I always give way, as the hon. Gentleman knows. I should like to be able to complete this point.

We do not have evidence that personation is practised to a significant extent here. We have had representations from all the constitutional parties in Northern Ireland about the level of personation, but no such representations from this side of the water.

Mr. Ross: The hon. Gentleman used two particular words—"widespread" and "significant" personation. Do the Government have any evidence that there is personation on a small scale or in relatively small areas such as a single polling station or polling box, as referred to by the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Bruinvels)?

Mr. Scott: I suspect that if the personation had reached a serious dimension, so that it posed a threat to the integrity of the electoral system, the parties here would have made representations to the Government. They have not done so, and therefore I do not believe that the situation exists. Certainly, it does not exist on this side of the water where there are no paramilitary groups organising in a dedicated way on a large scale the personation that we have witnessed in recent elections in the Province. I do not believe, therefore, that there is a case for the extension of the Bill to Great Britain. The Government sincerely regret that it is necessary in a matter as important as the democratic process to differentiate between the treatment of citizens in Northern Ireland and the treatment of those in Great Britain.

The right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) mentioned in particular the change of heart between the original letter from my right hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Mr. Prior) and the Government's final decision. The general election of 1983 occurred during that process, and we saw the most determined, sustained and widespread organisation of personation in Northern Ireland. That led us to believe that the powers under existing legislation were not sufficient and that we would have to seek to deal with that dangerous position by legislation.

It is true that electoral arrangements in Northern Ireland, even in parliamentary terms, differ from the arrangements in Great Britain—residential qualifications is the example that springs readily to mind. It is a question of balance as to which is the less desirable—to treat those in Northern Ireland differently from those in Great Britain because of the depth and seriousness of the threat to the electoral system there——

Mr. J. Enoch Powell: On a point of fact, there is no difference in the electoral qualifications for elections to this House between Northern Ireland and the rest of the kingdom.

11.30 pm

Mr. Scott: In Great Britain a person has to be resident on the qualifying date. In Northern Ireland a person has to be resident on the qualifying date and for three months before. There is that difference in the qualifications for parliamentary elections.

The question is whether the lesser of the two evils is to treat Northern Ireland differently or to allow an evil to disrupt and subvert the democratic process in Northern Ireland. We are determined to prevent the latter. I therefore urge the Committee to vote for the retention of clause 7.

Question put, That the clause stand part of the Bill:—
The Committee divided: Ayes 126, Noes 13.

Division No. 31] **[11.30 pm**

AYES

Amess, David	Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Ancram, Michael	Bright, Graham
Archer, Rt Hon Peter	Brinton, Tim
Ashby, David	Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Baker, Nicholas *(N Dorset)*	Bruce, Malcolm
Bellingham, Henry	Bruinvels, Peter
Benyon, William	Budgen, Nick
Bevan, David Gilroy	Burt, Alistair
Blackburn, John	Butterfill, John
Bottomley, Peter	Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia	Chapman, Sydney
Boyson, Dr Rhodes	Chope, Christopher

Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon
Couchman, James
Dorrell, Stephen
Dover, Den
Duffy, A. E. P.
Durant, Tony
Emery, Sir Peter
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Anthony
Fenner, Mrs Peggy
Fletcher, Alexander
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Marcus
Freeman, Roger
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Gummer, John Selwyn
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Harvey, Robert
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hawkins, Sir Paul *(SW N'folk)*
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, J.
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Hickmet, Richard
Holt, Richard
Hooson, Tom
Howarth, Alan *(Stratf'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howell, Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Howells, Geraint
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hume, John
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Kellett-Bowman, Mrs Elaine
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
Knight, Gregory *(Derby N)*
Knowles, Michael
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim
Lyell, Nicholas
Major, John
Mates, Michael
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Moynihan, Hon C.
Newton, Tony
Norris, Steven
Onslow, Cranley
Patten, Christopher *(Bath)*
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rowe, Andrew
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Skeet, T. H. H.
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Spencer, Derek
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Martin *(Fulham)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, J.
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Tracey, Richard
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watson, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Whitfield, John
Wood, Timothy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Michael Neubert and
Mr. Peter Lloyd.

NOES

Beggs, Roy
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Kilfedder, James A.
McCusker, Harold
Maginnis, Ken
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Nellist, David
Nicholson, J.
Paisley, Rev Ian
Powell, Rt Hon J. E. *(S Down)*
Robinson, P. *(Belfast E)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smyth, Rev W. M. *(Belfast S)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. A. Cecil Walker and
Mr. William Ross.

Question accordingly agreed to.
Clause 7 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

New Clause 3

OFFICIAL POLL CARDS

'The following shall be inserted after Rule 28(3)*(c)*—

"*(d)* the documents which the elector may be required to produce to the presiding officer at the polling station under the terms of this Act.".'. — *[Mr. J. Enoch Powell.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. J. Enoch Powell: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

The Committee will already be aware of the foreboding which is felt by right hon. and hon. Members on this Bench as to the number of electors at a future election in Northern Ireland who will arrive at the polling station innocent of the fact that a new qualification and condition has been attached to their right to exercise the franchise, and that if they do so arrive, they will depart not merely disgruntled but in many cases determined, having thus been, as they will see it, insulted, not to cast their vote, certainly at that election, whereby undoubtedly the accuracy of the electoral process would be damaged.

It is therefore, if we are to have this legislation, essential that as far as possible every person likely to exercise his vote in person, because of course it is only voting in person or by proxy with which the Bill has been concerned, is aware before he goes to the polling station of the new requirement which has been attached to the casting of his vote.

There is one form of communication, not indeed foolproof, not indeed failsafe, but at any rate of very general application, which can usefully be applied for that purpose in addition to advertisements in the newspapers. Advertisements in the newspapers other than those advertising the respective merits of the different political parties—merely drily announcing legal particulars about the forthcoming elections—are not the favourite reading of those who buy the newspapers. It cannot, therefore, be taken for granted that notices inserted in the newspapers, however accurate, as to the new conditions to be imposed upon voting, will come to the attention of all likely to want to vote in person, particularly the elderly, who, as is the habit with the elderly, think that having done it so often, they know how it is done.

We ought therefore not to despise the poll card as a means of communication between the electoral authorities and the electorate. The new clause, although its precise terms are related to earlier amendments, invites the Government to consider making it an actual duty for the poll card to carry—I was going to say "upon the face of it", but I suspect that it would be done upon the back of it—a notice of the documents with a firm indication that at least one of them will be required as a condition of voting.

I know that the Minister is anxious to ensure the best possible success for the operation of the legislation. It will fail miserably if a substantial number of electors are unaware of its essential provisions on the next polling day. I hope, therefore, that he will empower himself to use this valuable means, perhaps the best available means, of communication with electors—the poll card—to convey that information.

11.45 pm

Rev. Ian Paisley: I remind the Minister that when I brought this matter to his attention previously he said that he would consider it. I trust that he will be able to respond today. It is only right that the poll card received by the elector should make clear not only where he has to vote but that he must bring with him one or other of the prescribed documents. I trust that the Minister will take that reasonable request on board.

Mr. Scott: I am happy to be able to end this Committee stage on a note of agreement and harmony, although not

[Mr. Scott]

in precisely the way suggested by the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell). I assure the Committee that the Government totally share the aim of giving the widest possible publicity to the requirement for voters to bring one of the prescribed documents to the polling station. I will arrange through regulations for it to be made necessary for that information to be included on the polling cards.

Rule 28(3) of the Representation of the People Act 1983 states that

"The official poll card shall be in the prescibed form".

I shall ensure that the aim of the new clause is met by prescription in regulations.

Mr. J. Enoch Powell: I beg to ask leave to withdraw the new clause.

Motion and clause, by leave , withdrawn.

Bill reported, with an amendment; as amended, to be considered tomorrow.

Northern Ireland (Road Traffic, Transport and Roads)

11.48 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Chris Patten): I beg to move,

That the draft Road Traffic, Transport and Roads (Northern Ireland) Order 1984, which was laid before this House on 13th November, be approved.

The order seeks to bring our basic legislation up to date through amendments which have already been put into effect in Great Britain.

Article 3 will enable the Department of the Environment to conduct experimental traffic schemes. These will last initially for six months but may be extended to a maximum of 18 months, after which the experiment must either be made permanent or abandoned. This will give us more flexibility in testing solutions to road traffic problems. At present, changes can be introduced only after a somewhat time-consuming statutory process. As hon. Members will know, in road traffic management, as in other areas of life, theory and practice often differ. It will therefore be to the benefit of all road users if the Department, as road authority, can quickly make amendments to traffic control measures to ensure that the most efficient and cost-effective measures are adopted.

Article 4 provides new powers to deal with a common source of complaint in the Province—the parking of heavy commercial vehicles on footways where they not only cause considerable damage to the surface and to underground services, but constitute a danger and inconvenience to pedestrians, especially the blind. There will be a general prohibition on the parking of such vehicles on verges, footways and the land between two carriageways with exemptions in certain instances such as loading or unloading where the operation could not otherwise be carried out.

The provisions of articles 5, 6 and 8 seek to strengthen the hand of the Department and the RUC in dealing with goods vehicles. Powers are sought to prohibit the driving of overloaded goods vehicles, to require goods vehicles to proceed to a place not more than five miles away for the purpose of being inspected—at present the distance is one mile—and to facilitate the use of dynamic axle weighbridges.

Article 7 places Ulsterbus Ltd. and Citybus Ltd. on a similar footing to publicly-owned bus undertakings in Britain by exempting them from the requirement to have third party insurance cover as required under the 1981 road traffic order. In effect the companies will carry their own insurance, subject to such underwriting arrangements as they deem necessary.

The provisions affecting transport also touch on vehicle licensing and railway issues. Article 11 is of special significance. It will enable the Department to attach to a road freight vehicle licence conditions relating to its parking. This power will be used in conjunction with those in Article 4 to ensure that the parking of goods vehicles in residential areas is kept to a minimum. It is an environmental as well as a transport provision.

Article 15 makes new provisions with respect to level crossings, and was not in the draft order circulated for consultation and considered by the Northern Ireland Assembly. However, I feel that because of the continuing programme of level crossing automation being undertaken

by Northern Ireland Railways Ltd., it is important that Northern Ireland legislation should be brought into line with that in Great Britain as quickly as possible. At present it is not possible for Northern Ireland Railways to automate crossings on private roads, many of which are operated by the road user. With increasing urban development, several crossings of that type now have a considerable volume of traffic, and enhanced safety measures are desirable. The new proposals will allow automatic controls on all roads to be introduced by order made by the Department. We also propose an element of statutory local consultation for all roads, in that Northern Ireland Railways will be obliged to refer its proposals for automation to the district council for the area concerned.

Mr. James Molyneaux (Lagan Valley): The hon. Gentleman referred to level crossings on what he called private roads. When does he expect to receive the report of the inquiry that has been established by Northern Ireland Railways into what it calls accommodation crossings, which I believe are what the Minister called crossings on private roads?

Mr. Patten: I hope that I shall have a chance to answer the right hon. Gentleman's question before the end of the debate.

Any representations which the council wishes to make —I return to the matter of consultation—must be taken into account by the Department when it decides whether or not to make the order.

This important proposal seeks to balance, as it must, the needs of railway safety with the need for a more cost-effective railway system. Hon. Members may appreciate a clearer understanding of the considerations that will apply when a level crossing is brought forward for automation. The proposal is subject to extensive consultation involving the railway company, the RUC traffic division and the Department's roads and road safety officer services. The Department will make the appropriate order only when it is satisfied that all the parties are in agreement both on the principle of the automation and on its detailed operational requirements.

Mr. J. Enoch Powell (South Down): Will the Minister remind the House to what parliamentary procedure, if any, the order would be subject in present circumstances?

Mr. Patten: As I recall, the order would be subject to the negative resolution procedure. We seek in the order to bring the situation into line with that in Great Britain, but I will return in more detail to the right hon. Gentleman's point.

The automatic crossing will then be installed to the specification approved by the Department of Transport in Great Britain and inspected by that Department's railway inspectorate prior to coming in operation.

Article 16 gives the railway company the power to construct railways and to allow the transport holding company compulsorily to acquire land to facilitate such construction. The power is sought as a desirable element in general transport planning.

I shall deal finally with the roads part of the order. I do not need to tell right hon. and hon. Members from the Province what road humps are, as they have been used extensively as a security measure. Article 18 proposes a new use for such humps as a speed control measure. The Department will be given the power to construct humps on roads with a speed limit of 30 mph or less. Humps are therefore to be used on urban roads, especially those which are designed to serve residential areas only and which have become used as through routes by traffic. The installation of humps with the consequent reduction of speed should discourage unnecessary through traffic and offer an important road safety element.

This is a wide-ranging order which embraces a wealth of detail and I trust that, even at this late hour, my exposition has proved of passing interest.

11.55 pm

Mr. Peter Archer (Warley, West): It is a convention of the House that, immediately a Minister has resumed his seat, the spokesman for the official Opposition should rise to express his party's reaction to the Government's proposals. Normally that is a sensible way in which to proceed, but when we are considering a measure that is not controversial in a party sense I wonder whether it might not sometimes be better to see first whether any hon. Member wishes to raise a fundamental objection so that the debate is begun by formulating the principal issues. I have no such issue to raise.

If there is any one theme running through the order I fail to discern it. It is a collection of measures, each of which seems modest but worthy, for facilitating transport in the Province. We are grateful to the Minister for the clear but brief way in which he described them. I wish to refer only to article 16 which is headed, "Power to construct railways." I hope that the Government have it in mind to use these powers, as they are asking for them, and I hope that one of the earliest uses they make of them is to proceed with the rail link between York road and Central station, Belfast, about which I wrote to the Minister last February. He will recollect the consultants' report on the Belfast urban area plan and the public inquiry that followed. The inspector recommended provision of the link saying that it would increase the overall efficiency of the rail network.

There was wide public support for the link. It seems generally to be accepted that it would make an important contribution to the complete transport system, yet earlier this year the Minister said that consideration would be delayed for, apparently, three years. That was a deep disappointment to many people, to employees of the railways and to potential passengers. If the Minister can say anything to offer hope of an improvement on that time schedule, we shall regard that as a bonus.

It would be illogical on our part to deny the Secretary of State these powers because we thought that he might be too lethargic in exercising them. Beyond that, at this late hour, the House will be pleased to hear that I confine myself to welcoming the order.

11.58 pm

Mr. J. Enoch Powell (South Down): This is indeed an order which covers a wide number of subjects and on some of them I hope that I can induce the Minister to expatiate rather more than he did in presenting the order. I do not intend to refer to more than a few of them.

I should like to mention humps and the experimental traffic control schemes that include them. We have the benefit in the order of a definition of the word "hump." A "'road hump' means an artificial hump in or on the surface of the road which is designed to control the speed of vehicles". As the Minister said, we are familiar with this device for purposes of security. In Newry—I apologise, as I am

[Mr. J. Enoch Powell]

being betrayed into trespassing into the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Nicholson), not entirely having got over no longer representing Newry. If my hon. Friend will permit me to say so, there are humps in the road approach to Newry which could well be reconsidered and thought to be fit for withdrawal, having originated in a security provision.

One seriously wonders what the potential scope is for series of humps in residential roads. I hope that the experimental period, and its results, will be severely considered before schemes are made permanent, as the apparently good idea of a road hump on many private roads seems to have severe limitations if it is to be applied to public roads, even in residential areas.

Article 4 deals with the

"Parking of heavy commercial vehicles".

I can only agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux) that, if we could eliminate the parking of commercial vehicles on verges, many parts of Northern Ireland would be happier places and many roads would be more sightly. But I warn the Minister that it will not be sufficient for this article to become law. He will have to ensure that this provision is enforced and policed. It is all too easy for commercial vehicles to use a road verge relatively briefly and to leave it in a condition which is a horrible offence to the inhabitants of the neighbourhood and for that offence to be repeated many times until it becomes virtually habitual and yet for no particular offence to have been identified when it was committed. I hope the Minister will understand that the provisions of article 4 call for very special police attention and vigilance in enforcement.

I stray again into the same prohibitive reminiscences. On the Minister's visits to Newry, which I know are not infrequent, he may recall that on his way into the town he passes on the right hand side what appear to be a series of monumental little lighthouses along the verge of the road. Eventually these were found to be the only remedy for the harassed inhabitants of the houses on that side of the Banbridge-Newry road against the incessant parking of commercial vehicles, which had reduced the verges to a slough. Legal provision is fine, but it will be inefficacious unless it is severely policed. I hope the Minister will be able to communicate from this House a wish that the vigilance exercised when this order comes into force should be specially acute.

Article 10 deals with the

"Licensing of public service vehicles".

Paragraph 2 refers to

"public service vehicles . . . while making journeys to or from places outside Northern Ireland"

if they are registered in Northern Ireland and vice versa.

If I have not mistaken the nature of these road service licences, I wonder how this provision accords with the Government's intention to remove from road services the straitjacket in which they have hitherto been confined by road service licensing. It would be a strange paradox if while freeing from that straitjacket the development of public service vehicle traffic inside Great Britain we introduced or continued powers to restrict and licence it as between the Province of Northern Ireland and the mainland.

It may be that a misunderstanding lies at the root of my comment, but in any case I would be grateful if the Minister could clear it up and bring it into relationship, if there is a lack of one, with Government policy on the mainland.

Article 15 is directed to level crossings. It is interesting to compare the new section with section 66 of the 1967 Act, which it replaces. The point that will strike a diligent collator of the section in the 1967 Act and the article is the ousting of parliamentary control. Subsection (1) of the proposed new section 66 reads:

"The Department may . . . by order provide that, any statutory provision shall not apply".

It is a general principle that is observed in subordinate legislation that it is objectionable for uncontrolled subordinate legislation to repeal or alter statutes. We do not make statutes in the House, even on railway undertakings and level crossings, to have them repealed by Departments. We have historically been jealous of a suspensory power. In the original legislation that power was properly subject to affirmative procedures in the House. That seems to be the right procedure. If Ministers are to say that a statute which the House has made is no longer to have effect, it should be the House, in effect, which by affirmative resolution says that. I would not regard it as adequate if there were substituted for the former affirmative procedure a negative procedure, bearing in mind how rarely it is possible effectively to assert negative procedure, especially if it should turn out, when the Minister has had further time to examine the matter, that the negative procedure is the sort which, under the conditions of direct rule, turns out to be no procedure at all. We shall listen with great interest to what the Minister has to say on control by the House of the powers in new section 66 to oust statutory provisions.

The Minister set out the consultations which it is intended shall be gone through with local representative authorities and others before any such alterations are made. However, consultation is no substitute for parliamentary procedure when we are removing safeguards that the House has imposed. I hope that that will be taken to heart more generally as well as in the immediate context of the article.

I refer last—it is a kindred point—to part V of the 1967 Act, which provides for the construction of railways. It was with some surprise that those studying the order found that they were called upon to enact powers to enable railways to be constructed. I take it that the intention is to enable railways to be constructed more conveniently and with less interference by parliamentary and other action than would otherwise be the case. I notice that this part was described by the Minister as a desirable element in the development of transport. It may or it may not be. That depends on how the powers are exercised.

I assume that in this part of the order we are converting the old railways clauses, which used to have to be embodied in the private Acts that authorised the construction of the railways, into a piece of a regulation. If so, we are again removing from the purview of the House in its legislative capacity something which has hitherto lain within that sphere. If that is what has happened, we should be clear about it. At this moment, as I understand it, if it is intended to build a new railway —and I shall put forward a suggestion in a moment——

Mr. Chris Patten *rose*——

Mr. Powell: The Minister is about to guess.

Mr. Patten: Warrenpoint.

Mr. Powell: The Minister is right. He is aware of my obsession with Warrenpoint and the coming development in communications between the mainland and the Province. However, before I come to that obsession I invite the Minister to be a little more clear about the legislative consequences of article 5. Are we in fact dispensing with the necessity, for the future, of private Bills being promoted for the creation of railways, and are we in effect depriving the public, by these measures, of any opportunity that they would have had by petition or otherwise to put forward their views when a new railway construction is anticipated?

On second thoughts, I shall not return to Warrenpoint, as I am glad to find it already in the Minister's mind. No doubt he will observe that little major engineering would be necessary to re-extend from Newry — trespassing again — into Warrenpoint in the Down, South constituency the railway that used to serve the port of Warrenpoint which, from next year, will be very much busier than it has been for many a long year, much to the advantage of the hinterland of the Province and, indeed, to the island of Ireland as a whole.

12.11 am

Mr. Peter Robinson (Belfast, East): I know that it may be hard to detect that the Road Traffic, Transport and Roads (Northern Ireland) order has produced any sense of occasion in this House, but I can assure you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that for one hon. Member at least there will be a sense of rejoicing at the acceptance of the order. It will be known to me not under the title that I have just mentioned, but rather as the road humps order.

Since I was first elected to this House in 1979, I have attempted to persuade the Minister's predecessor to engage in consultation with his colleagues on the mainland to establish whether they would engage in an experiment with road humps and whether our experience with road humps for security purposes could be extended for reasons of road safety to other roads in the Province.

The road that I asked the Minister to study was one of which he should be well aware. If he looks out of the window of one of the offices at Dundonald for which he has responsibility, he can see it. It is a slip road that runs parallel to the Upper Newtownards road and travellers who use a bank at one end then make swift access to Newtownards road. It is the sort of slip road where a 30 mph limit would be unsuitable. But even that speed would be preferable to the speed of vehicles using the road. I hope that my request will be one of the first that the Minister will have the opportunity to consider when the order is passed, as I suspect it will be.

There are several matters on which I hope the Minister will give us further information. I have noted in schedule 2 the method by which the Department intends to inform the public that a road hump is to be situated at a given location. The method of site notices is one which he intends to use. I believe that he is aware that their use for this purpose may be used against him by those of us who have been arguing for them for another aspect of his responsibility—planning. I know that he is considering some changes in neighbour notification and site notices and also in third party appeals.

Are there criteria set down in the Department as guidelines for where such road humps should be placed? Will it be decided on the basis of accident figures for a given area, or of who can cry the loudest to have one in his street? Will any restrictions apply to site lines? I imagine that there would be considerable difficulty if the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) were to travel round a corner at about 60 mph in the Bogside and confronted a road hump.

There must be some restrictions. Will the Minister tell us about the regulations which he intends to have laid down in his Department? May I assume in the references to the dimensions and spacing of road humps that the regulations are likely to be similar to those that have been used for security purposes?

12.16 am

Mr. William Ross: At first, when one reads article 4 about the parking of heavy commercial vehicles, it seems that there is a blanket ban. However, as one proceeds, one discovers that there are a number of let-outs for anyone who wishes to park a heavy goods vehicle. I am curious to know why the bans are imposed on heavy goods vehicles only. I know of areas where the grass verge has been churned into a mud bath by lighter vehicles using them as parking areas. Why should we restrict parking for heavy vehicles when cars, tractors and large vans such as those used by telephone engineers also cut up grass verges? Why is the prohibition only on heavy vehicles? Considerable damage can be caused by considerably lighter vehicles, depending on their tyres, and so on.

Article 4(3)*(a)* states that a vehicle can be parked

"for the purpose of loading or unloading."

The condition for parking under article 4(3)*(b)* is

"that the loading or unloading of the vehicle could not have been satisfactorily performed if it had not been parked on the footway or verge."

What happens if in a built-up area an individual discovers, as did a constituent of mine, that he must park on a footpath to unload his vehicle but that there is a double yellow line? The end result of constant police and traffic warden action was that he closed his business and moved elsewhere. Because he received so many fines and was constantly harassed, he could not carry on business. Is there a way round the problem? Does this provision open a window of opportunity to such people?

Article 4(2)*(a)* states that permission can be given

"by a member of the Royal Ulster Constabularly in uniform or a traffic warden."

That would appear to mean that the traffic warden need not be in uniform, although the police officer must. I see no good reason for that. On many occasions a plain clothes police officer might wish to give such permission, but, as the legislation is drafted, he could not. Will the Minister say why that is so, and why an off-duty traffic warden would appear to be able to give such permission? The Minister may believe that this is nit-picking, but it could have practical applications to many people.

Article 6 states:

"An inspector of vehicles or a member of the Royal Ulster Constabulary may at any time require a person in charge of a stationary goods vehicle on a road to proceed with the vehicle, for the purpose of having it inspected . . . to any place where an inspection can be suitably carried out not being more than five miles from the place where the requirement is made."

Why is it that only a person in charge of a stationary goods vehicle can be asked to proceed with the vehicle for inspection? Is the Minister saying that if the police or an inspector of vehicles come across a vehicle parked in a lay-by, while the driver and his helper are having their tea, they can tell the driver to go to the inspection centre,

[Mr. William Ross]

whereas if the police or the inspector are parked in the lay-by and they stop a goods vehicle coming along the road they cannot demand that the——

Mr. Chris Patten: It is usually necessary to stop the vehicle in order to talk to the driver.

Mr. Ross: Yes, but the legislation does not say that. It refers to

"any person in charge of a stationary goods vehicle."

It does not say that the vehicle must be stopped. My impression of the legislation is that it applies only to parked goods vehicles.

I cannot understand why there is a five-mile limit on the distance within which the vehicle can be compelled to move for inspection. It will mean that the vehicle inspection department of the RUC will try to find stationary vehicles within five miles of the vehicle inspection centres, and nowhere else. At present, it is possible to stop a vehicle and tell the driver to take it to an inspection centre within a specified time. That is a bone of contention of many of my constituents, who say that, although their vehicles have been inspected and passed as fit for the road even the week before—they also have the necessary documentation for the vehicles—they are told to take their vehicles to the inspection centres and have them inspected again.

My constituents whose vehicles have been passed as roadworthy for 12 months ask why they should be forced to return to the inspection centres after such a short time. It should be enough for them to produce the necessary documents, which show that their vehicles passed the inspection recently and were deemed fit for the road. If something is wrong with the vehicles—apart from minor breakages which the drivers or owners would repair within a short time—the inspection process cannot be very good.

Does article 6 give the Northern Ireland authorities power to require vehicles that pass through the Province, from or to Great Britain or the Continent, to undergo a thorough inspection? I hope that that is the way it is to be, because one hears horrific stories of vehicles being used which are not suitable and are not up to the proper standard.

In recent weeks and months there have been a considerable number of orders capable of being prayed against passing through the House on the subject of level crossings on the railway lines between Londonderry and Belfast and Belfast and Dublin, and there are a number of others pending. Until I listened to my right hon. Friend the Member for South Down (Mr. Powell), I believed that that type of order would continue in the future. Having listened to him, I am not so sure. If that is not the case, I shall be extremely worried.

Although this order lays a requirement on the railway authorities to inform the council of the area, which may then make representations, if it stops at the council the representations may not be listened to. It may be that the Department, which will be the deciding authority in this case, will simply overrule the wishes of the council and the people in the area. If there was no order coming before the House on which some sort of parliamentary action could be taken, our constituents would be deprived of the protection that I feel they need.

There are places where the requirements laid down in the order are acceptable. There are many quiet country roads where lights and automatic gates are acceptable, although I personally do not like them. But there are other places where roads are extremely busy, some of them even in towns, and where the proposed regulations are quite unacceptable.

Some time ago I wrote to the Minister about one example of what I mean in Milburn in Coleraine, where the railway line is crossed at a very dangerous location. The line is at the top of a hump-back. On one side there is a post office. On the other side there are the Crown buildings which house several Government Departments, including the unemployment office, the agricultural office and several others. There is also a large primary school close by, and there is a large housing estate surrounding it, with children going to and from the school in fairly large numbers every day and having to cross the railway line, which at present is manned, with gates.

I understand that somewhere in the pipeline there is an order to remove the present equipment and put in automatic equipment. That is quite unacceptable to me and to my constituents in the area. It is one of those areas right in the middle of a town where we must maintain the present high standard of protection and manning. Nothing else is satisfactory in those circumstances because this is a very busy road where there is an enormous number of children during the school term, where many other people travel to and from the Crown buildings and where there is quite a lot of traffic passing in any case. That is perhaps an extreme example of where the gates should be kept, but there are other cases, of busy roads out in the country, or where the level crossing is in a bad position, where it is necessary to maintain a much higher level of protection for the public than that which is possible under the order.

I hope that the Minister will tell us what these changes mean in relation to the representations that we may be making in the House on behalf of our constituents. We want to know what his criteria will be whenever he has to decide whether automatic barriers will be allowed. We want to know about this, and there is no time like the present, before the order for Milburn is printed and distributed.

12.30 am

Mr. James Molyneaux (Lagan Valley): This order is relevant to the reservations that have been expressed about the legislation concerning railway crossings. We may be correct in assuming that this is another victim of direct rule. Under Stormont rule, presumably, these orders were affirmative and, like all legislation affecting Northern Ireland under direct rule, they have all been down graded one step so that we are now faced with negative orders. This is not very satisfactory, because, unless one is fairly quick on the draw and spots those two little lines of italics, one does not get in within the 40 days.

The Minister spoke about the road humps. In my maiden speech to the Antrim county council 20 years ago I suggested a physical device for the slowing of traffic at dangerous spots. I suggested that the then county surveyor, who is not unknown to the Minister, should examine the Dutch system, in which sections of the road approaching danger spots are replaced with a corrugated device in pre-cast concrete. That has an advantage over the humps, of which we have had all-too frequent experience in Northern Ireland in the past few years. The humps may not be

properly constructed, or an inexperienced or nervous driver, no matter how slowly he may proceed, may take the hump in the wrong way. He may lose his exhaust pipe or break his sump.

That takes me back to an occasion when I was being driven around the constituency of Fermanagh and South Tyrone by my hon. Friend the Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis). At that time he had an addiction for what I can only call low flying. He took one of these humps at excessive speed, and when he came out the next morning he found that the sump oil had trickled across the nice concrete parking space. He was held up and missed an entire day's canvassing.

I come back to the practical suggestion. I hope that the use of the word "humps" in the order can be construed in such a way as to allow the use of the other device. It causes the maximum discomfort to any road hog driver. It may damage the suspension, but it cannot do other physical damage to the vehicle, as can the road humps of blessed memory, which are thankfully now being removed from many areas where they were never necessary anyway. I do not expect the Minister to give a definitive answer tonight, but perhaps he will feed that suggestion into the machine and see whether the experts in his Department can construe humps as meaning the corrugated device, which can be much more effective.

12.33 am

Mr. Clifford Forsythe (Antrim, South): I welcome article 4, which is a necessary measure against the parking of heavy commercial vehicles on the pavement. A number of accidents have been caused by large commercial vehicles being parked and other vehicles running into them in the dark. On other occasions, even in daylight, children have run out from behind the vehicles. As the Minister said, another problem is the blind trying to get along the footpaths and finding the vehicles parked in their way, which is dangerous. Attempts have been made to curb that type of parking, using the present legislation. That has not proved successful.

Generally, commercial vehicles park around filling stations. Double yellow lines are put down on both sides of the road, which means that the people who live on the other side of the road cannot park outside their houses. That disadvantages those who live close to the filling stations.

At a certain filling station in my constituency, drivers of large vehicles have a habit of driving on to the footpath to fill up with diesel at a pump which is conveniently placed beside the footpath, instead of driving on to the forecourt. A difficulty arises because the drivers forget about their lorries parked on the footpath and go into the café, which is in the filling station, to have their meal. They come out again in about an hour. I am not trying to prevent the drivers from having a meal, but it would be better if they parked on the forecourt or in the lay-by which is just a little way down the road.

It is fine to bring in the order, provided that it is enforced. What if it is enforced in the same way as regulations dealing with gipsies and itinerants? My right hon. Friend the Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux) has been fighting a rearguard action in upper Balinderry against vehicles, caravans and even horses which graze on the grass verges.

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): No donkeys.

Mr. Forsythe: No donkeys. It is essential that the order should be enforced rigidly. The Under-Secretary should realise — he probably agrees with me — that large vehicles parked on the footpaths destroy the surfaces and perhaps even the electric wiring beneath the footpaths, causing the street lights to go out. It would be helpful if large lorries could be kept off the verges.

I express interest in this subject because I live on the road that comes from Templepatrick, past Ballyclare to Larne. There are lovely grass verges by the side of the road. The lorry drivers decide that they want to take a rest and so they drive on to the grass verge. They plough up the grass verge and we end up with no grass. That is unfortunate, considering the fact that the Department of the Environment keeps the grass verges in good order.

Article 26A(2)*(a)* states:

"A person shall not be convicted of an offence by virtue of paragraph (1) if he proves to the satisfaction of the court that the vehicle was parked—

(a) in accordance with permission given by a member of the Royal Ulster Constabulary in uniform or a traffic warden".

If a driver had been given permission by a policeman in uniform or traffic warden to park, who would take him to court? I hope that the Under-Secretary of State will give an explanation.

I understand that a vehicle could be allowed to park on the verge of a road for the purpose of loading or unloading. If the vehicle would otherwise hold up traffic, it must be parked on the verge to keep it out of the way.

Article 26A(3)*(b)* states:

"that the loading or unloading of the vehicle could not have been satisfactorily performed if it had not been parked on the footway or verge".

Not having been in the construction industry I do not understand why one cannot unload on the road if one can unload on the footpath. I do not know why this provision is included.

I can see extra employment being created because of article 26A(3)*(c)*. It states:

"the vehicle was not left unattended at any time when it was so parked."

I assume that the driver will ensure that he has someone with him all the time to look after the lorry.

I welcome, as other hon. Members have, schedule 2, which provides for humps on roads to assist with road safety. I can think of roads in my constituency where cars come to a bottleneck. They slip down a side road and drive through residential districts where a great many children play. We have occasionally asked whether there is a way to stop that, but we have been told that it is not possible to put up a "No entry" sign because the road is a through way, and there could not be a 15 mph sign because motorists would not obey it and the police would have to sit there all the time to enforce it.

There is a case for humps to be constructed so that motorists are discouraged from taking short cuts. If they run into a couple of humps they might find it better to go up to the bottleneck.

12.41 am

Mr. Chris Patten: I am grateful for the varied and interesting contributions that right hon. and hon. Members have made, beginning with the speech of the right hon. and learned Member for Warley, West (Mr. Archer). He referred understandably to article 6 and asked whether it

[Mr. Chris Patten]

related to the cross-harbour rail link and what the Government's latest proposals were on that substantial capital project.

As I said, the power to build railways provided in article 6 is being taken as a general transport planning provision. It could be used for the cross-harbour link should that project be proceeded with.

Equally, and this is a point I make because I have listened with interest to the speech made by the hon. Member for Antrim, South (Mr. Forsythe), it could be used should the rail network be involved in the transport of lignite, given the encouraging signs that there are about that discovery.

The right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux) asked about the rail-road link across the Lagan. The rail link remains part of the Belfast transportation strategy. I cannot say any more to the House than I said at the beginning of the year to the Belfast city council. We shall review the position each year when we consider public expenditure for the three-year period ahead, but the rail link will not be provided in advance of the road link. The estimated cost of the rail link, at 1984 prices, is £16 million. That excludes land costs. I am aware of the interest in that project and we shall continue to consider it in the public expenditure discussions year on year.

The right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) referred to the rail network in the Newry area. It is a subject about which I know a certain amount. I spent one of the happiest days of my happy year and a half in Northern Ireland opening the new railway station at Newry. I note what he says about the rail link to Warrenpoint. I am sure that Sir Myles Humphreys, the chairman of Northern Ireland Railways, and his board, will also note it.

The right hon. Gentleman asked me about the new powers on railway construction. He was right in saying that we are removing the need to proceed by means of a private Act. However, I feel that there are adequate safeguards in the proposed procedure. There will, for example, be provision for a public inquiry in relation to the vesting of the land and the construction of the railway, but the essential point made by the right hon. Gentleman was correct.

The right hon. Gentleman asked about the detailed provisions of article 10, particular in relation to paragraph (2). Similar regulations have been made in Great Britain by the Department of Transport, requiring public service vehicles registered in Northern Ireland, when operating certain services within Great Britain, to carry authorisations issued by the Department of Transport. Therefore, the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland has to make a reciprocal Northern Ireland regulation to deal with public service vehicles registered in Great Britain which operate similar services in Northern Ireland.

Mr. J. Enoch Powell: Is the object of the licensing to restrict or control the provision of transport services? Is it, as it were, an old style transport planning provision? If it is, why is it still being maintained?

Mr. Patten: Perhaps I can take up the point with the right hon. Gentleman later in correspondence, as obviously I have not made the point sufficiently clear at the Dispatch Box.

The right hon. Gentleman asked me about the procedure for level crossing orders and the alterations in it. Again he was right. Section 66 of the Transport (Northern Ireland) Act 1967 provided that such orders were to be subject to affirmative resolution. The point was also made by the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley in the Stormont Parliament. Under direct rule, such orders are subject to negative resolution at Westminister and come before the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments. The substituted section 66 makes no specific provision as to how level crossing orders are to be treated. They therefore fall to be dealt with under section 78 of that Act, which provides that regulations are to be subject to negative resolution, as the right hon. Gentleman mentioned earlier. Such orders will be submitted in draft to the Northern Ireland Assembly and will be scrutinised by the Examiner of Statutory Rules. I do not think that it is necessarily appropriate that orders with a very localised impact should continue to be dealt with here at Westminister. I note that their Great Britain equivalents are not subject to any scrutiny such as that.

The right hon. Member for Lagan Valley asked about accommodation crossings. Northern Ireland Railways have plans to provide improved safety measures at accommodation crossings. Those measures are being carried through by the company in a programme planned over a six-year period.

The hon. Member for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross) raised a number of issues, particularly with regard to level crossings. I know the hon. Gentleman's interest in and concern for the subject. I assure him that the Department will not consider the making of an order unless it is satisfied that all concerned are content with the detailed safety measures proposed.

I recognise the hon. Gentleman's concern about the endangering of pedestrian safety by the removal of gated crossings, but, as I have pointed out to the hon. Member in correspondence, the evidence from Great Britain shows that gated crossings have the worst accident record, and that the automatic safeguards built into the open crossing system offer substantial protection to all crossings users.

The hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) asked a number of questions relating to road humps, which understandably concerned other right hon. and hon. Gentlemen. I should make it clear to the hon. Gentleman that our draft follows the Transport Act 1981, particularly section 32. The criteria will be set out in regulations designed to protect not only residents but motorists. The hon. Gentleman is particularly concerned about the criteria that would be applied. Of course, as usual we shall have to take account of accident figures, vehicle and pedestrian flows—the usual rational criteria that always determine major and minor capital works on roads.

Mr. Ken Maginnis (Fermanagh and South Tyrone): Perhaps it would be wise at this stage to draw the Minister's attention to the lack of enthusiasm that there will be for road humps in Omagh roads division, especially in my district council area, where we have been beseeching the Minister for a considerable time to provide adequate finance to remove the unnatural humps and other impediments in our area. When that is done, no doubt we shall welcome the provision of humps, to which the Minister referred.

Mr. Patten: I recently had the opportunity to discuss at some length the provision of funds in the Omagh

division with a council in that division. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that the point of view that he put to me vigorously was put equally vigorously by several councillors on that occasion. Several councillors wished to make it clear to me that they, too, did a good deal of low flying around their own area.

I can only say to the hon. Gentleman that I believe that we have made more money available in that division, as in others, particularly for minor works, in the past year or so. Roads expenditure as a whole in Northern Ireland has fallen as housing expenditure has risen, almost exponentially. Though that has unfortunate consequences for any Minister regularly visiting district councils, it is wholly justifiable in terms of the overall allocation of funds within the programmes in Northern Ireland.

The right hon. Member for Lagan Valley talked about a device which I suspect is designed for slowing down fast traffic on a main road, but by definition the humps that we are thinking about are designed for an entirely different purpose—to discourage the rat runs, to which the hon. Member for Belfast, East referred, through suburban streets, which I know causes a good deal of alarm and concern, particularly to mothers taking their children to school in the mornings.

The hon. Members for Londonderry, East and for Antrim, South and the right hon. Member for South Down talked about parking on verges. I should make it clear to the hon. Member for Londonderry, East that in Great Britain the Government took power to ban all footway parking, but the difficulty is that the Government have not been as successful as we should have liked in implementing that ban universally. Heavy vehicles do the most damage to verges. We are, therefore, wise to start with them. It is important to ensure that the legislation is adequately enforced—a point made strongly by the right hon. Member for South Down. The way that we are concentrating on heavy vehicles gives us the best chance and opportunity of doing that.

Mr. Roy Beggs (Antrim, East): Can the Minister assure the House that there is adequate legislation to prevent the growing development of verge sales throughout the year in Northern Ireland, particularly at roundabouts?

Mr. Patten: I think that there are two issues here, one of which sometimes stems from sales involving more permanent parking by itinerants or travelling people. I believe that the hon. Member for Antrim, South referred to that. I very much hope that the proposals that I announced recently will help in that regard. As for sales not involving travelling people or the curious category of "static travelling people" as they are sometimes described, powers are available to the constabulary to deal with the problems that arise although I accept that those powers need to be examined.

The hon. Member for Londonderry, East referred to the powers available to stop vehicles. Power to do that already exists in the Road Traffic (Northern Ireland) Order 1981. The new provision will enable the RUC or an inspector of vehicles to direct a vehicle that has been stopped to a place where it can be examined. The new power will be useful in dealing with overloaded vehicles, which I believe that the hon. Gentleman had in mind. The Department is engaged in providing more weighbridge facilities, which should help us to deal with those vehicles. The five-mile provision is designed to bring more goods vehicles into the weighbridge net and thus to ensure both fairer competition and road safety.

Mr. William Ross: Is the Minister saying that the inspections are now to be restricted merely to determining whether a vehicle is overloaded and that the provision has nothing to do with the mechanical safety or otherwise of the vehicle?

Mr. Patten: No, of course we are concerned about the mechanical safety of vehicles as well. The hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I am wrong, but I thought that he had referred particularly to overloading.

The hon. Gentleman also referred to foreign vehicles. I confirm that power already exists under the 1981 order to inspect, weigh and, if necessary, prohibit the driving of such vehicles. That should catch the kind of vehicle that he had in mind.

With the exception of the matter raised by the right hon. Gentleman the Member for South Down with which I did not deal adequately, I believe that I have covered most of the points referred to by hon. Members.

Mr. William Ross *rose*——

Mr. Patten: I see that another is coming up.

Mr. Ross: In view of the change that is evidently coming in relation to the provisions about level crossings and as the order will come into operation two months from today, is the Minister in a position to give an undertaking that the Milburn order will be laid under the existing provisions rather than these provisions before that date?

Mr. Patten: No, I am not in a position to give that undertaking but I will come back to the hon. Gentleman on that, as I am aware of his concern about it. I am extremely keen to ensure that there is as full and open consultation as possible on the subject of crossings, as extremely important questions of safety arise in which the hon. Gentleman, other hon. Members, councillors and other people representing the interests of local communities take a very proper interest. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for showing that interest again today.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Road Traffic, Transport and Roads (Northern Ireland) Order 1984, which was laid before this House on 13th November, be approved.

Northern Ireland (Family Law)

1 am

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Dr. Rhodes Boyson): I beg to move,

That the draft Family Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Northern Ireland) Order 1984 which was laid before this House on 13th November, be approved.

The main purpose of this order is to bring the rights of occupation in respect of the matrimonial home in Northern Ireland broadly into line with those in England and Wales under the Matrimonial Homes Act 1983. The order also follows both England and Wales and Scotland in giving cohabiting couples protection from domestic violence. In addition, the opportunity is taken to abolish the action for breach of promise of marriage and to restate the law relating to the prohibited degrees of relationship in marriage.

The order covers some rather technical ground and, as a non-lawyer, I crave the indulgence of the House and especially of the right hon. and learned Member for Warley, West (Mr. Archer) if I lend more emphasis to the general principles underlying this legislation rather than the legal minutiae. I shall deal first with occupation rights in the matrimonial home where one spouse—usually the wife—is not entitled to occupy the matrimonial home in her own right but does so by virtue of the other spouse's right to occupy it. In this situation the non-entitled wife has little protection if her husband puts her out of the home or sells it over her head. This is most likely to happen when the marriage is breaking down. The husband might first exclude his wife from the matrimonial home or simply sell it behind her back; or he might desert the wife, leaving her in the matrimonial home. Were he then to mortgage the property and subsequently default on the mortgage, the mortgagee could enforce his security by taking possession proceedings against the wife which would result in the wife losing the matrimonial home.

Part II of the order is designed to remedy this state of affairs. It applies equally to both non-entitled husbands and wives. But, as I have indicated, in practice it is usually the wife whose occupation rights are dependent upon the husband and it is she who is generally in the weaker position.

Article 4 gives the non-entitled wife the right not to be excluded or evicted from the matrimonial home by the husband without a court order or, if not in occupation, the right with the leave of the court to re-enter and occupy the matrimonial home. Those are the new statutory rights of occupation.

Articles 5 and 6 contain the provisions which protect the non-entitled spouse from sales or mortgages over her head. In such circumstances, the rights of occupation operate as a charge known as a matrimonial charge. To be effective and binding against a purchaser, defined in article 3 to include a mortgagee, a matrimonial charge must be registered in the Land Registry or Registry of Deeds in accordance with article 6 at the appropriate time. The charge must be so registered before the purchaser enters into a contract to purchase an estate affected by the charge or before the mortgagee takes a deposit of title documents as security for a loan.

These provisions strike a balance between the rights of occupation of the non-entitled spouse on the one hand and the rights of purchasers and mortgagees deriving title from the entitled spouse on the other. The non-entitled spouse must be able to protect her rights of occupation in the matrimonial home; and the purchaser or the mortgagee must be able to establish that he is not purchasing property or advancing money on a security which is subject to binding rights of occupation on the part of the non-entitled spouse.

Article 10 is an important provision which expressly provides for the release of the rights of occupation or for the postponement of a matrimonial charge in favour of another mortgage or charge. This provision will be useful where the non-entitled spouse is agreeable to the sale or mortgage, so that the purchaser or mortgagee may proceed in the certainty that he will not be bound by the non-entitled spouse's rights of occupation.

Before I leave this part of the order, I wish to draw the attention of the House to paragraphs (2) and (3) of article 6 which represent the most significant alterations to the order since it was published as a proposal. They result from the extremely helpful recommendations of the Northern Ireland Assembly——

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North)): Hear, hear.

Dr. Boyson: —and from representations made by the Law Society of Northern Ireland. I am gratified to hear the words "Hear, hear," if only once, while describing a somewhat complicated order. Having received that sign of approval, I can enhance my position further by telling the House that, of the 14 recommendations for change put forward by the Assembly, 13 were accepted.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Hear, hear.

Dr. Boyson: We stated clearly to the Assembly—the letter was written after I came to this post—why we could not accept the remaining recommendation. If necessary, I shall enlarge on that point tonight. However, 13 of the 14 recommendations for change advanced by the Assembly were accepted by the Government.

Paragraph (2) of article 6 is an additional provision which has been inserted to define the word "estate" for the purposes of paragraph 1. Its purpose is to ensure that matrimonial charges are only registrable in relation to estates in land which are themselves registrable in the Land Registry or Registry of Deeds, namely, freehold estates and leaseholds exceeding 21 years. These are the estates which are likely to be sold or mortgaged.

Paragraph (3) of article 6 alters the time before which a matrimonial charge must be registered to be binding against a purchaser. I have already indicated that the charge must be registered before the purchaser or mortgagee enters into a contract to purchase or before he takes documents of title as security for a loan, thus creating an equitable mortgage. As originally published, the order followed the English position more closely by providing that a charge would be void, and therefore not binding, against a purchaser unless registered before registration of the purchase in the Land Registry, or, in the case of unregistered land, unless registered in the Registry of Deeds before completion. But because of differences in the system of conveyancing in Northern Ireland—I am informed that there are major differences as compared with England—strong representations were made to the effect that the original provision did not strike the intended balance between the non-entitled spouse and the purchaser. Paragraph (3) takes account of the representations and produces greater certainty.

Part III follows the recommendations contained in Law Commission Report No. 26 on breach of promise of marriage, which was implemented in England and Wales by the Law Reform (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1970. Article 15 abolishes the action for damages for breach of promise of marriage, which is no longer used in practice in Northern Ireland. I inquired when the last case had been and was told that in the past seven years there been only one, and that it was not completed. Article 16 provides for property disputes between the parties to a terminated engagement to marry by applying the same law and procedure as in property disputes between spouses. Article 17 amends the rules of law which relate to gifts between the parties to a terminated engagement.

Part III also restates the law relating to the prohibited degrees of relationship in marriage in Northern Ireland. Article 18 sets out the prohibited degrees in a table which corresponds to schedule 1 to the Marriage Act 1949 in England and Wales.

Part IV contains an important provision to extend to cohabiting couples and their children the legislative protection from domestic violence currently available to spouses, Article 20 widens the scope of articles 18, 19 and 21 of the Domestic Proceedings (Northern Ireland) Order 1980. It empowers courts of summary jurisdiction to make personal protection orders and exclusion orders in respect of couples who are living or have lived together in the same household as if they were husband and wife. Protection from domestic violence in respect of such cohabiting couples is already available in the rest of the United Kingdom under the Domestic Violence and Matrimonial Proceedings Act 1976 and the Matrimonial Homes (Family Protection) (Scotland) Act 1981.

The order has been well received by those who were consulted, including the Northern Ireland Assembly. There was only one division in the Assembly, and it was on the rights of the cohabiting woman. The provision was accepted by 18 votes to five. The order has been welcomed as a vehicle for some timely and necessary reforms in family law. It brings family law in Northern Ireland more closely into line with that in the rest of the United Kingdom. I am sure that the House welcomes that.

1.9 am

Mr. Peter Archer (Warley, West): This is another order in respect of which it is no task of mine to express any deep disagreements of principle. The Opposition's reaction is chiefly to wonder why provisions so sensible took so long to introduce.

There are substantial points of detail which we might have wished to discuss had we been accorded the luxury of a Committee stage. One of the unhappy consequences of direct rule is that subjects which on this side of the water would be dealt with in a Second Reading debate, a Committee stage with a plethora of amendments and subsequent stages — which are still frequently insufficiently considered to spare us the mistakes and oversights that bedevil our law and administration—are foisted on Northern Ireland after a brief debate on an unamendable order.

The extension of rights of occupation in the matrimonial home to a non-entitled spouse is long overdue.

Mr. Peter Robinson (Belfast, East): Does not the right hon. and learned Gentleman believe that it is of significant value to the people of Northern Ireland that this order, like others that we shall discuss in the early hours of the morning, has been fully scrutinised by the Northern Ireland Assembly, to the extent that 13 of its 14 recommendations have been accepted and are included?

Mr. Archer: Yes, the Assembly does an important job in scrutinising orders of this kind.

As long ago as 1967, I was privileged to be asked by Baroness Summerskill to pilot through the House a Bill which she had introduced in another place, and which became the Matrimonial Homes Act 1967, which first introduced this principle on this side of the water. It is only now being extended to Northern Ireland.

It is understandable and agreeable that the order has been welcomed by the Equal Opportunities Commission, the Women's Law and Research Group and by the women's committee of the ICTU, but I believe that it will be welcomed far more widely by all those who believe in elementary justice. A Committee stage might have been valuable to consider the anxieties of the Law Society about the mechanics of registration, but those were considered in the Assembly. If experience reveals a genuine problem, I hope that the Government will come back with an amending order.

One consequence of having no Committee stage is that we are compelled in this debate to refer to matters which we might otherwise have explored at a subsequent stage. Article 4 (3) provides that in relation to the occupation of a non-entitled spouse, the court may make such order as it thinks just and reasonable, having regard among other things to

"the conduct of the spouses in relation to each other".

I share the anxieties which have been expressed about the consequences of that. Some of us are long enough in the tooth to remember when the courts investigated conduct, both in considering whether to terminate a marriage and for ancillary purposes. The Minister was kind enough to refer to the fact that some of us with legal experience in these matters might have points of detail to contribute. I can remember the tedious hours spent in cross-examination and investigating such allegations as

"distressed the Petitioner by serving him cold tea".

I remember how the time of the court was consumed, large costs accumulated and, more seriously, how the parties were forced to undergo the embarrassment of a public inquiry into the daily incidents of their domestic life. Some were so dismayed by the prospect that they were prepared to forgo a claim to justice rather than submit to such an inquisition. I hope that these words are intended to be construed as limited to conduct related to the disposition of the home. But I fear that once they are in the order it may be difficult to exclude conduct which is alleged to be relevant to the question whether one spouse can bear to be in the same house as the other. This might be a backward step towards resurrecting Victorian values.

I am troubled by article 5(7). It has never been easy to reconcile the demands of insolvency law with a compassionate approach to the problem. It is unfair that the rights of non-entitled spouses may be overridden by debts which they could and would have paid if they had been given the opportunity. It is even more unfair if a husband deliberately makes himself insolvent to outmanoeuvre his wife. It seems that a not unreasonable suggestion was made by the Law Society, and adopted by

[Mr. Archer]

the Assembly, that the courts should have discretion and that that should be achieved by making a matrimonial charge not void but voidable at the discretion of the court.

The decision to extend the principle of the Domestic Proceedings (Northern Ireland) Order to cohabitees is very much welcomed by the Opposition. There can be no reason why a woman living in the same house as a man should not be protected from violence even though she lacks a marriage certificate. And it is high time that we abolished the old concept of breach of promise.

The procedures of direct rule being what they are and leaving us with no opportunity to discuss these matters in Committee, we must judge the order as a whole, balancing its contents with its omissions. On that basis, we have no hesitation in supporting it.

1.17 am

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): The Minister said when presenting the order that he did not have legal training and would therefore deal only with the generalities and principles. I, likewise, do not have legal training. Perhaps it is significant that my young colleague in the Assembly from South Belfast, the late Edgar Graham, had had legal training. The draft order was first submitted to the Finance and Personnel Committee when he was chairman of it. Next week will be the anniversary of his brutal murder. The Province lost an able politician and lawyer in that dastardly deed.

I welcome the kind remarks about the scrutiny role of the Assembly, but I was aware when the right hon. and learned Member for Warley, West (Mr. Archer) referred to the need to study these matters in Committee that one of the problems that faces the Assembly is the technical absence of a Government representative to defend Government legislation. We have discovered tonight how important it is to tease out information in the course of debate. However, with those limitations, I believe that the Assembly has done a worthwhile job. Despite the invitation to be present, there are problems that mean that Ministers do not like to stay with the Assembly into the small hours of the morning answering questions and supplying information that is vital to us.

My right hon. and hon. Friends welcome the order. We do so because in an age when we hear critics minimising the importance of the family, we discover that there is still a remarkable degree of stability, especially within family units in Northern Ireland. We acknowledge that while the institution of marriage can often be the butt of music hall comedians, it is still a desirous state. Anything which strengthens the institution is to be welcomed. I share the sentiments expressed by the right hon. and learned Member for Warley, West who welcomed the order as long overdue and needed to give protection to spouses — especially the wife — of a marriage in Northern Ireland.

In some ways, we may not have gone so far down the road in financial arrangements as is evident in other parts of the United Kingdom where, in joint tenancies or joint accounts, husband and wife have an equal interest. In some parts of Northern Ireland, there is still a tendency for everything to be in the name of the husband. Accordingly, as I understand this, the most important of the three orders before us this evening, it seeks to implement the rights conferred by the Matrimonial Homes Act 1983 on the occupational right of a spouse where one spouse has no estate.

Before this measure was introduced, the husband—especially in the Northern Ireland context—owned the house, and the wife had no legal estate—her name was not on the deeds — and neither did she have any beneficial estate. Because she had not put any money into the house she had no equitable right. I welcome the fact that in recognising the reality of life today, where a woman contributes much in the creation of the home, the order gives her a recognised stake in it. Until now, the law meant that the wife occupied the home only at the pleasure of the husband. The 1983 Act and the order seek to rectify that problem.

I was interested to note that tribute has been paid to the contribution of the Women's Law and Research Group and the Equal Opportunities Commission. They specifically referred to the taking into account of conduct, and criticised that provision. The Assembly rightly came down in favour of retaining conduct in the order. I am aware that some are terrified of the concept of what they call the "establishment of a fault" principle. The right hon. and learned Member for Warley, West referred to the restoration of Victorian values. I am not so sure that some of those values do not need to be restored today for the good of the nation. Therefore, I welcome the fact that the order retains the concept of conduct.

The crucial element in the order is contained in article 4, which gives the occupational right to which I referred. It brings the benefits of the 1983 Act to non-owning spouses in Ulster. Article 4 (2)*(a)*, *(b)* and *(c)* provide that a non-owning spouse is given positive power to act against an owning spouse, and article 4(2)*(b)* is especially useful.

Perhaps it is my theological and ecclesiastical background that heaved a sign of relief when I discovered that the degrees of relationship had not been changed. It appears that despite the headlong rush for modernity, the nation has a fair amount of sense and sensibility. I welcome the fact that those laws have not been changed. However, they codify what, in a sense, has been traditional. Article 18(3) is interesting. Does it mean that we amend our laws about who can or cannot marry according to the laws of a foreign country? If so, why? I do not fully understand the method of expression and would be grateful for clarification of it.

I share the sentiments of those who welcome the cancellation of the old breach of promise laws. They were unenforceable and could have left have a difficult position open to abuse. Because it eliminates the legal action that could have been pursued if someone broke off an engagement, this long overdue amendment is welcome, as are the terms on which a marriage-type settlement for property of such an engagement is applied.

The Minister referred to the one element of disagreement in the Assembly's publication. It was interesting, because it met the terms of the Act — it evidenced widespread support and did not come from one section of the Assembly. It manifested a concern that one part of the order may have tended to undermine the institution of marriage. Members of the Assembly who opposed the article on cohabitation were concerned about that. However, I believe that even they share the belief that if two people are cohabiting, especially if it is for any length of time, have assumed the responsibilities of husband and wife within a family context and the husband

mistreats the cohabitee, it is unfair that there is no right of redress. It is essential to the law of natural justice that the rights of such a person should be defended.

I welcome the general import of the order, which strengthens the traditional concept of family law and ensures that there is a degree of equality between the parties.

1.28 am

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): I, too, welcome the order. Tonight we have illustrated the value of the Northern Ireland Assembly. I sat in the House before there was an Assembly to scrutinise such orders. Tonight we meet at 1.30 to pass the order, when one is not at one's brightest.

Mr. J. Enoch Powell (South Down): Speak for yourself.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Neither the Minister nor the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) is at his brightest at this hour of the morning. It does not matter whether the right hon. Gentleman wishes to make a loud protest. It is ridiculous to pass laws for a nation at this unseemly hour. The order should have been debated at a reasonable hour.

However, the Northern Ireland Assembly was able to spend many hours on this order. I entirely endorse the remarks of the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) about the noble and excellent work of Edgar Graham. It is difficult to realise that a year has passed since his terrible murder. Mr. Graham put his hand to this legislation to try to do something for the ordinary people of Northern Ireland that would benefit all sections of the community.

The fact that 13 of the Assembly's 14 recommendations were accepted shows that the Assembly is carrying out its work with diligence, courage and zeal. It put forward reasonable amendments to the orders, and the Government accepted the vast majority of them because of the reasoned way in which they were put and because of their sense. It should be put on record that Northern Ireland and the order would be the poorer if we did not have the Assembly. The right hon. and learned Member for Warley, West (Mr. Archer) said that there is no Committee in the House to deal with such orders, and that Northern Ireland Members have no opportunity in Parliament, which is the sovereign Parliament of the nation, adequately to deal with them. Therefore, it is even more important to maintain the Assembly structure, and to encourage it to continue the good work that it has done with the orders.

As the hon. Member for Belfast, South said, with this order we are underscoring the importance of safeguarding family life and its vital contribution to society. Some members of the Assembly felt strongly about cohabiting, not because they believed that a cohabitee should not be protected by the law, but because they believed that such conduct should not take place. I appreciate their dilemma, and understand why they voted against that section. The Minister will probably agree with that when he replies.

The order is an example of the necessary work being done by the Assembly to ensure the better government of Northern Ireland and better legislation passed in the House. We have no opportunity to bring the Minister before a Committee of the House and talk to him about our problems. I hope that Ministers will attend Assembly Sessions more often when it deals with such orders; arrangements will be made to ensure more playback from Ministers. That is the only way in which legislators will have the opportunity properly to scrutinise and digest the laws that govern Northern Ireland, and to make suggestions for amending and strengthening them.

I welcome the order. I believe that its approval will be helpful. I am particularly pleased about the arrangements made for the break-up of an engagement. Anyone involved in pastoral work knows the difficulty that occurs between two families and the two parties in such a break-up. I am glad that there is to be some redress in law. It is a very important part of the order.

1.35 am

Dr. Boyson: With the leave of the House, perhaps I may be allowed to make a brief reply to the debate.

It is interesting that the emphasis has been on the moral and the principle side, because I see Parliament's job as being to consider general principles and then to bring people within legislation from there. I do not think that the order can be criticised for undermining any moral values. It restates in modern terms what was laid down in the 17th century.

The hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) drew attention to the end of article 3 about links with people outside the country. I am told that it is highly technical. I was supplied with some material to enable me to reply to the hon. Gentleman which I found extremely difficult to understand because it touches on international law. I shall write to the hon. Gentleman when I understand it fully so that he may share my understanding. I feel that it is pointless to read out an explanation which I do not fully understand.

Mr. Archer: Perhaps I may assist the hon. Gentleman. Any person is normally subject to the law of the country in which he or she is domiciled for this purpose. It would be arrogating to ourselves the right to overrule the law of the country if we said that the law of Northern Ireland should apply in the case of someone who was domiciled elsewhere. It is as simple as that.

Dr. Boyson: I am grateful for that intervention. I trust that at other times when I have complicated legal matters to deal with I can rely upon the right hon. and learned Gentleman, and that he will always interpret the law correctly. If there is any dispute about this matter, obviously I shall still write to the hon. Member for Belfast, South about it, because it is not one that I have met before. I am sure that others have, but I had not until the question was asked of me.

We heard two views on the subject of conduct and whether it should be considered. It is one of the factors enumerated in article 4(3), namely the conduct of the spouse, and it is intended that this, with respective needs and financial resources, the needs of any children and all the circumstances of the case, should be taken into account during an assessment. The court would consider all the factors there enumerated and weigh them according to their relevance to the facts of the case.

Conduct might be considered by the court to have particular relevance in two kinds of case. The first is an application for an ouster injunction under article 4(3), where, for example, the entitled spouse was violent to the non-entitled spouse. In an appropriate case the court would

[Dr. Boyson]

have power to exclude the entitled spouse from the matrimonial home. The second case in which conduct might be considered relevant is where a non-entitled wife with rights of occupation acquiesced in the sale of the matrimonial home without the knowledge of her partner in marriage. I shall not go into further details. The issue is one that is raised in the event of divorce in that the court has to decide whether there is a guilty party. At this hour it would be dangerous to start that debate, with differing views being expressed by right hon. and hon. Members.

We can all welcome the order. I want especially to underline what hon. Members have said about the value put upon it by the Assembly when considering it before it came back to the House, to say nothing of the fact that 13 of the 14 recommendations were accepted. Although the Assembly may not have liked the 14th recommendation, it brings the law into line with the rest of the United Kingdom.

We are grateful for the scrutiny given to the order by the Assembly because it has resulted in an order of which the House can approve. It does not undermine any of the morality that we uphold. It does that morality even greater justice, in modern terms.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Family Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Northern Ireland) Order 1984, which was laid before this House on 13th November, be approved.

Northern Ireland (Loans)

1.40 am

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Dr. Rhodes Boyson): I beg to move,

That the draft Northern Ireland Loans (Increase of Limit) Order 1984, which was laid before this House on 7th November, be approved.

I shall be brief because this is a relatively simple issue, and it would be difficult to introduce morality into this debate, although, I know how, in the House, issues of morality can be introduced into almost any debate.

Mr. J. Enoch Powell (South Down): I shall introduce them.

Dr. Boyson: I shall leave that to the right hon. Gentleman.

The order increases by £200 million the amount available for lending from the National Loans Fund to the Consolidated Fund of Northern Ireland.

The present order is concerned solely with Northern Ireland's level of borrowing from the National Loans Fund. The Northern Ireland (Loans) Act 1975 provided that a total of £800 million could be lent from the National Loans Fund to Northern Ireland and also made provision for the Secretary of State, with the approval of the Treasury, to increase this amount, on one occasion only, by a sum not exceeding £200 million, to £1,000 million. It is this £200 million which is the subject of the present order.

Northern Ireland borrowing has not yet reached the existing limit of £800 million. I believe that in March this year, when another tranche was taken, it reached £798 million, so only £2 million was left for any further borrowing. That is why it is expected that before the end of the current financial year, the £200 million extra will be required.

The new limit of £1,000 million authorised by this order is unlikely to be sufficient to meet the borrowing needs of Northern Ireland for very long. I intend therefore to bring forward further legislation during the 1985-86 parliamentary Session to enable the limit of £1,000 million to be increased.

I commend the order to the House.

1.42 am

Mr. J. Enoch Powell (South Down): It was perhaps because he had family law still so much on his mind that the Minister hardly did justice to what is a remarkable and curious financial mechanism. I hope that I shall not pose to him propositions that are too deep for understanding, whether at this time of night or at any other time, but I assure him that, if not issues of family morality, issues of financial morality are potentially raised by what has been laid before us in so apparently simple and innocent a form.

One is somewhat reassured by the Minister's indication that, as the power of increasing the limit by order is exhausted by the present order, it will be necessary to legislate if borrowing in this form is to continue, which I hope that it will not, for reasons that I shall explain. When that happens, we shall have the whole panoply and mechanism of a Bill that will enable us to scrutinise both the principles and the details and to be fully informed as to the witchcraft that is to be practised.

Under the principal Act, sums are advanced by the Secretary of State to the Consolidated Fund of Northern

Ireland. I interpose here a fact of which the Minister will become aware before long, although this is his first opportunity to learn it. Hon. Members on this Bench are bitterly opposed to the existence of the Consolidated Fund for Northern Ireland, which they regard as one of those many artificial devices that are maintained solely for the purpose of insulating and isolating the affairs of the Province from those of the rest of the United Kingdom and preventing them from being seen as an integral part of the financial administration of the rest of the United Kingdom.

I return after that excursus to my quotation:

"the Secretary of State may with the approval of the Treasury advance to the Consolidated Fund of Northern Ireland by way of any sum"—

I come to the words of importance—

"for the purpose of any expenditure which, in the opinion of the Secretary of State, is of a capital nature."

It is to enable the Secretary of State to make advances to the Consolidated Fund of Northern Ireland that this Act and this order tap the National Loans Fund.

Our inquisitiveness is immediately stimulated as to what may be

"the expenditure which, in the opinion of the Secretary of State, is of a capital nature."

I hoped that my inquisitiveness might be satisfied by the fact that under the principal Act it is necessary for an account to be rendered annually of the sums which have been advanced under the principal Act and there has to be a report upon it from the Comptroller and Auditor-General.

I sought from the Vote Office the most recent account and report, and was served with House of Commons paper 159,

"Accounts relating to Issues from the National Loans Fund 1982-83"

which, I must admit, I returned to the Vote Office with indignation, saying that it did not contain the very documents for which I was searching. With customary diligence and curiosity, the Vote Office researched and drew my attention to the last two pages of that paper. Looking at those pages, I ascertained the presence of the annual accounts for the sums advanced during the financial year 1982-83. I said, "There is something missing. We are also due for the report of the Comptroller and Auditor-General." In the financial scrutiny which Northern Ireland Members endeavour to give to Appropriation orders and such like instruments, we rely upon the assistance that we obtain from the Comptroller and Auditor-General for Northern Ireland. So I said, "Where is the report of the Comptroller and Auditor-General for Northern Ireland?" After an interval, my attention was drawn to the small print at the foot of the very last page—almost a flyleaf of the report. It stated:

"I certify that I have examined the above Account. In my opinion the Account properly presents the receipts and payments of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland under section 3(1) of the Northern Ireland (Loans) Act 1975 for the year ended 31 March 1983. I have no observations to make upon it."

This is the first occasion when I have seriously quarrelled with the Comptroller and Auditor-General for Northern Ireland, for, indeed, I do have observations to make upon the account. The accounts are entirely uninformative. Surely, when the House asked to have accounts showing the loans which had been made by the Secretary of State, it was entitled to be told the expenditure which, in the opinion of the Secretary of State is of a "capital nature" for which loans have been advanced by him out of moneys obtained by him from the National Loans Fund. What are the expenditures "of a capital nature" so different from the other expenditures incurred in the government of Northern Ireland that they can be contained within the narrow compass of an outstanding total which has not yet exceeded £800 million, to which an addition of no more than £200 million is necessary to tide the Government over for another two years?

We know the purposes for which advances are made from the National Loans Fund in other circumstances. Those who examine the table of contents of House of Commons paper 159 will be enlightened upon them. They are conveniently classified under various heads which will enable me to make the point of principle at which the Minister and the House will eventually, I hope, discover I am driving. The heads are:

"Accounts of Loans to Nationalised Industries."

They are loans to nationalised industries from the National Loans Fund. Then

"Loans to Other Public Corporations"—

yes—

"Loans to Local and Harbour Authorities. . . . Loans to Private Sector."

Those are all loans to non-governmental bodies, to bodies other than Departments of State, made by the National Loans Fund; for the National Loans Fund is the avatar of the old Public Works Loans Funds which was set up to enable local authorities to borrow for capital purposes—for their capital expenditure, easily distinguished from their current expenditures—at what was then thought would be more advantageous conditions than they could obtain in the open market.

After all those categories of capital expenditure to which the National Loans Fund contributes directly in the rest of the United Kingdom, we find the final heading:

"Accounts of Loans within Central Government under: Northern Ireland (Loans) Act 1975."

There is here a splendid spoof. All the expenditure which is incurred by the Government of Ireland, of whatever nature, is granted by the House out of the Consolidated Fund of Northern Ireland. It is a curious arrangement whereby a small infusion into that Consolidated Fund of Northern Ireland is made from the National Loans Fund instead of any of the other sources from which the Consolidated Fund for Northern Ireland is topped up.

Of course, the Consolidated Fund for Northern Ireland is a fictional system; it is a system by which money enters from the United Kingdom Consolidated Fund and is poured out again into the expenditure in Northern Ireland, thereby preventing the House from dealing with the expenditures and Estimates for Northern Ireland in the manner in which it deals with other issues out of the Consolidated Fund.

Yet here is this curious little trickle, as it were, this extra pipe of a thin bore, which leads—I suppose by the principle of the siphon—out of the National Loans Fund into the Consolidated Fund of Northern Ireland to meet expenditures, not distinguished, not named, not identified, which, in the opinion of the Secretary of State, are "of a capital nature", expenditure so exiguous that, as I say, another £200 million will see them through the next two years. It is nonsense.

To meet the expenditure of Her Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom, the Government borrow at the margin—the jolly old central Government borrowing requirement—whatever they do not feel inclined to find by tax or obtain by other revenues. There is no

[Mr. J. Enoch Powell]

identification or relationship between the total of central Government borrowing in any given financial year and any section of the Government's expenditure in that financial year—no means of connecting the two. Indeed, thanks to the wise dispensation of our predecessors at the end of the 18th and the early years of the 19th centuries, it is impossible to distinguish them. We have eliminated the notion of assigned revenues by the principle of a Consolidated Fund. Thus the borrowings of Her Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom to which ultimately this little trickle is attributable, are by way of a marginal financing of the grand total of Government expenditure. They have nothing to do with the sort of purposes for which persons and corporations inside the economy, inside the realm, are allowed to or prudently may borrow. They are not secured upon any particular revenues; they are not related to the profitability or unprofitability, efficiency or inefficiency of any of the activities financed by central Government. It is just a margin—that part of the sums to be expended which the Government do not care to meet by taxation.

That is of necessity also true of that sham Consolidated Fund — the Consolidated Fund of Northern Ireland. There is a grand total of expenditure for which the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland is answerable to the House. Of that grand total an undefinable quantity may be attributed to the central Government borrowing requirement of the United Kingdom. The matter cannot be expressed more definitely than that. Yet we have this pantomime of purporting to borrow sums from the National Loans Fund for the Consolidated Fund of Northern Ireland in order that they may be spent on undisclosed expenditure which, in the opinion of the Secretary of State, is "of a capital nature".

It is all humbug. Whether it is capital expenditure—on any economic analysis—or not capital expenditure, these sums do not go any way to meet it. They are not assigned to it. The returns on those investments are not related to these sums. We have no accounts which make any sense of them, and the Comptroller and Auditor-General, finally defeated, had to sink back into being an ordinary auditor and certify the uninformative accounts.

I will make a suggestion to the Government. Clearly what lay behind this practice in its earlier days was that once upon a time the Government of Northern Ireland found it convenient—and Her Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom were agreeable — rather than borrowing at their margin in the market, to borrow from the National Loans Fund. Some such loans were still outstanding when that Government was abolished and superseded by direct rule. Instead, however, of acknowledging that thereby public expenditure in Northern Ireland was merged in the public expenditure of the United Kingdom, a fiction of borrowing from the National Loans Fund for capital purposes in Northern Ireland was continued, and that is what we have before us in the order.

It is an order which—I make no complaint about the Minister himself — insults the House by withholding information as to the nature of the expenditure. Though, of course, we understand very well why that information is not given, we understand very well why the Secretary of State has not published a list of the sums "of a capital nature" on which these moneys have been laid out. If he attempted to do so, it would be seen to be a perfectly artificial and random selection, in no way differentiated from many other much larger expenditures for which he was responsible.

I ask the Minister, rather than putting the parliamentary draftsmen to work upon a new edition of the Northern Ireland (Loans) Act 1978, not to do anything at all. There will be no difference, no disadvantage or loss whatever suffered by any interest in Northern Ireland, if he does that. Indeed, there will be no alteration in the financing of those expenditures in any real economic sense. Their impact on the general level of inflation will be quite unaltered. So, I say, let it lapse.

I will tell the Minister from what quarter he will encounter opposition when he makes that perfectly simple suggestion. A suggestion which will put him in favour with the Whips who are not a class of men who go around looking for reasons for additional legislation, particularly Northern Ireland legislation, which is apt at untimely hours to stir the loquacity of those representing seats in Northern Ireland. It will also endear him to his colleagues in the Cabinet, his rivals for parliamentary time. His absence from the Legislation Committee will be but a blessing upon his head. No, it is not from those quarters that the Minister has anything to apprehend; it is from a different quarter altogether. I shall tell him where the opposition will come from. It will come from much nearer at hand—from the Northern Ireland Office.

Of course, it will not tell him the full reason for its opposition. He will find that it will be opposed to the legislation lapsing, because it will perceive in that the seeds of the eventual demise of the Consolidated Fund for Northern Ireland; and he may wonder why it is that the Northern Ireland Office, or those whom the Minister will find confronting him, should be so dedicated to the continued existence of that venerable survival.

It is because they are implicated in an agreement with the Government of the Irish Republic that no alteration will be made in the arrangements for the government of Northern Ireland which in any way tends to consolidate the Union or make it more difficult for Northern Ireland to be hived off into some form of combination with the Irish Republic. That is why those very people regard it as almost the ultimate disaster that had fallen upon their heads when our Province received full representation in this House. That is why they mugged the then Prime Minister the following day when they discovered what he had given away.

It is for that reason that we shall be supporting the Minister, cheer him on, and wish him success, when he makes his attempt, and because we wish him success, I am offering him this warning as to where opposition will come from. He will encounter opposition when he goes back to officials and says, "You know, I was listening to the debate; and a very lively debate it was". The House of Commons has been at its best at 2 o'clock in the morning, as it so often has been in the greatest days of the House of Commons, which are not exactly these days. So the hon. Gentleman says, "I have been listening to a most entertaining and instructive debate in the House of Commons on that order, and I have discovered that it is not necessary for me to have renewal at all of the Northern Ireland (Loans) Act." It will be quite amusing, when the Minister imparts that discovery to his officials, to be a fly on the wall and hear what they have to say. Nevertheless, let the hon. Gentleman harden his heart, for he knows what

nonsense it is to ladle out sums into the Consolidated Fund for Northern Ireland for alleged capital purposes which nobody can ascertain, let alone disclose.

Perhaps it was a good thing that the extra £200 million was needed. If it had not been needed, or needed so soon, it might not have been possible to put the Minister in the way of questioning the necessity for this whole apparatus. I hope that he has found the debate helpful—which is not what one can always say when expecting the return to the Dispatch Box of the Minister in charge of a Northern Ireland Order in Council.

2.4 am

Dr. Rhodes Boyson: I listened with great interest to the analysis given by the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell). As always, he made a great parliamentary speech. I shall have to study it and look into the points that he made. In the meantime, I should like my order today so that at least we can last until March, which will give me time to read the small print and consider where we are.

It is part of the greatness of this House that a Member can challenge the whole of what is being done in any part of our society and raise questions in people's minds. That is what the right hon. Gentleman has done tonight. I do not know that I shall agree with him in the morning. I certainly shall not be calling any early morning meetings about the matter. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that many people besides myself, other hon. Members and the officials to whom the right hon. Gentleman referred, will be taking microscopes and magnifying glasses to what has been said today.

Clearly no one wishes to intervene after the speech of the right hon. Gentleman. We wish to hurry away so as to be fresh to read it in *Hansard* tomorrow.

Mr. J. Enoch Powell: On Friday.

Dr. Boyson: I shall be able to read it in Northern Ireland at the weekend with the feeling of the Province upon me. In the meantime, rather humbly after the right hon. Gentleman's contribution, I commend the order to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Northern Ireland (Increase of Limit) Order 1984, which was laid before this House on 7 November, be approved.

Soviet Jewry (Government Policy)

Motion made and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Lang.]*

2.6 am

Mr. Ivan Lawrence (Burton): I begin by saying how pleased I am that my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office is to reply to the debate, as I know that this issue is dear to his heart as well as to the hearts of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and the Government. I also welcome the presence at this late hour of the right hon. and learned Member for Warley, West (Mr. Archer), the distinguished chairman of the all-party parliamentary committee for the release of Soviet jewry.

The past few weeks have brought a most interesting and welcome improvement in East-West relations. There are signs of reducing confrontation and the hint of the beginning of a period of détente. We are being invited to believe that we in the West can live happily with the Soviet Union and its friends in eastern Europe. The Soviet leaders are seeking to persuade us that if we will trust them sufficiently to scale down our armaments they will respond by scaling down theirs and peace will become enduring. They invite us to believe that they will honour their international undertakings and ask us to trust their declarations of good intentions. They wish us to think only well of them.

Let us look, therefore, not into the crystal ball but at the Soviet Union's record in one area of international undertakings and declarations of good intentions so that we may judge more safely whether the time is ripe to accept that invitation to trust. Let us consider the Soviet Union's record of human rights and focus for a moment on its treatment of its Jews to see whether the Government's policy towards the USSR is unduly harsh and unjustified and ought to be changed.

The Soviet Union's international undertakings on human rights are substantial and impressive. It has ratified nearly all major international conventions on human rights and has associated itself with the principal international declarations. I shall refer to three such obligations.

The first is the right to emigrate. The Soviet Union is a party to the international covenant on civil and political rights, article 12(2) of which states that

"everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own."

Article 5(d) of the international convention on the elimination of all forms of racial discrimination — of which the Soviet Union is a signatory — accords the same right, as does basket 3 of the Helsinki final act, which, in addition, stipulates that favourable consideration shall especially be given to the reunification of families. The USSR is, of course, a signatory of the final act.

How are those solemn international undertakings on the right to emigration being honoured? In 1979, 51,000 Jews were allowed to leave the Soviet Union for Israel. In 1980 the figure was 21,000, in 1981 it was 9,500, in 1982 it was 2,700, in 1983 it was 1,300. In October 1979, 4,000 Jews were allowed to leave, but only 29 exit visas were granted in October 1984.

The Soviet Government tell the world that no more Jews want to leave mother Russia. The fact is that 400,000 Jews still in the USSR have asked to leave and have received notarised invitations from relatives in Israel but have not received exit permits. Official estimates based on

[Mr. Ivan Lawrence]

past experience suggest that there may well be a further half a million who would request the right to emigrate if, following application and refusal, they would not become outcasts.

The pattern is as follows. Application by Jews to leave is followed by dismissal from their jobs because they are considered no longer trustworthy. They are then forced either to take menial work or to become unemployed and risk prosecution as parasites—a process which is itself a breach of convention 29 of the International Labour Organisation's convention against forced or compulsory labour which the USSR has, of course, signed.

There are about 10,000 refuseniks—those who have received over a number of years official notices of refusal to leave and who are willing to confront the Soviet authorities on the issue. They are victimised. Their children are expelled from colleges of higher education. They are subjected to insulting attacks in the media. They are selectively conscripted into the army and often stopped, searched and arrested. They can seek in vain for an effective recourse to the courts for protection. So much for that international undertaking.

Secondly, there is the universal human right to enjoy cultural freedom. The USSR is a signatory of the international covenant on civil and political rights, article 27 of which gives its Jewish minority the right

"to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practise their own religion or to use their own language."

Article 18 also requires that

"everyone shall have the right to manifest his religion or belief, in worship, observance, practice and teaching".

Articles 34, 36 and 45 of the Soviet constitution itself prohibit any form of discrimination on the basis of nationality and, together with article 74 of the Russian Republic criminal code, guarantee the use of national languages to the peoples of the USSR. In addition, article 52 of the USSR constitution guarantees freedom of conscience, as does the Soviet ratification of the United Nations declaration on the elimination of all forms of intolerance and of dicrimination based on religion or belief.

How does the USSR honour those solemn national and international undertakings on the right to freedom of culture? The study of Hebrew, alone among the minority languages, is banned. Hebrew teachers, when discovered, are threatened with severe punishment if they continue. No Hebrew books are published in the USSR. Virtually no books are published in any language on Jewish history and culture. Today there are fewer than 60 synagogues in the whole USSR, and only five ordained rabbis. Jews are denied the opportunity to train their clergy or issue religious bulletins or periodicals. No Hebrew bible has been published for half a century. Prayer shawls and other religious articles are unobtainable.

Having put a stop to almost all emigration, the Soviet authorities are now attempting to destroy the Jewish community by arresting its leaders and teachers. Yosif Begun, the outstanding campaigner for the right to study Hebrew, received in 1982 a brutal sentence of seven years' imprisonment and five years' internal exile. During 1984, Moshe Abramov, who had been trained as a Rabbi but who refused to accept his rabbinic office because it required him to work for the KGB, was sentenced to three years' imprisonment. Zakhar Zunshain, a Hebrew teacher of Riga, received a three-year sentence in June of this year. Yakov Levin, also a Hebrew teacher, of Odessa, received a similar sentence earlier this month. Alexander Kholmiansky, Yakov Nesh, Yuli Edelshtein, Hebrew teachers of Moscow, and Mark Nepomniashy, a Hebrew teacher of Odessa, are all being held incommunicado in prison awaiting trial on charges of alleged serious crimes. These policies are clearly intended to obliterate the historical memory of Soviet Jewry, to destroy its ethnic identity and to force assimilation. So much for that international undertaking.

Thirdly, there is the right to protection against downright racial discrimination—against anti-semitism. Article 20 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which the USSR is a signatory, prohibits

"any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence"

as do most of the other human rights conventions and constitutions to which the USSR is a party. How is that solemn undertaking being honoured? Under the thin disguise of anti-Zionism there have been an increasing number of scurrilous attacks on individual Jews, the Jewish people, Judaism and on the state of Israel. An orchestrated series of newspaper articles in several Soviet republics refer to Hebrew teachers and cultural activists as spies, criminals and traitors. Jewish money, it is said, finances the military arms race in the Western world, Zionists brought Hitler to power and supported Nazism and the state of Israel and Nazi Germany are to be equated. As the Bishop of Birmingham said at a meeting that was recently held in the Palace of Westminster, the Russians have a long and miserable history of anti-semitism and it seems to be getting worse.

The list of the victims of anti-semitic persecution in the past few years alone is long and ugly. Anatoly Shcharansky received 13 years' imprisonment in horrific conditions, Vladimir Slepak and Ida Nudel were sent to Siberia, refused exit visas and harrassed, Victor Brailovsky, Boris Chernobilsky and Dmitry Shchiglik of Moscow, Gregory Geishis, Boris Kalendarev and Yevgeny Lein of Leningrad, Lev Elbert, Kim Fridman, Vladimir Kislik and Valery Pilnikov of Kiev, Osip Lokshin and Vladimir Tsukerman of Kishinev, Aleksander Paritsky of Kharkov, Moisei Tonkonogy of Odessa, Iosif Zisels of Chernovitsy, Aleksander Panaryev of Sukhumi and Aleksander Magidovich of Tula are just some of those who have served terms of imprisonment or exile and are now living under the constant surveillance of the KGB and are still refused permission to leave. These are the Jews in labour camps and psychiatric hospitals and the Jews who are suffering harassment and persecution throughout the USSR.

Refuseniks have told us that if the rehabilitation of Stalin takes place in time for the 40th anniversary of the victory over the Nazis, the anti-semitic campaign could be revitalised and that his plan to transport all Jews to the main centres of Siberia could be put into effect.—"Do not treat this as a fantasy", they implore us, "it is a definite threat to our future safety."

If those are the solemn international undertakings and if that is how the Soviet Union honours those undertakings, the future is indeed grim for the Jews of Russia and for the chances of lasting and genuine detente based on trust of the Soviet Union. The Government's policy of speaking up at every opportunity for the Jews of

the Soviet Union has been beyond reproach. I congratulate and thank my hon. Friend for his valiant efforts and congratulate my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary and the rest of the Government in that regard.

That activity and concern seems to have had little effect on the Soviet Government, however. Must it always be thus? Next month, Mr. Gorbachev will be an honoured guest of this country and the Government. Presumably he is coming to reassure us of his Government's good intentions and to engender trust. Let us hope that he realises that the best way in which his Government can convince us of their good intentions is to show that they are prepared to honour their obligations toward human rights in general and the tragic plight of the Jews in particular.

Will my hon. Friend assure me that this Government will not cease to remind Mr. Gorbachev of the very great importance which we in Britain and the West attach to this matter? If we cannot trust the Soviet Union to honour its promises to the weak in its own land, could we ever trust it to honour its promises to the nations of the world which have made themselves weak in the forlorn hope of enduring peace.

2.21 am

Mr. Peter Archer (Warley, West): I am grateful to the hon. and learned Member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence) for sacrificing some of the limited time available to him to permit me this brief intervention. I congratulate him on securing an opportunity to raise these matters.

We in this House are jealous of the privileges that protect our right to speak freely, without fear and constraint. It is appropriate that on occasion we should use that right to speak for those who are not so fortunate and who are not free to speak for themselves. It is right that national Governments should sometimes be invited to hear views that reflect the voice of the whole international community.

It is easy for any Government to institutionalise repressive practices until they become immunised against them and no longer believe it possible that they may be wrong. That is particularly so of a Government who are not prepared to hear criticism at home. Despite the lateness of the hour, I am grateful for this opportunity of associating myself with what the hon. and learned Gentleman said.

The fact that the subject has been discussed in the House will, I hope, give some of the more compassionate among those who take decisions in the Soviet Union cause to reflect on what is happening to decent people whose only crime is their wish to make their home where their heart is. I hope that this will serve further to offer them the assurance that they are not alone or forgotten.

2.22 am

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Malcolm Rifkind): The subject that my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence) has chosen for this debate is important, and I am grateful to him for raising it. I pay tribute to both my hon. and learned Friend and the right hon. and learned Member for Warley, West (Mr. Archer) for the major contribution which, over a number of years, they have made to this very subject.

Since I first became a Minister in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, I have had special responsibility for the Soviet Union and eastern Europe. It has therefore fallen to me on many occasions in my contacts with Ministers from Warsaw Pact countries to raise human rights issues. Naturally enough, when I am speaking to my Soviet opposite numbers, the subject of Soviet Jewry is raised. When I speak on human rights issues, I feel that I can do so with particular authority for three separate reasons.

First, I can do so confident that I am reflecting the views of all sides of this House. There may be many issues on which we are divided, but seeking better observance of human rights in eastern Europe and the Soviet Union is not one of them.

Secondly, I know from my own constituency mail, and from the many letters that hon. Members pass to me, that these human rights issues are the subject of a deep and genuine concern among ordinary people. Whether from churches, synagogues or human rights groups, or on occasion simply off their own bat, individuals from all walks of life write to express their concern about the many instances of human rights abuses in the Soviet Union, which are recorded in the press and elsewhere.

Thirdly, I am conscious that by raising these issues I am not unjustifiably interfering in the internal affairs of other countries. The great achievement of the Helsinki Final Act was to put human rights issues firmly on the international agenda. Principle VII of the opening section of the Helsinki Final Act is clear, and says:

"participating states will respect human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief, for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion".

For all that, my Soviet interlocutors claim that raising these issues is unwarranted interference. Their very defensiveness shows that they are aware that, much as they may wish it, it is not possible to go back on the commitments that they made at Helsinki.

It is impossible not to be shocked by the many reported instances of inhumane Soviet behaviour. Yosif Begun was imprisoned last year for teaching Hebrew. Anatoly Shcharansky has been rotting in gaol for more than seven years for getting together with a few like-minded Russians to monitor Soviet observance of the Helsinki Final Act. Many thousands of Soviet Jewish citizens have been deprived of their rights, their jobs and on occasion their freedom merely because they have applied to emigrate. It is not possible not to feel a sense of involvement in the fate of these fellow Europeans.

There are too many examples of draconian administrative acts by the Soviet authorities which are completely disproportionate to the so-called offences for one to embark on a systematic account. The fact is that the reports make it difficult not to conclude that the Soviet authorities are operating a systematic policy of discrimination that verges on oppression and is directed particularly against minority religious groups. It is directed against others apart from the Jewish community but it is that community which is the subject of the debate.

The Jewish community has probably been subject to more consistent harassment than others, partly because it occupied a more important place in Soviet intellectual and political life. The harassment also applies to Baptists, Catholics and even to Orthodox Christians. Of course, there is carefully sanctioned religious observance in the

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Soviet Union, and Soviet representatives are not slow to point this out. There are semi-official figures for the numbers of regular worshippers, for the number of "registered" congregations and of the number of Bibles and prayer books published by the state, for example. But the line is drawn at any religious observance which is not officially sanctioned and, of course, at any challenge to the state's monopoly of power in every detail of Soviet life.

What can we do realistically to show our concern and to encourage more humane practices in the Soviet Union? First, the Government will ensure that the issue of human rights and the Soviet Union's Helsinki and Madrid commitments are kept firmly on the agenda of our ministerial contacts with the Russians. These matters must figure, but that will not be to the exclusion of the many other important matters that we have to discuss with them. We must show that these questions have not been, and will not be, forgotten.

Secondly, as well as mentioning the wider issues, we should on occasion mention individual names of those we are trying to help. At times—and recent years have been such times—this may be without apparent result, but that does not make it worthless. Anatoly Shcharansky may be lying in an inhospitable camp in the Urals, but a telegram has just got through to his wife to let her know where he is and that he is alive. Would this have happened 40 years ago? Certainly it did not happen in the case of Osip Mandelstam, the great Russian Jewish poet of the 1920s and 1930s. Would it have happened if it had not been for the efforts of Mrs. Shcharansky, which have made the name of her husband a household name in the West? To mention someone who is not Jewish, would we have seen the strangely concocted films of Dr. Sakharov and his wife in Gorky if it had not been for the constant mention of his name by Western representatives.

Obviously we have to be selective about names. The names which are chosen must be in some sense representative of categories of human rights abuse. When my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary met Mr. Gromyko in July, he mentioned Father Gleb Yakunin, a Russian Orthodox priest, Dr. Koryagin, a Soviet psychiatrist, Anatoly Shcharansky, whom I have already mentioned, and the Sakharovs. In March this year, I drew the attention of the First Deputy Foreign Minister, Mr. Kornienko, to the cases of Yosif Begun, Ida Nudel, Anatoly Shcharansky and Raoul Wallenberg.

Thirdly, with respect to what can be done, I think that hon. Members themselves can join in this process. The Russians are more in evidence in social and political circles in London these days, which is something that we welcome. This gives hon. Members the opportunity to mention particular cases that have been brought to their attention by constituents when they meet Soviet diplomats. The point can be put over in moderate and reasonable terms. This would help to show that concern about human rights is something which not only the Government are concerned about. This would show that it is the concern of all hon. Members.

A question that is often raised is whether these approaches should be publicised or remain confidential? My experience leads me to believe that what is required is a carefully judged mixture of both. If these matters remain confidential, there will be little public pressure on the Russians for visible improvements. If everything is done in a blaze of publicity, the Soviet reaction will tend to be not to respond, out of pride and stubbornness. I think that it is right that Ministers should make clear to the House and the press that they have raised human rights issues with Soviet Ministers, but there will be occasions when the specific names mentioned will not be made public. And when we do make names public, we assure ourselves via those most closely connected with the persons concerned that the public mention of their names will not do them harm.

There will always have to be a strong element of coaxing on our approaches. The power we have in our hand is the potent one of example and of persuasion, but it does not go much beyond that. Occasionally, those who are impatient for results and anxious for early progress suggest that some way should be found to force the Russians to behave better—that we should not speak to them until there is a major improvement in their observance of human rights, or that we should not trade with them. Experience, however, shows that rigid linkage of that kind is an ineffective and unrealistic way of proceeding either in terms of our own interests or in the interests of those we are trying to help.

The successes that have been notched up, and I am thinking for instance of the major increase in the rate of permitted Jewish emigration in the 1970s, have coincided with periods of reduced international tension. We are now experiencing the lowest level of permitted Jewish emigration since the early 1970s. When the Soviet Union feels itself isolated, it has tended to treat its own citizens worse, not better. We should, therefore welcome recent signs of greater willingness on the part of the Russians at least to talk, because it is only through the process of increasing contact and a fuller mutual understanding that we can achieve the sort of East-West confidence that is likely to lead to better relationships and reduced tension. I believe that human rights will, in the long term, be the beneficiary of that.

Meanwhile, over human rights as much as any other part of the East-West agenda, we must show patience and persistence. We must not allow the subject to slip out of sight as relations with the East improve. It is not part of the Government's policy of pursuing better East-West relations to avoid the awkward issues. The Soviet Union's CSCE commitments remain, and we shall continue to remind it that we expect it it live up to these in their entirety. We shall continue to insist that progress must be made on all fronts, not simply selective ones. Advances on security or trade matters must not be at the expense of the human rights commitments. The fact that attention in the CSCE process this year has largely been on the conference on disarmament in Europe in Stockholm will be balanced next year by the undoubted considerable interest in this House and elsewhere in the human rights meeting in Ottawa. The latter will give the West good opportunity to make that principle clear in practice as well as theory.

My hon. and learned Friend mentioned the visit of Mr. Gorbachev to the United Kingdom. We look forward to that, as it is important in our relations with the Soviet Union. He asked me for an assurance that we would raise human rights issues during the visit. It is not our practice to indicate in advance the agenda for such visits. We shall bear in mind the issues that my hon. and learned Friend has raised.

Meanwhile, the Government will continue to plug away at this issue, to press for improvements in Soviet treatment of its Jewish community, and the other minority communities that suffer discrimination of one kind or another. We will do that not only because it is a most important part of the CSCE process that we should do so, and not only because common humanity compels us to do it. We shall continue to explain that the way that the Soviet authorities treat their citizens creates in itself a wider and real problem of trust and understanding in this country. If they wish us to accept the genuineness of their desire for peace and security, there would be no better earnest of their intentions than to show in the way that they treat their own citizens and especially those who wish to travel or to emigrate that their motives vis-a-vis their neighbours and the West are indeed peaceful and friendly.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-seven minutes to three o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 29 November 1984

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

NORTHERN IRELAND

Republic of Ireland (Constitutional Talks)

1. **Mr. Winnick** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what talks he intends to have with the Government of the Irish Republic concerning the constitution of Northern Ireland.

2. **Mr. Andrew Bowden** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent discussions he has had with Ministers from the Government of the Republic of Ireland.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Douglas Hurd): I had a meeting with Mr. Barry, the Foreign Minister of the Republic of Ireland, on 25 October, when I also met Mr. Noonan, the Minister for Justice. I met Mr. Barry again with other Ministers at the Heads of Government meeting on 18 and 19 November. These were useful occasions and I look forward to future meetings within the framework of the Anglo-Irish Inter-governmental Council. Such meetings do not affect the constitutional status of Northern Ireland.

Mr. Winnick: Does the Secretary of State appreciate the immense harm caused to Anglo-Irish relations by the Prime Minister's remarks after her meeting with the Irish Prime Minister? Would it not be wise for the right hon. Lady and the Secretary of State, who is new to the job, to realise the need for sensitivity? Is he aware that if mainstream Irish nationalism is treated with contempt the only gainers will be the Provisional IRA?

Mr. Hurd: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has already answered that question. The process of regular discussion and consultation between the two Governments, the giving and taking of advice, is very useful and important for all who are concerned with Northern Ireland.

Mr. Bowden: Will my right hon. Friend ignore the characteristically unhelpful comments of the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick)? Will he confirm that although the three proposals in the Forum report are not acceptable to the majority of Northern Ireland people, there is an opportunity for a unique relationship between the two sides and ourselves without impinging upon the spirit or the letter of the constitutional guarantee?

Mr. Hurd: My hon. Friend is exactly right. The Forum report is a stimulating document in which much common ground is revealed on issues such as consent and violence. Much has been said of the three possible solutions in the Forum report, but it leaves the door open to other possibilities.

Mr. McCusker: When the Secretary of State next meets Dublin Ministers, will he ask them to describe in detail the abject misery and nightmare existence which they allege is endured by hundreds of thousands of people in Northern Ireland for which he is responsible? What does the Secretary of State intend to do to remove the deprivation which, according to allegations made at the weekend, is suffered by hundreds of thousands of Northern Ireland people who are being denied basic political rights?

Mr. Hurd: I hope that we shall have the support of Unionist Members on both sides of the House in proving that the Province's institutions are there to serve all who live in the Province.

Mr. Peter Robinson: At the recent meeting with Mr. Barry, or at the summit, did the Secretary of State or the Prime Minister raise with representatives from the Republic of Ireland the arrogant, abusive and illegal claim of jurisdiction over Northern Ireland contained in articles 2 and 3 of the Republic of Ireland's constitution?

Mr. Hurd: No, Sir.

Ms. Clare Short: Does the Secretary of State admit that the only policy that the British Government have for Northern Ireland is desperately to keep the lid on it and that they have no solution to all the conflict, misery and death? Does he agree that Britain is simply willing to wait until some explosion occurs to force constructive action that will bring us to a long-term settlement?

Mr. Hurd: The hon. Lady cannot have read the communiqué from the summit or what has been said since. Her description of our policy is a travesty. On the one hand, for the reason that I have just given, we are searching for closer and more effective co-operation between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. Within the Province, a particular part of my job is to do my best to encourage those who are elected to represent the different traditions there to come together and to show that the institutions of the Province exist to serve all its inhabitants.

Mr. Dubs: While making every possible allowance for the Secretary of State's newness to his job, may I ask whether the right hon. Gentleman is not aware that his mind-boggling complacency will arouse the anger of many people who want to see a settlement of our difficulties in Northern Ireland? Does he realise — if not, is it not about time that he did so — that his speeches and the conduct of the Prime Minister are a stab in the back for the Prime Minister of the Republic and the hopes of many people for peace in both parts of Ireland?

Mr. Hurd: I am amazed that the hon. Gentleman, who is usually fair in his comments and criticism, should take up that theme. I shall, with great pleasure, send him the transcripts of the press conferences of both my right hon. Friend and myself, and with his usual fair-mindedness he can judge for himself. I am not in the least complacent —no member of the Government is—about the situation in the Province. The levels of violence are unacceptable, the levels of unemployment are deeply tragic and disturbing, and the political institutions are obviously not normal.

Mr. Archer: I welcome the Secretary of State to his first Northern Ireland Question Time since assuming his present high office. Has he grasped the catastrophic change in atmosphere which has taken place since the summit, with parties which were previously prepared to talk and exchange proposals now expressing bitterness and frustration, and with everyone adding his three penn'orth of petrol to the fire? Is the right hon. Gentleman not appalled at the fact that this change has stemmed from the crass insensitivity of the Prime Minister following the summit meeting, and is there any reason to hope for anything better from the February summit?

Mr. Hurd: I am glad that the right hon. and learned Gentleman mentioned the February summit, because there is work to be done along the lines that I indicated—but not altering the constitutional status of the problem—on which we need the co-operation of the Irish Republic. I do not agree with the rest of what he said. I refer the right hon. and learned Gentleman back to the communiqué issued after Chequers, which sets out the lines of work which the two Governments agreed to follow. That is what we are doing.

Devolution

3. **Mr. Maude** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he anticipates laying proposals for devolved government before the House as envisaged under the Northern Ireland Assembly Act 1982.

12. **Mr. Tim Smith** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on his recent round of talks with Northern Ireland party leaders.

Mr. Hurd: I have talked to the leaders of Northern Ireland constitutional parties twice in recent weeks and I have met the Assembly's Devolution Report Committee. All have said that they want to make progress and have shown some understanding of each other's anxieties. I shall continue to encourage them to build on these expressions of intent.

Progress will be made only when the parties reach common ground on a political framework for Northern Ireland which commands widespread acceptance throughout the community. This is, of course, the criterion laid down in the Northern Ireland Act 1982.

Mr. Maude: Will my right hon. Friend take every opportunity to impress upon the Unionist parties that it is in their interests, as well as in the wider national interest, to take all steps to encourage and to show greater generosity to those representatives of constitutional nationalism in the Northern Ireland community?

Mr. Hurd: I agree with my hon. Friend. When I took office and read the Ulster Unionist document "The Way Forward" I was struck with the following phrase:

"It is the responsibility of the majority to persuade the minority that the Province is also theirs".

People in the House and the country who follow these matters now wish to see what action the Unionist parties propose to take to bring this about.

Mr. Michael McNair-Wilson: Is my right hon. Friend ruling out any possibility of amending the Northern Ireland Assembly Act so that devolution can take place? If so, and as he has a breathing space, may I suggest that it might be useful to set up a commission — perhaps a Royal Commission — drawn from a wide spectrum of the community to consider the possibility of a better structure of local administration for the Province?

Mr. Hurd: I have no plans to bring forward to the House proposals to amend the Act, as I do not think that at this moment the possibilities are exhausted.

Rev. Martin Smyth: Does the Minister recognise, as I do, the signs of an incipient pantomime season in some of the statements from the Opposition today? Will he acknowledge that, despite Opposition Front Bench comments about parties being willing to talk, one significant party has not been prepared to come into the Assembly to talk? Does he appreciate that it is extremely difficult for the parties in the Assembly to come forward with plans unless those people are prepared to share with us in wrestling with the problems involved in finding a solution to Northern Ireland's constitutional issues?

Mr. Hurd: I understand that difficulty, but I think that the ingenuity of political leaders in the Province should find a way round it if they are to turn into reality the general professions that they have made in recent months.

Rev. William McCrea: Will the Secretary of State take the opportunity to impress upon the SDLP the need to talk to Unionist representatives of the Province instead of running to Dublin every other day?

Mr. Hurd: It is very important for all the constitutional parties in the Province at this particular time to find ways in which their leaders and members can discuss the problems of the Province together.

Sir John Biggs-Davison: Despite the comments of hon. Members opposite, is my right hon. Friend aware that we commend his restrained approach to these problems? Unlike his predecessors in office, however, will he avoid an absolute commitment to legislative devolution, because many of us, on both sides of the water, believe that Northern Ireland should be fully governed like any other part of the United Kingdom?

Mr. Hurd: I am certainly aware of that view and I have read the skilfully written pamphlet to which my hon. Friend and others have put their names.

Provisional Sinn Fein

4. **Mr. McCusker** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will proscribe Provisional Sinn Fein.

Mr. Hurd: I do not think that proscription is the right course at present, but the Government keep this under close review and would not hesitate to use the power if the circumstances warranted it. The absence of proscription confers no immunity on any individual members who commit terrorist acts.

Mr. McCusker: Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that that answer will disappoint many people in Northern Ireland and on the mainland, especially in the light of the comments made by the leader of Sinn Fein in the aftermath of the Brighton bombing? If he is not prepared to consider proscription, will he take up the suggestion made in Sir George Baker's recent report that a debate should take place in Northern Ireland about the possibility of banning from fighting elections parties that support violence?

Mr. Hurd: The practical difficulties of enforcing proscription would be very great. The propaganda advantage to the IRA would also be very great. I note the hon. Gentleman's second point, however, and I hope that it will not be too long before the House has the opportunity to debate the report of the late Sir George Baker and the Government's attitude to it.

Rev. Ian Paisley: The Secretary of State has banned one party—the IRA—but Sinn Fein is part of the IRA and in many areas the officers are synonymous. If, as he now says, a ban would not be effective, what is the point of banning the main organisation when he is not prepared to ban a section of it?

Mr. Hurd: People who commit illegal acts are liable to prosecution, whatever the organisation to which they belong. I believe that it is better to deal with terrorists by pursuing and prosecuting people for criminal offences that they commit rather than for the views that they hold or the organisations to which they belong.

Mr. Merlyn Rees: Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that it is absolutely right to proscribe organisations that are overtly paramilitary, dress up in paramilitary uniforms, carry weapons, and murder? Is he further aware that it was I who, despite the close connection between the two organisations, deproscribed the Provisional Sinn Fein, with other organisations, in 1974? I fully agree with him that if anyone in Provisional Sinn Fein is doing anything that is against the law the best way to deal with that person is to collect the evidence and put it before the courts. To do anything else would simply play into the hands of Provisional Sinn Fein, which, despite its activities, believes that it has a political view to put forward. Is not the only way to defeat it to defeat its political arguments?

Mr. Hurd: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his comments.

Mr. Maginnis: Is the Secretary of State aware that one Peter Sherry, who stood as a Sinn Fein candidate in a local government by-election, recently used his manifesto to forecast which people would be murdered, and three of those murders have already been carried out? In view of that misuse of the democratic procedures, will the right hon. Gentleman view more seriously and urgently the suggestion of my hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann (Mr. McCusker)?

Mr. Hurd: I know that the prosecuting authorities, as is right, carefully study any statements by Sinn Fein leaders and representatives to ascertain whether they would justify prosecution. I am sure that they will note the hon. Gentleman's comments.

Mr. Archer: Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that the best way to defeat paramilitaries is to remove the alienation and despair on which they feed? Will he make a start by relaxing those elements in the legal system which are destroying the confidence of many decent, law-abiding people, such as supergrass trials with overloaded indictments? When will the House have an opportunity to debate the Baker report?

Mr. Hurd: The matter raised by the right hon. and learned Gentleman falls clearly within the ambit of the Baker report. Obviously it is for my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House to say when the debate will take place, but I hope that it will not be delayed for too long.

Civil Defence

5. **Mr. Gerald Bowden** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made in Northern Ireland in the completion of local authority emergency planning and the raising and training of civil defence volunteers.

16. **Mr. Hayes** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the level of civil defence emergency planning in Northern Ireland.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Nicholas Scott): Northern Ireland is one of 11 home defence regions in the United Kingdom, and civil defence emergency planning in the Province is being developed along broadly the same lines as those in the rest of the United Kingdom. I am satisfied that reasonable progress is being made in developing preparedness in Northern Ireland.

The current legislation requiring local authorities in England and Wales to undertake emergency planning does not at present apply in the Province. Discussions have begun between the Northern Ireland Office and district councils on the latter's role in emergency planning, with a view to the introduction of similar legislation to that applying in England and Wales. These discussions will include the question of harnessing local voluntary effort.

Mr. Bowden: Does my right hon. Friend agree that there can be no effective civil defence in Northern Ireland unless and until emergency planning officers have been appointed at both county and district level?

Mr. Scott: The position in Northern Ireland is slightly different, in that under regional control, as we have no county organisation in Northern Ireland, there are four area organisations, which correspond to the health and social service area board organisations. Both the regional and area levels are under the control of my Department. We have made substantial progress in identifying plans and individuals who will fulfil those roles. Discussions along those lines are in progress with the district councils.

Mr. Hayes: Will my hon. Friend do all in his power to encourage the greatest and closest co-operation between the Northern Ireland radioactivity monitoring organisations and their equivalents in the Republic?

Mr. Scott: The United Kingdom warning and monitoring organisation, of which Northern Ireland is a part, exercises regularly. Volunteers and others from Northern Ireland regularly take part in exercises in co-operation with their counterparts in Great Britain.

Mr. Neil Thorne: What purpose-built buildings are available at regional and area level? Will my hon. Friend ensure that those buildings are adequate?

Mr. Scott: We have an intermediate programme for adapting certain buildings to be better able to provide for the purposes of civil defence. There is a provision over the period 1986 to 1988 for purpose-built buildings.

Milk Quotas

6. **Mr. Nicholson** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress he has made with the application of milk quotas in Northern Ireland.

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Dr. Rhodes Boyson): Forty per cent. of producers in Northern

Ireland have had their quotas confirmed. The remainder have submitted applications for special case or exceptional hardship treatment. Four local panels have dealt with almost all of the special cases initially referred to them. In addition, some 400 requests have been received for review by local panels following initial rejections by the Department and work is progressing on the consideration of these appeals.

The dairy produce quota tribunal has considered nearly 50 per cent. of the exceptional hardship claims received.

Mr. Nicholson: Is the Minister aware that Northern Ireland is the only part of the United Kingdom which at present stands to pay the super levy within the regulations? Will the Minister assure the House that no money will be collected from Northern Ireland dairy farmers or forwarded to Brussels until all appeals are heard, and until we are sure that all EEC countries will stand firm and carry out their part of the bargain?

Dr. Boyson: On the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question, the number of people who are prepared to be bought out as outgoers in Northern Ireland is less than in the rest of Great Britain. On his second point, on 20 November, in the House, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said that either all member states would collect the super levy or none would do so. She said:

"We shall not be in a position in which Britain keeps the rules while others do not."—[*Official Report*, 20 November 1984; Vol. 68, c. 143.]

Rev. Ian Paisley: Will the Minister give an assurance to the House that those who have won their cases before panels and tribunals will receive this extra allocation? Can they be sure that what has now been allocated to them will be received?

Dr. Boyson: That assurance cannot be given at present, because the panels and tribunals have been acting separately. We still do not know the amount of buy-out by the outgoers. The decision will have to be made to link the 3 per cent. which we hope we can distribute to the hardship and special cases with the number of claims. Until the whole matter is finished that assurance cannot be given.

Mr. Beggs: Will the Minister tell us what impact the cut in milk production has had on cheese production and the manufacture of products other than butter in Northern Ireland factories? Will at least some of the butter presently stored in the United Kingdom be made available cheaply in Northern Ireland to Northern Ireland consumers?

Dr. Boyson: I am aware that the hon. Gentleman's last point is of interest to many hon. Members. I cannot give the details of the effect on cheese and butter production, but I shall write to the hon. Member. The number of people employed in agriculture in Northern Ireland increased slightly last year. There are no signs of a decline.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels: Has my hon. Friend any details of the impact of milk quotas on employment in Northern Ireland?

Dr. Boyson: I am pleased that my hon. Friend asked that question, because it allows me to reiterate the fact that the number of people employed in agriculture in Northern Ireland increased last year. I am sure that all of us welcome that. There is no evidence that there has been any decline this year.

Flags

7. **Dr. Mawhinney** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he intends to introduce legislation to bring the Province into line with the rest of the United Kingdom with respect to the flying of flags.

Mr. Scott: We have no present plans to do so.

Dr. Mawhinney: Does my hon. Friend understand that his answer will cause grave disappointment to some of his hon. Friends and to the Unionists, who are always pressing Her Majesty's Government to treat the Province in exactly the same way as they treat the United Kingdom? At least in this instance, will he explain why the Government are treating the Province differently?

Mr. Scott: I am not without sympathy for the point that my hon. Friend puts forward. Perhaps I can clear up one misapprehension. It is not illegal to fly the tricolour in Northern Ireland, only to do so in circumstances likely to cause a breach of the peace. However, I understand that other legal powers are available to the police which enable them to act in those matters. My hon. Friend must recognise that this is a sensitive matter.

Mr. William Ross: Will the Minister confirm that when the flag of the Irish Republic is flown in Northern Ireland it is flown not as a friendly gesture to a neighbouring state but rather as a claim by the Irish Government to sovereignty over Northern Ireland? Will he also confirm that there are a number of councils in Northern Ireland, such as Londonderry, which do not allow the Union flag to be flown on any buildings over which they have control?

Mr. Scott: Of course, I understand that there are some circumstances where the Irish tricolour is used provocatively. There are also times, I imagine, in Northern Ireland when it is used to express the aspirations of one third of the community.

Mr. J. Enoch Powell: It is not a third.

Mr. Scott: The Government are pledged to respect the tradition of that one third of the population.

Mr. Archer: Is the Minister aware that many people in Northern Ireland will appreciate his answer? Does he not understand that the Flags and Emblems (Display) (Northern Ireland) 1954 Act is a gratuitous and pointless provocation to nationalist feeling and that repealing it would be a modest step towards the hope of restoring some progress through constitutional politics?

Mr. Scott: This is a sensitive matter. It is something that the Government will consider, but I cannot at this point commit myself to any definite action.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Can the hon. Gentleman tell the House on what he bases his allegation that a third of the people want to go into the Irish Republic? Recently, an outstanding Roman Catholic leader calling himself Father Paul said that not 20 per cent. of Roman Catholics would vote for a united Ireland.

Mr. Scott: I am not even sure that raising the tricolour necessarily demonstrates a wish to join the Republic. It indicates an aspiration—one might say a tradition—within Northern Ireland, to which we owe respect.

Gas Industry

8. **Mr. Nellist** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the future of the Northern Ireland gas industry.

Dr. Boyson: The Government announced on 6 September that the proposed Kinsale gas project would not proceed as it would not be economically viable for Northern Ireland. We have always made it clear that we could not continue to subsidise a gas industry that had no real prospects of viability; we have now asked towns gas undertakings in the Province to consider their position.

Mr. Nellist: Should not the Minister explain to the House that that decision directly affects the jobs of 1,200 workers in the gas industry and indirectly those of many hundreds more? It also affects services to over 68,000 households, which depend on gas as their sole source of energy. According to Coopers and Lybrand in 1981, the decision not to go ahead with that project and the implied dismantling of the gas system in Northern Ireland would cost £124 million. Should not the Minister explain the need for a fully nationalised gas industry and a commitment by the Government to the jobs of workers in that industry and to the services that they currently provide?

Dr. Boyson: The decision was made purely on economic grounds, in that what one spends on gas subsidy one cannot spend on other things. It is a question of preferences. At present, the subsidy for 3 per cent. of the energy used in the Province costs £12 million a year. No one appreciates more strongly than I do the concern for jobs in Northern Ireland, but there is a subsidy per man of £12,000. The decision was made purely because the heavy fuel cost with which the gas from the Republic of Ireland is linked rose tremendously in the past year, while the demand for gas by both domestic consumers and industry fell.

Rev. Martin Smyth: Will the Minister ensure that if the gas industry goes out of operation liquid gas will be considered, in order to compensate those users who wish to use it rather than turning to more expensive forms of heating?

Dr. Boyson: We have not closed any of the 13 gas enterprises in Northern Ireland. We have said only that we cannot continue with an open-ended subsidy, or any subsidy at all. If any of the towns gas operations can continue economically, they may do so with our blessing. If those companies decide that they must go out of business because of the costing, we shall have to consider the Government's responsibility in connection with alternative fuels and equipment, and what the hon. Gentleman has said will be taken into account.

Mr. Michael Brown: Following the collapse of the natural gas project, will my hon. Friend say whether there is any opportunity or likelihood of Northern Ireland overcoming its dependence on very high-cost energy sources?

Dr. Boyson: I am grateful for that question. Recently there has been a considerable discovery of lignite reserves in the Province. Northern Ireland's problem is that it has no native energy supply. However, hundreds of thousands of tons of lignite have been found, not only near Lough Neagh, but in four or five other areas of the Province. We hope in January to fire about 500 tons in the west Belfast power station, to find out whether lignite can be used for electricity generation.

Mr. Archer: Has the Minister read the report of the joint working group of the Northern Ireland gas employers board and the gas trade union group, which suggests an alternative project for saving the jobs? If he has not read it, will he undertake to do so if I send him a copy?

Dr. Boyson: I always welcome any gift from the right hon. and learned Gentleman, especially during the Christmas season. However, I have read the report, but neither we nor our advisers in the Department are convinced that the idea is economic. If it is economic and people want to do that they can—we are merely ending an open-ended subsidy.

Magherafelt High School

9. **Mr. Ross** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many mobile classrooms there are at Magherafelt high school.

Mr. Scott: Twelve, Sir.

Mr. Ross: Does the Minister agree that the large shift of population from Belfast to large new housing estates, and the need to build schools without extra funding in those areas has contributed to the large number of mobile classrooms at Magherafelt high school and other schools? Will he embark on a long-term programme to replace those hutments with permanent accommodation so that children can enjoy a proper standard of education and accommodation?

Mr. Scott: I accept that the large-scale use of temporary classrooms is unsatisfactory and should not be prolonged for any longer than is necessary. The provision of permanent accommodation must depend on the priority accorded to the different schemes by education and library boards and the availability of resources from the centre.

Rev. William McCrea: Does the Minister agree that a complex involving an infant school, a primary school, a high school and a college of further education on one small piece of ground in Magherafelt is inadequate and that it is time the board took further steps to get sufficient ground to meet the need?

Mr. Scott: The board has plans for the installation of rather more permanent accommodation. That has been approved since 1979, but so far no plans have been advanced. The matter depends on the priority accorded by the board to it in the forthcoming financial year.

Security

10. **Mr. Latham** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will make a statement on the security situation in Northern Ireland.

15. **Sir John Farr** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the current security situation in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Hurd: Since my predecessor last answered questions on 26 July, two policemen, three soldiers and nine civilians have died in incidents arising from the security situation in the Province. So far this year, the efforts of the security forces have resulted in 508 people

being charged with serious offences, including 40 with murder and 65 with attempted murder. In the same period, 188 weapons, 26,560 rounds of ammunition and 7,521 lb of explosives have been recovered. I pay tribute to the members of the security forces and the innocent civilians who have been tragically killed. I should like to pay tribute also to the dedication and bravery of all the security forces who work tirelessly to protect the people of Northern Ireland from violence.

Mr. Latham: As terrorist violence remains the greatest single issue affecting the United Kingdom, will my right hon. Friend confirm that improving cross-border co-operation with the Republic remains at the core of the Government's policy, whatever the ups and downs of our bilateral relations?

Mr. Hurd: Yes, Sir. My hon. Friend will have seen the passage in the communiqué which resulted from Chequers, in which both Governments committed themselves to maintain and, where possible, improve such co-operation.

Sir John Farr: I join my right hon. Friend in congratulating the security forces on the wonderful job that they are doing. Will he re-examine cross-border security and ensure that there is absolute unanimity about cross-border problems in regard to communications between the two sides?

Mr. Hurd: I agree that that is an important feature. Security policy in the Province is not static. We are constantly examining new ways in which the security forces can wear down and defeat the terrorists, but obviously we cannot talk about them.

Mr. Kilfedder: Although the battle against terrorism is vital to Northern Ireland, does the right hon. Gentleman agree that it is equally important to combat ordinary criminals in the Province? Will he take steps to persuade the Chief Constable to put more police into my constituency, where crime is on the increase?

Mr. Hurd: I shall ensure that the Chief Constable is made aware of the hon. Gentleman's comments.

Castlereagh (Development)

11. **Mr. Peter Robinson** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will consider a modest relaxation of planning law for development outside the Matthew stop line in the borough of Castlereagh.

Mr. Chris Patten: Such development would not require a change in planning law; however, it would not be in accordance with the approved development strategy for the Belfast urban area.

Mr. Robinson: Has the hon. Gentleman had the opportunity to read the statement issued by his predecessor, the hon. Member for Hampshire, North-West (Mr. Mitchell), issued on 10 August 1981, which said that the presumption should always be in favour of the application, particularly if job creation resulted? Will he review that and see what resistance there has been from divisional planning officers to the laudable sentiments in that statement of his predecessor?

Mr. Patten: I have read that statement, as I have read a number of other good statements by my predecessor, I do not believe that there is any resistance on the part of DPOs, but I take note of what the hon. Gentleman says. As he will be aware, we are about to respond to the Northern Ireland Assembly on planning policy in general.

Mr. William Ross: Does the hon. Gentleman not understand that the small relaxation sought would not meet the need in regard to planning law in Northern Ireland, and, in particular, in Castlereagh? Will he consider going much further and giving planning control to councils such as Castlereagh so that they can exercise that authority on behalf of all who live within the boundaries?

Mr. Patten: I shall not be able to do that next week. However, I shall soon be able to respond about planning and planning law in general in Northern Ireland. I hope that, once again, our views will be regarded by the hon. Gentleman as useful.

Apprenticeships

13. **Mr. A. Cecil Walker** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he has any plans for increasing existing skills through a programme of balanced apprenticeship training in Northern Ireland.

Dr. Boyson: Employers are basically responsible for determining numbers and training of apprentices. The Government, however, already support employers by providing extensive off-the-job training in 11 Government training centres and by funding the skill training scheme operated by the individual industrial training boards.

Mr. Walker: I thank the Minister for his sympathetic response to my question. Is he aware that Short Brothers provides the largest number of balanced apprenticeships in Northern Ireland? Does he agree that the acquisition of a contract for the Short's Tucano trainer would result in a further expansion of the number of apprenticeships available to young people in the Province?

Dr. Boyson: I am aware that anybody connected with Northern Ireland or Shorts would agree with the second part of that question. I visited the apprenticeship centre at Shorts this year and I am glad to say that there has been an increase from 65 apprentices last year to 118 this year. The Government are funding 20,000 young people in various training schemes. Indeed, in Government training centres more apprentices are being trained this year than last year.

Mr. Beggs: Does the Minister accept that the promotional literature being presented by Shorts is factually correct? Will he commend it to his colleagues in the United Kingdom whose constituencies could also benefit from the increased employment that would result from the supply of parts for that basic trainer if the contract goes to Shorts?

Dr. Boyson: I am sure that all hon. Members will pay close attention to what the hon. Gentleman has said and will mark his question in *Hansard* and circulate it around the United Kingdom.

Young Offenders

14. **Mr. Fatchett** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many young offenders sentenced to indefinite terms of imprisonment at the Secretary of State's pleasure were released in 1983.

Mr. Scott: Two, Sir.

Mr. Fatchett: I am delighted to hear that two have been released, but is it not now necessary for the Minister to recognise the plight of many others, all of whom, by definition, were committed for offences at a young age, many of whom are now opposed to political violence, and all of whom look forward to a date when they can be released from prison, which will give them some hope as individuals for the future?

Mr. Scott: I am aware of the strong feelings on both sides of the community in Northern Ireland on this matter. My primary concern must be the safety of the public, but it might help the hon. Gentleman to know that five cases that are subject to the Secretary of State's pleasure have been given release dates in 1985.

Rev. Ian Paisley: I welcome that announcement, but will the Minister bear in mind the great hardship that has occurred in those cases because the parents do not know the release date? If those people had been over age they would probably have been released long ago. Both parts of the political and religious divide are concerned about the matter. Will the Minister keep in mind the debate that was held in the Assembly on this issue?

Mr. Scott: I cannot envisage circumstances in which the penalty for murder can be other than an indeterminate sentence. However, I am aware of the pressures and uncertainties that many families of those young people suffer. I hope, in the not-too-distant future, to be able to issue guidance to the parents and to the prisoners, which should help to remove some of the uncertainty.

Coal Imports

17. **Mr. Skinner** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps have been taken to offset the increase in price of coal imported into Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

Dr. Boyson: None, Sir. Pricing is a matter for the coal trade. I expect prices to fall when normal supplies are resumed.

Mr. Skinner: Is the Minister aware that *The Daily Telegraph*, the Tory house magazine, of 21 August 1984 states that the people of Northern Ireland are having to pay £10 a tonne extra for domestic coal because they can no longer get cheap supplies from Britain? What is all the nonsense that we have heard for the past two years, with the Government saying that there is cheap coal abroad if only we could get at it? The truth is that the people of Northern Ireland, as well as the people in Great Britain, are having to suffer because of the Government's stupid policy of trying to run down British pits while importing dearer coal from abroad.

Dr. Boyson: I am sure that the whole House will welcome the news that the hon. Gentleman is a regular reader of *The Daily Telegraph*. One of the problems with coal supplies for Northern Ireland is that long-term contracts are made with the NCB but at present coal is having to be bought on spot markets round the world. Long-term contracts are not being made, so that coal can once again be bought from the NCB. The hon. Gentleman should welcome that.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Ray Powell** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 29 November.

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher): This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House I shall be meeting President Mitterrand in Paris this evening and shall attend a dinner to be given by the President at the Elysee.

Mr. Powell: This week we have heard a lot about the Prime Minister's speech on Monday night to the Carlton club on the subject of upholding the rule of law and the enemy within. Will she explain to the House and the nation why the Employment Act 1980 and the Shops Act 1950 should be treated entirely differently by her and her Ministers? Why does she allow the courts to treat the Employment Act in one way, with its harsh, obscene sequestration of trade union funds, while condoning blatant abuse of the Shops Act? Is——

Mr. Speaker: I ask the hon. Gentleman to be brief.

Mr. Powell: Is that not another example of the Tories' double standards?

The Prime Minister: Clearly, the hon. Gentleman would have profited if he had read the lecture in full. He might then have learnt that the law in this country is impartially administered. The courts are the servants of the law and not of the Government.

Mr. Stokes: Will the Prime Minister be good enough to give an assurance that if the House should be so foolish as to allow in television cameras the cost will not fall on the taxpayer?

The Prime Minister: I believe that the situation would be the same as that in the other place, and that no extra money would be provided for televising the House, should it decide to allow televising of its proceedings. But in one way the BBC licence fee is raised automatically by the amount that the Government decide on, having received all the representations. People have no option but to pay it if they wish to receive television broadcasts.

Mr. Kinnock: Yesterday the Chancellor of the Exchequer admitted that unemployment was higher than the Government had assumed or expected. In the light of that, what possible justification can there be for taking away £340 million of regional job development money or for allowing the closure of one third of Britain's skillcentres?

The Prime Minister: I do not know whether the right hon. Gentleman heard the statement on regional policy yesterday, or read it. If he had done so he would have learnt the answer to his question, which is that the changes in regional policy are designed to obtain better value for the money that is spent in the regions and to ensure that it is directly related to the number of jobs that are anticipated. It would seem much better to relate it to job creation than to capital allowances, which could give a subsidy towards replacing jobs with machinery. I doubt whether the right hon. Gentleman would be in favour of that.

Mr. Kinnock: Not only did I hear the utterly unconvincing statement yesterday, which is a betrayal of regional interest, but I looked at reactions to it this morning. Is the Prime Minister aware of criticism of it from the Confederation of British Industry, the Trades Union Congress, trainers, managers and employers? When today's unemployment figures stand at a November record of 3,223,000, why does the right hon. Lady still want to hit simultaneously at investment, employment and training? What makes her insist on destroying the means of people, regions and firms to help themselves to get work?

The Prime Minister: If the right hon. Gentleman heard the statement he will know that the average cost per job is £35,000, which seems a high cost for creating jobs. I should have thought that he was keen on getting better value for money. Indeed, he said as much in a speech on 6 October 1983, when he spoke about Labour party policy. He said:

"We plan to get the maximum advantage out of that expenditure and we very much do want value for money because it is our money."

That is our policy, and I am delighted to have his support for it.

Mr. Kinnock: We want better value for money and better jobs for money. The Prime Minister wants neither.

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman is speaking nonsense. If he wants better value he will get it from the way that we are going. If he wants better and more jobs, will he stop supporting the miners' strike?

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: In seeking to assist my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, may I ask her to assure us, especially 130 of her colleagues who will not accept the decision of the Secretary of State for Education and Science, that he will not be allowed to phase out the minimum maintenace grant and, for the first time in nearly a quarter of a century, to charge fees for higher education courses?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend will be aware from the autumn statement that this year money for education has been increased by £140 million. There are many demands on funds and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science has followed some of the demands made previously in the House that more should be given to science. Part of the money that comes from the change in student awards goes to increasing the sum spent on the science budget. In the next two years £10 million will go towards improving laboratories and equipment, and in each of the next two years £14 million will go to enable the research councils to undertake more high quality research projects. My hon. Friend will know that 100,000 families will not make any contribution to students' grants. He will also know that we have the most generous system of student grants——

Mr. Winterton *indicated dissent.*

The Prime Minister: If one lived in Japan it would be lower, in Sweden it would be lower, and in the United States it would be very much less generous.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I ask the House not to shout and laugh when the Prime Minister is answering questions, because when that happens I cannot hear her, and neither can anyone else.

Mr. Steel: Given today's disgraceful unemployment figures, how does the Prime Minister expect students to find part-time jobs, as recommended by the Secretary of State for Education and Science, to finance their education?

The Prime Minister: As the right hon. Gentleman knows, many of them frequently do. In addition to the £700 million that taxpayers give towards student grants, there is also an extra amount of about £100 million that is not taken into account in that figure for housing benefit and supplementary benefit in the recesses.

Q2. **Mr. Lofthouse** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 29 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Lofthouse: Is the Prime Minister aware that yesterday's statement on regional policy will have a devastating effect on many communities? Is she further aware that it is another kick in the teeth for the mining communities, especially in west Yorkshire and the Castleford travel-to-work area — [HON. MEMBERS: "Why?"] If hon. Members listen I shall tell them. Is the Prime Minister aware that if she has no plan to assist those areas we shall have a continuation of the unfortunate incidents that have occurred in my constituency during the past week, and that she will be held responsibile?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman is talking nonsense, and he knows it. How he dares to say that in a week during which—long before the announcement was made—we have seen violence at a level and of a pitch that we never expected to see in this country is a mystery. If the hon. Gentleman wants the maximum number of jobs from the expenditure of money, he should approve of a system that links the subsidies to the jobs created. It would be ridiculous to link it to anything else.

Mr. Robert Banks: Will my right hon. Friend reflect on the traffic chaos last night caused by the student demonstration on Westminster bridge? Does she agree that the organisers of such demonstrations not only cause enormous irritation and inconvenience to the general public, but prevent the emergency services, doctors and surgeons from getting through to people whose lives may be at risk? Should not court fines reflect the gravity of those circumstances?

The Prime Minister: I believe that it was a disgraceful demonstration, which stopped traffic, ambulances and fire engines, and undermined any sympathy that some people may have for the students. *[Interruption.]* I repeat that no students anywhere in the world are treated more generously than British students. In Sweden and Japan they would receive loans, and in many other countries they would receive part loans and part grants. Britain has the most generous student grants in the world, and such demonstrations undermine the faith of those of us who have continued to give student grants.

Mr. Foot: How does the Prime Minister conceivably justify the withdrawal of special area assistance from the areas that have already been hardest hit under her Government? Why does she show such enthusiasm for this measure of combined stupidity and meanness?

The Prime Minister: As the right hon. Gentleman knows, the total available for regional aid covers a larger area than it did previously — *[Interruption.]* Not so much will be given to special development areas, but there were many problems in those parts of the country which were just outside development areas, especially in the west midlands. The regional grants cover a wider area and make grants available to more people. They also link the grants to the number of jobs created. I should also point out to the right hon. Gentleman that the Government, by knocking off the national insurance surcharge, have probably done more for jobs than any other Government.

Q3. **Mr. Bellingham** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 29 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some minutes ago.

Mr. Bellingham: Did my right hon. Friend hear about the corporation dust cart that screeched to a halt outside a Scottish bank yesterday morning, whereupon the driver leapt out and placed his application for British Telecom shares at five minutes to 10? Is it not good news for Britain that at the beginning of next week probably over 1 million more people will become first-time share owners? Does she agree that one of the things that riles Labour Members is that many of those new shareholders will be Labour supporters, who have ignored threats of renationalisation?

The Prime Minister: Yes, the denationalisation of British Telecom will bring many people into share ownership and independence for the first time. The Labour party cannot tolerate that, because it wants people to be under its thumb and not to be independent with their own shares and their own homes.

Mr. Benn: Has the Prime Minister's attention been drawn to the case of Brenda Greenwood, the first miner's wife to be thrown into prison for voicing her opposition to pit closures? Is she aware that her attempts to crush and criminalise all opposition will fail in Britain, as it did in pre-war Germany?

The Prime Minister: Unlike pre-war Germany, this country has a totally independent system of the rule of law. *[Interruption.]* I would have hoped, if it is not a forlorn hope, that one day the right hon. Gentleman and the Opposition would totally condemn violence and see that the violence on the picket line and the violence perpetrated in the name of this strike is stopped. From the fact that they do not we shall draw our own conclusion — that they wish to continue the strike by that method.

Business of the House

3.31 pm

Mr. Neil Kinnock (Islwyn): May I ask the Leader of the House whether he will state the business of the House for next week?

The Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Biffen): Yes, Sir. The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 3 DECEMBER—Second Reading of the Local Government Bill (1st Day). Motion on the European Community Document 5937/1/84 on social regulations on tachographs and drivers' hours.

TUESDAY 4 DECEMBER — Completion of Second Reading of the Local Government Bill. Motion on European Community Documents 7805/84 and 9613/84 on the lead content of petrol and motor vehicle emissions.

WEDNESDAY 5 DECEMBER—Debate on a motion to approve the intention of Her Majesty's Government to sign the draft agreement on the future of Hong Kong, Cmnd. No. 9352.

THURSDAY 6 DECEMBER — Debate on a motion to approve the Chancellor of the Exchequer's "Autumn statement". Completion of remaining stages of the Elections (Northern Ireland) Bill.

FRIDAY 7 DECEMBER—Private Members' motions.

MONDAY 10 DECEMBER — Second Reading of the Representation of the People Bill. Motion on the Local Government (Interim Provisions) Act 1984 (Appointed Day) Order.

[Relevant Documents:

Monday 3 December

(a) 5937/1/84—Draft Social Regulations relating to road transport and recording equipment.

Tuesday 4 December

(b) 7805/84 — Draft Directives on lead content of petrol and vehicle emissions.

(c) 9613/84—Amendment to draft Directives on lead content of petrol.

Relevant Reports of European Legislation Committee:

(a) HC 78-xxxiii (1983-84) para. 2.

(b) HC 78-xxxiv (1983-84) para. 2.

(c) HC 5-ii (1984-85) para. 1.]

Mr. Kinnock: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman. I am sure that the Prime Minister will be making a statement after next week's EEC summit. However, will the right hon. Gentleman ensure that the House will be able to debate the results of the summit in Government time the following week?

The right hon. Gentleman will know that yesterday's High Court ruling by Mr. Justice Hodgson throws doubt on the legality of the £120 million order granting supplementary finance to the Common Market. What do the Government intend to do about the order? May we have an assurance that none of the money has been paid to the Common Market in advance of parliamentary approval, as I know that the right hon. Gentleman is particularly vigilant about these affairs?

In next Monday's debate on the local government legislation, will the Secretary of State for the Environment be announcing an independent audit into the cost of abolishing the metropolitan counties and the Greater London council as recent responsible estimates put the cost at £1,000 million for that abolition?

May I ask for additional time for two debates—first, on Monday week, on the Local Government (Interim Provisions) Act 1984 (Appointed Day) Order, and secondly, on Wednesday next, on the motion to approve the Government's intention to sign the draft agreement on the future of Hong Kong?

Will the Leader of the House tell us what arrangements he has made for a debate on the subjects raised in early-day motions Nos. 161 and 162, since clearly they have aroused the interest of 148 of his right hon. and hon. Friends as well as of all right hon. and hon. Members on the Opposition Benches and of a very large number of people outside?

[That, in the opinion of this House, access to first degree courses should not be inhibited by the level of parental contribution in respect of student fees and maintenance.]

[That this House, recognising that the United Kingdom has one of the smallest percentages of 18-year-olds entering higher education of any Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development country, concerned at the United Kingdom's inadequate levels of skilled manpower and believing in education as a ladder of opportunity for all young people of ability, regards the proposed large increases in parental contributions as misconceived and of a severity which will make it difficult if not impossible for many families to pay the full contribution; and calls for policy on student grants and fees to be totally reviewed rather than subject to repeated piecemeal adjustments.]

Mr. Biffen: Of course, I note the anxiety of the right hon. Gentleman that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister should report to the House after the European Community Summit meeting. The possibility of a debate is a matter that we can consider further through the usual channels.

The right hon. Gentleman asked about the payment of funds to the Community, which has been the subject of judicial comment. This is now being studied, and I shall ensure that the House is informed when I am in a position to do so.

I am afraid that I cannot anticipate the content of the speech of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment in Monday's Second Reading debate. But I shall draw to my right hon. Friend's attention what the right hon. Gentleman said about the audit.

The right hon. Gentleman requested extra time to debate the motion on the Local Government (Interim Provisions) Act 1984 (Appointed Day) Order and in respect of the proposed Hong Kong agreement. I hope that I shall be able to accommodate him on both.

Finally, the right hon. Gentleman made a good-natured inquiry about the early-day motions on student grants signed by a number of my right hon. and hon. Friends. I am sure that it will not have escaped the right hon. Gentleman's notice that the matter is referred to in "The Autumn Statement" by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer and will be appropriate for reference in the course of Thursday's debate.

Mr. Jonathan Aitken (Thanet, South): Will my right hon. Friend assure the House that there will be an opportunity for a full debate on the miners' strike before the House goes into the Christmas Recess? I am sure that he will agree that there have been many important

developments, including the increasing flow back to work of miners and today's schism in the NUM executive, which the House should debate as soon as possible.

Mr. Biffen: I understand my hon. Friend's interest that there should be a debate on the miners' strike. It is almost certain that the business of the House will provide a chance for some reference to be made to it. However, at this stage I cannot in any sense guarantee that there will be a full day's debate in Government time.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Has the Leader of the House seen the motions in the names of my right hon. and hon. Friends on regional aid? When will these and all the issues of the statement by the Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry be debated, and when shall we be able to question the Minister on his inability to understand where the unemployment is?

Mr. Biffen: I have noted the action that the hon. Gentleman has taken in respect of these orders, and I realise that the House will want to debate the Government's regional policy and the orders. I shall ensure that such a debate will be held as soon as it can be reasonably arranged.

Mr. Michael Latham (Rutland and Melton): To save the time of the House, will my right hon. Friend confirm that he could avoid a debate on early-day motion No. 162 if the Secretary of State for Education and Science withdrew his proposal and responded to the feelings of many right hon. and hon. Members on this matter?

Mr. Biffen: It is not for me to confirm that there would be such a neat mechanical relationship between one gesture and another. But if my hon. Friend wants to make his point at greater length, he will have his chance on Thursday.

Mr. Michael Foot (Blaenau Gwent): The Leader of the House will have seen the furious protest from the Opposition Benches when the statement about regional policy was made yesterday. He will also have seen that demands were made by the Opposition on behalf of people in all parts of the country pressing for a debate on the subject before the Government proceed with this monstrous measure. May we be assured not merely that we shall have one day's debate but that there will be a full debate covering all these matters? Some of us represent parts of the country where there is between 20 and 25 per cent. unemployment. The Government's proposals mean that even the aid that we are getting at present will be cut. That is what the Government are doing, and we want to debate it fully.

Mr. Biffen: I tried to give a reasonably forthcoming answer to the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) when he put that point to me. I accept the passion that the right hon. Gentleman invests in this topic. He is right to say that many hon. Members from all parts of the House wish for an early debate. I shall do my best to discharge that requirement.

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): Does my right hon. Friend realise that unless there is a helpful statement from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science some of us might find it rather difficult to support the Government on Thursday?

Mr. Biffen: It it is very kind of my hon. Friend thus to inform me. I only hope that he informs his Whips with the same charm privately as he does me publicly.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that the debate on the Hong Kong issue on Wednesday will be an historic occasion and that a great many hon. Members will wish to speak? Did I understand him to say earlier that he would provide additional time for that debate?

Mr. Biffen: I am happy to confirm the premise of the hon. Gentleman's point. It will, indeed, be an historic debate. In response to a request by the Leader of the Opposition, I said that we would extend the time for debate to midnight. Legislation on that matter will be forthcoming, so those unlucky on Wednesday will have their opportunity when we discuss the legislation.

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Bristol, East): Will my right hon. Friend find time for a full debate on the law of the sea convention prior to 10 December, by which time, if we do not sign it, we will lose our pioneer investor status?

Mr. Biffen: I do not necessarily agree with the reflection of my hon. Friend in making his request. There will be an Adjournment debate on that very topic next week, initiated by my hon. Friend the Member for Bexleyheath (Mr. Townsend). Perhaps my hon. Friend would get in touch with him.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Regarding Question Time, is the Leader of the House aware that 40 minutes for foreign affairs, including the EEC, is somewhat inadequate? Is he making any progress in doing something about that?

Is the right hon. Gentleman further aware that yesterday 145 questions were tabled to the Prime Minister for answer in two weeks' time? As it is becoming a running farce, is it possible for the usual channels to consider the suggestion that anyone who wants to table a question to the Prime Minister must go to the Table Office to do so?

Mr. Biffen: Any attempt to reform Prime Minister's Question Time would be such a fundamental change in the culture of this place that it would best be undertaken by the Procedure Committee.

On the hon. Gentleman's first point, I regret to say that I have already replied to him with a buck-passing answer suggesting that the matter be referred to the usual channels.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Did my right hon. Friend see reports that stated that one in three applicants for British Telecom shares failed to fill in the form correctly? Will he therefore arrange for our right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science to come to the House at an early stage to answer calls from Conservative Members not to reduce student grants because the level of education obviously needs to be kept up?

Mr. Biffen: I must say, that is very good—nine out of 10. If my hon. Friend starts with the premise of the circumstances of the applications for British Telecom shares, I should prefer him to stay with that and reflect on what a resounding success it was.

Mr. Robert Kilroy-Silk (Knowsley, North): Given the depth and scale of unemployment, poverty and destitution experienced by the people of Merseyside, will the Leader

[Mr. Robert Kilroy-Silk]

of the House arrange for a debate on Merseyside so that we can specifically identify those aspects of Government policy that are clearly responsible for the present problems, and discuss what, if any, proposals the Government have to ameliorate them?

Mr. Biffen: I do, of course, understand the deep social and economic problems on Merseyside and the way in which the hon. Gentleman has intimately identified himself with them. Given the constraints on Government time, I hope that the point that he wishes to make can be made during the debate on regional policy that has been promised.

Mr. Tony Speller (Devon, North): Is my right hon. Friend aware that as a result of the Government's policy announced yesterday, the need for a debate on regional policy is more than ever urgent? Is he further aware that only today I heard that 30 new jobs were cancelled in Ilfracombe, which has lost its status because of the Government's ill-considered thinking.

Mr. Biffen: I thank my hon. Friend for that trailer to his intended contribution to the debate on regional policy.

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): In view of the authoritarian ideas developed in the Prime Minister's speech at the Carlton Club, will the right hon. Gentleman organise a full-scale debate in the new year so that we may consider not only the Glorious Revolution of 1688 to which the Prime Minister referred, but the 1640 revolution which established parliamentary democracy and parliamentary Government in Britain?

May we also consider the Acts of Parliament that have been abolished, such as the Combination Acts about which the Prime Minister was careful not to talk? May we have such a debate so that the nation knows that there is a real feeling in the country for fighting for basic democratic rights which were completely ignored by the Prime Minister in her speech which, incidentally, I read in full?

Mr. Biffen: I have many responsibilities at the Dispatch Box, but I shall neither seek nor undertake the task of correcting the hon. Gentleman's misconceptions about British parliamentary, economic and social history. I can tell him that those who fought for parliamentary liberties in the 17th century did not do it by resorting to rent-a-mob tactics.

Mr. Heffer: No—civil war.

Mr. Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): In view of the Government's repeated statements about the need to uphold the courts of the land, why was the Leader of the House not able to give the Leader of the Opposition an absolute assurance that he would remove from the Order Paper the order for supplementary payments to the Common Market until the courts have determined the validity of the order, in the light of Mr. Justice Hodgson's decision yesterday? Will he at least make a statement saying that there is no question of any money being sent until the courts have declared this order to be valid.

Mr. Biffen: It would be absurd if I removed that order from the Order Paper, thus anticipating a judgment which has not yet been made. I gave a forthright reply to the Leader of the Opposition. I stand by that reply and do not intend to add to it.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Will the Leader of the House consider making proposals to improve public access and facilities for lobbyists in this building? Is he aware that in the past few weeks elderly lobbyists have been forced to wait outside in the cold and rain before being allowed in? Is he further aware that there are no refreshment facilities for people who are not in the company of a Member of Parliament, and that the facilities for disabled people are poor?

Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that on 8 November people in wheelchairs were forced to wait in the cold of Westminster hall and were not allowed into the Central Lobby until I made arrangements? Is not the way that members of the public are treated when they try to come to the House disgraceful? May we have some sensible plans for allowing the public into the building?

Mr. Biffen I think that the whole question of lobbying could properly be considered by the Accommodation and Administration Sub-Committee of the House of Commons (Services) Committee. I accept that the matter should be further considered. If the hon. Gentleman submits his evidence, I shall draw it to the Committee's attention.

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): My right hon. Friend my be slightly wearied by the fact that I keep asking him when the Government will make a statement on the disposal of nuclear waste in Cleveland. Is my right hon. Friend aware that I have raised the subject 13 months in a row but that the Government keep shying away? The patience of the people of Cleveland is wearing very thin, Sir. Will my right hon. Friend please do his best for us?

Mr. Biffen: I shall do my best. I shall draw the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment to the plea that my hon. Friend has made yet again today. I know of his deep concern for the part of the world in which he lives. I appreciate why he wishes to draw my attention to it.

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): Is the Leader of the House aware that the Secretary of State for Scotland held a press conference in Edinburgh this afternoon to announce that he was refusing the legitimate demand of Scottish teachers for an independent inquiry into their pay and conditions of service? Will the right hon. Gentleman convey the anger of the House to the Secretary of State and tell him that we believe that he is treating the House with contempt, as he has many times before, by holding press conferences in Scotland instead of coming here to make statements to the House. Will he insist that the Secretary of State makes a statement next week so that we may question him?

Mr. Biffen: Of course I shall refer to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland the point that the hon. Gentleman has just raised. I would not for a moment seek to get involved in controversies of a Scottish character, but my first reaction is that it cannot be entirely reprehensible that my right hon. Friend should try to do something in Edinburgh which relates to Scottish education.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): As my right hon. Friend knows, there is a healthy majority for "The Autumn Statement", but on the other hand there is no majority in the House for the ill-thought-out proposals on parental contributions. Would it not be sensible to have a

separate debate on this issue so that it could be consigned to the political dustbin at the earliest possible opportunity before it causes an immense amount of damage?

Mr. Biffen: Perhaps providentially, this week's business enables my hon. Friend to make a powerful speech and judge his conscience.

Mr. Eddie Loyden (Liverpool, Garston): The Leader of the House will be aware of today's lobby in relation to the drug Debendox. In view of the sympathy for those women and given that many people believe that their justified claims are being disregarded by the drug companies, will the Leader of the House ask his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services to make a statement, and will he also consider the possibility of a short debate?

Mr. Biffen: I shall most certainly undertake to put that request.

Mr. Roger King (Birmingham, Northfield): In view of the national importance of tomorrow's Stoke-on-Trent summit between the Leader of the Opposition and the leader of the NUM, will my right hon. Friend urgently find time next week to discuss the outcome?

Mr. Biffen: Plenty of other agencies seeking the spread of truth and illumination will, I believe, do that task for us in an extra-parliamentary fashion.

Mr. Greville Janner (Leicester, West): In the light of the growth of sweatshops associated with the outrageously high level of unemployment together with low income and the Government's apparent intention to repeal the wages councils regulations, and in view of the Government's refusal to provide enough funds for the Health and Safety Executive to do its job, when may we have a debate on this matter? As the unemployment level in some parts of Leicester is more than 50 per cent. and that the number of sweatshops is growing, surely this is a matter which demands the attention of the entire House.

Mr. Biffen: The hon. and learned Gentleman has raised this matter with me in the past, and I must again give him the same somewhat narrow reply. This is a topic in respect of which the hon. and learned Gentleman could well try his luck for an Adjournment debate.

Dr. Alan Glyn (Windsor and Maidenhead): Is the Leader of the House aware that last night's demonstration impeded the progress of hon. Members to the House of Commons, and is not that contrary to the Sessional Orders passed by this House?

Mr. Biffen: That may be so, and it touches on the fairly wide lobbying issue raised by the Hon. Member for Islingto, North (Mr. Corbyn). Feelings run in a variety of directions as to how best we can deal with this matter in the future.

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): The answer which the right hon. Gentleman gave to his hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor) was extraordinary. It is unusual when a court has judged that a particular ruling is not in order to find that the order is still on the Order Paper of the House of Commons. The matter is still be be determined, and surely in that interim period it ought to be withdrawn.

Mr. Biffen: No, it stands there pending clarification of the situation.

Mr. Alan Howarth (Stratford-on-Avon): Will my right hon. Friend arrange for a general debate on the structure of taxation? If the Chancellor is contemplating the introduction of significant changes in the structure of taxation, many hon. Members would be glad if, while he is still developing his thinking, he had an opportunity to listen to the views of the House.

Mr. Biffen: I think that that is a very bad idea. We are getting to the stage where there is intense public debate before Budget decisions. That public debate is being conducted in such a highly lobbyist fashion as to inhibit the proper independence of judgment that a Chancellor should exercise in the vital months before his Budget.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): As the inquiry by the five accountants headed by Cooper and others—[HON. MEMBERS: "Lybrand."] No, that is his name. As that inquiry into the affairs of the National Coal Board in the last few months shows that pits have been closed and threatened with closure on the basis of false accounting procedures—for example, Cortonwood was supposed to be losing £6 per tonne when proper accounting procedures show that it is making a profit of £5 per tonne—and as the closure of pits means that there are fewer left to take on all the overheads for subsidence, and so on, is it not high time that the Government arranged for a debate on the mining industry or for a statement from the Secretary of State for Energy? If the Secretary of State is a seeker after truth, he will wish to ensure that we know everything about the NCB accounts and that the report is published in full rather than held back by the NCB in an attempt to hoodwink the taxpayer?

Mr. Biffen: The hon. Gentleman will appreciate that we had a three-hour debate on the coal industry last week and I believe that it was a lively and constructive debate. I will, of course, draw the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy to the points raised by the hon. Gentleman, but I cannot hold out the prospect of an early debate on the industry.

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): In view of the natural apprehension of many people, especially the old, that the BBC may apply for an increase of almost 50 per cent. in the television licence fee, bringing it to about £70, and in view of the rapidly changing structure of British broadcasting, will my right hon. Friend discuss with my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary the possibility of an early debate on the future financing of British broadcasting?

Mr. Biffen: I shall certainly make that request to my right hon. and learned Friend. Meanwhile, I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Surbition (Mr. Tracey) will realise that any change in the licence fee is subject to the negative resolution procedure, so it would almost certainly be debated in the House.

Mr. Eric Deakins (Walthamstow): Why has the Foreign Secretary not yet made a statement to the House this week about the outcome of the recent meeting of EEC Foreign Ministers, bearing in mind that it was the last meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers before the summit and that the so-called guidelines on budget discipline were considered in the full knowledge that they had not been and would not be approved by the Council of Agriculture Ministers?

Mr. Biffen: I will most willingly draw the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs to that point.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels (Leicester, East): Before Monday week's debate on the Second Reading of the Representation of the People Bill, will my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House draw the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary to the widespread concern about the risk of personation not only in Northern Ireland, which is dealt with in the Elections (Northern Ireland) Bill, but throughout the United Kingdom? As personation has also occurred in various cities in Great Britain, could discussions take place with a view to some kind of submission being put forward for the debate on Monday week so that electors in the rest of the United Kingdom can be protected from electoral abuse?

Mr. Biffen: I shall, of course, draw the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary to that point.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): In view of next week's debates, Mr. Speaker, may I be the first to wish you a Merry Christmas? Will the Leader of the House say whether the "appointed day" order is in fact the abolition of GLC and metropolitan county council elections? If that is what it is, how long will Parliament have to debate that fundamental attack on local democracy?

Mr. Biffen: I have responded to the Leader of the Opposition on this and I have said that additional time will be made available. It is hoped that the debate will last three hours.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I shall call the two hon. Gentlemen who have been rising in their places, but we must then move on.

Mr. Jerry Hayes (Harlow): I understand that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment has issued a consultative document on dog licence reform and that only one dog-eared copy is available in the Library to hon. Members. That document is not available in the Vote Office. Will my right hon. Friend ensure that copies of this document are made available in the Vote Office?

Mr. Biffen: I shall look into the matter.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Will the Leader of the House reconsider his reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner)? Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that those five accountants have challenged every economic and financial assumption made by the National Coal Board? The document they have produced is important and deserves a statement to be made on the Floor of the House. Will the right hon. Gentleman ensure that next week we shall receive that statement, because that will help us to challenge statements that have been made by the Government during the past months?

Mr. Biffen: Actually, I gave a very forthcoming reply to the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), who half nods his head at that remark. I said that I would refer the matter to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy, and I cannot go beyond that.

Supplementary Benefit (Board and Lodging)

4 pm

The Secretary of State for Social Services (Mr. Norman Fowler): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement on changes I am proposing in the system for making board and lodging payments under the supplementary benefit scheme. I have referred these proposals to the Social Security Advisory Committee for it to report its views to me after a process of consultation. Copies of the consultative document are available in the Vote Office.

Supplementary benefit expenditure on board and lodging is escalating. During 1983 it rose from £205 million a year to £380 million a year. My latest information suggests that unless action is taken expenditure will grow by a further 50 per cent. each year during 1984 and 1985. No responsible Government can allow expenditure to increase in this way unchecked. As an immediate measure of cost control, I laid before the House on 22 November regulations which will empower me to impose a temporary freeze on the existing local limits governing board and lodging payments. These regulations will be debated soon. They will be replaced by new arrangements which will come into operation in early 1985, following the consultative process.

There is particular concern about the growing number of young people receiving board and lodging payments, especially those spending long periods on benefit in seaside resorts. The number of such people aged 25 and under went up by 60 per cent. during 1983. The increasing evidence of abuse makes it essential to move quickly to bring ordinary board and lodging expenditure under control.

As far as residential homes and nursing homes are concerned, I welcome the contribution which the many good establishments make. However, the present system of paying for such care under the supplementary benefit scheme does not discriminate adequately between homes for different types of resident or patient. Furthermore, it is difficult to see why the charges for residential care homes for the elderly met for supplementary benefit claimants should vary from £51 a week in one part of the country to £215 a week in another. We must move to a system in which there is less variation throughout the country.

My consultative document proposes several changes. The responsibility for setting the maximum amounts of benefit payable will be transferred to Ministers. For ordinary board and lodging accommodation, the existing locally determined limits will be replaced by two new limits—one for the Greater London area and another for the rest of the country. I am also proposing limiting the eligibility of 16 and 17-year-olds to claim board and lodging payments in their own right. We shall also prevent young people from setting up in long-term board and lodging accommodation, but we shall safeguard the position of the genuine job searcher.

I am proposing a new structure of national limits for payments in the residential care and nursing home sector. These new limits will be designed to reflect the varying cost of providing different types of care. There is no question, however, of elderly, handicapped or disabled

people being moved out of their existing accommodation, and their position will be protected. At the same time, I am proposing that attendance allowance should be taken into account in assessing claims for supplementary benefit from people in private and voluntary residential care and nursing homes.

Subject to the process of consultation I have mentioned, I propose bringing regulations before the House in February next year with a view to implementing new arrangements in April 1985. I shall be monitoring the new arrangements closely after implementation and will not hesitate to produce further changes if these seem necessary. I shall be considering also alternative approaches in the light of the current review of the supplementary benefit scheme.

The supplementary benefit scheme is there to help people in need. The Government are committed to that. We are equally committed to our policy of care in the community. So we shall continue to meet the needs of the elderly, handicapped or disabled people, but we are equally determined to make sure that the supplementary benefit scheme is not abused or exploited. I am determined that we should no longer make unjustified board and lodging payments. I therefore give this warning: if claimants do not need board and lodging accommodation, or if the charges are too high, the supplementary benefit scheme will no longer pick up the bill.

Mr. Michael Meacher (Oldham, West): Is the Secretary of State aware that, although we accept that new consultative proposals are clearly needed, we note that the problems with which they are designed to deal result entirely from the Government's reckless folly in pursuing an orgy of privatisation of residential and nursing care at the taxpayers' expense, which got completely out of hand? Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that a year ago, in November 1983, the Government deliberately opened the floodgates for commercial exploitation by removing the limit then existing on board and lodgings charges and by substituting charges which, according to paragraph 6 of the DHSS supplementary benefit handbook,

"represent the highest reasonable charge for board and lodging suitable for claimants in the particular type of accommodation in the area"?

Will the Secretary of State confirm that as a result of this nod and a wink from his Department private developers cashed in on a building boom which had nothing to do with providing care and attention for those elderly people in greatest need, and everything to do with raking off huge profits, subsidised at the taxpayers' expense through supplementary benefits?

Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that, because of this private development bonanza, total board and lodging charges underwritten by his Department, which were, as he said, £205 million in 1982, have sky-rocketed this year, according to the Government's figures, to about £570 million? Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that this colossal increase of £365 million has largely been pocketed by private operators, who have used every fiddle in the book to push up charges, and that there has been nothing to stop them, because of the laxity of the criteria and, indeed, the open invitation which the right hon. Gentleman gave them a year ago?

Is it not astonishing, after all this, that there is not one word of apology in the statement by the Secretary of State for this enormous and reckless abuse of taxpayers' money? Is it not clear that the Government have panicked, since this is the fourth set of proposals in this area within one year? First, the ceilings on charges were substantially relaxed a year ago; secondly, proposals were made in April about who was classifiable as a boarder, which had to be withdrawn as unworkable; thirdly, the board and lodgings ceiling freeze was jammed on in September; and now, fourthly, we have these proposals. Yet still the Government have not got it right.

Why are the Government refusing claimants benefit and at the same time doing nothing to reduce the numbers forced to be hived off into bed-and-breakfast accommodation and hotels because of the squeeze on local authority budgets? Why will the Government not abolish the supplementary benefit restrictions on furniture grants, such as the iniquitous "suitable alternative furnished accommodation" rule which keeps claimants in bed-and-breakfast accommodation even when cheaper accommodation is available to them?

As to the new restrictions placed on young people under 25 moving into board and lodgings, is not the implication that young people up to the age of 25 will be expected to be kept at home, subsidised by their parents? If they cannot or will not live at home, will they be forced into squatting, into sleeping rough or on to the homeless circuit? Why are the Government so obsessionally worried about the relatively minor amount of abuse when the personal expenses of a person in lodgings are only £9·25 a week and when much vaster sums of public money are lost through tax evasion which, under this Government, regularly goes unchecked?

Mr. Fowler: I am bound to say that the hon. Gentleman came full circle in his argument. He started by agreeing that it was right to issue a consultative document, but by the end he had come to his usual position of opposing anything and everything that the Government propose on this subject. His response, in total, was superficial in the extreme.

The number of young claimants has increased rapidly. The number in board and lodging aged 25 and under has risen by 60 per cent.—from 23,000 to 37,000—during the last 12 months. This compares with an increase of that age group on supplementary benefit of nothing like that amount. All the evidence shows that this growth is continuing rapidly and disproportionately. The hon. Gentleman must make up his mind whether he wants that kind of growth to continue unchecked.

The Government believe that it is sensible to check that growth, not just on financial grounds—goodness knows, those are grave enough—but because I am completely opposed to it. It brings the whole social security system into disrepute when we read reports such as the one published in *The Standard* this evening, which show the abuse that is taking place. The hon. Gentleman mentioned the maxima which were introduced in 1983. We removed the completely open-ended commitment which the Government previously had. That was plainly sensible. I remind the hon. Gentleman that under the last Labour Government the provision of private voluntary residential care increased substantially. The hon. Gentleman has only to go back to the figures to see that that is the case. I had hoped that it would be common ground that we want to see a good private sector and standards maintained in the private sector, but that none of us in the House wants to see claimants abusing the system.

Mr. Humfrey Malins (Croydon, North-West): Does my right hon. Friend agree that one of the problems is that landlords who cram families into their hotels and receive large payments from the DHSS as a result make extortionate profits? Another problem is that because there is no requirement on the DHSS or local authorities to inspect these hostels or hotels, landlords often crowd husband, wife and three or four children into rooms 12 or 15 feet square and make life a misery for them? Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Government should act in this matter?

Mr. Fowler: Yes, I agree. That is why the Government are consulting on this issue. I should have thought that would be common ground between the two sides of the House of Commons in seeking to tackle this kind of abuse. I recognise my hon. Friend's interest in the matter. The kind of abuse that has been uncovered makes an unanswerable case for action, and that is what the Government propose. It may be necessary to go even beyond what we are proposing in the consultation document. This takes up my hon. Friend's second point. Under the supplementary benefit review, we shall consider having individual checks, not just on the value of the accommodation and the accommodation provided, but on whether the applicant needs that accommodation.

Mr. Archie Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): How many people are on the maximum rates on each of the three tiers? The Secretary of State said that there had been an increase in expenditure. Is not some of that increase due to the fact that the system has changed since last November? I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will not over-react and discriminate unfairly against 16 and 17-year olds. I believe he said that the consultation document proposes to limit their eligibility. I hope that he will not add to the increasing problems which we all experience of youngsters leaving home and finding no place to go. In my opinion and experience, the two-tier rate which he seems to be suggesting—one for London and one for the rest of the country—is a little too restrictive, because even in Scotland there are wide disparities of charges from one region to another.

Mr. Fowler: That is precisely why we are having these consultations. We are putting these proposals to the Social Security Advisory Committee, and the public and the political parties will have an opportunity to put forward their proposals. If suggestions are made which will improve the position, I guarantee to consider them seriously. I cannot give the exact numbers that the hon. Gentleman wants. The numbers involved in private voluntary homes and ordinary board and lodging have increased dramatically over the past few years, but they also increased long before the 1983 maximum limits were introduced. There are about 140,000 supplementary benefit claimants in ordinary board and lodging, and about 42,500 residents in private voluntary homes.

Dr. Brian Mawhinney (Peterborough): Having reported to my right hon. Friend cases in my constituency which helped to promote this benefits review, may I express my appreciation of his decision to limit the abuse of the system by young people, but, at the same time, to protect those young people who are moving around genuinely seeking employment? What does my right hon. Friend intend to do—he did not say in his statement—about those who are on supplementary benefit and in board and lodgings, who can currently receive up to £140 a week without any deductions from their supplementary benefit?

Mr. Fowler: We are considering that last point, and we shall consider it in the consultation exercise. The Peterborough case, which my hon. Friend put forcefully to me, is one which would be caught under the new regulations which we propose. I hope that I can satisfy him on that.

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): Is the Secretary of State aware that the Department of the Environment puts forward large capital sums for the building of hostels in the voluntary sector, and that those hostels are built only upon the assumption that his Department will cover a large part of the revenue implications? Did he do any research into the number of hostel places that will be cut as a result of his announcement? If he did, will he tell the House the outcome?

Mr. Fowler: There are specific proposals for hostels. We shall be setting national limits within a range which I hope will be satisfactory. Some of the national limits — for example, for residential care homes for the physically handicapped—will be increased rather than decreased. We shall have a much more sophisticated system than we have at present.

Sir Anthony Meyer (Clwyd, North-West): Is my right hon. Friend aware that his proposals will be warmly welcomed in my constituency not least by those who, over the years, have been operating residential homes without seeking to make exaggerated profits. Is he satisfied that the provisions for ensuring that young people genuinely trying to find work will be exempt from these cuts will be easy to operate?

Mr. Fowler: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend's first point. On his second point, it is our aim to achieve that. If there is any doubt about it, and if there are any proposals which my hon. Friend or the Social Security Advisory Committee wishes to put forward to make it more certain, we shall consider them. We have no intention of interfering with a youngster trying to seek work. I give that assurance.

Mr. Bill Michie (Sheffield, Heeley): Bearing in mind that the proposals do nothing for the unemployed or the homeless, but sweep the problem under the carpet, does the Secretary of State agree that it would be more sensible to give more financial help to and to co-operate with local authorities on housing stock and to have a more flexible attitude to single payments?

Mr. Fowler: Arguments can be advanced on both those points, but I do not think that that invalidates our action. At the moment the demand and numbers involved have increased drastically, and there is evidence of widespread abuse. In those circumstances, it must be reasonable for the Government to act.

Sir William Clark (Croydon, South): Is my right hon. Friend aware that his statement that he is determined to cut out the abuse or exploitation of supplementary benefit will be warmly welcomed, not just in the House, but throughout the country?

As we are talking about abuse and exploitation, may I ask whether my right hon. Friend has given any thought to the abuse that occurs when, from taxpayers' money,

supplementary benefit is paid to a recipient either for mortgage interest or for rented accommodation, and those two payments are not made in all cases? Why cannot the Supplementary Benefits Commission and the DHSS make such payments direct to those who should receive them? I remind my right hon. Friend that for council accommodation the rent allowance is sent direct to the local council. Why is there this anomaly in the supplementary benefit system? Clearly, it is an abuse.

Mr. Fowler: The matter is under review. We are considering it, and what my hon. Friend has said will be taken into account.

Mr. John Fraser (Norwood): Does the right hon. Gentleman not recognise that if he depresses, by freezing, the level of support for people in bed-and-breakfast accommodation, without legislating to control houses in multiple occupation, he will merely drive people into possible death traps, as they will have to lower their standards? Will the right hon. Gentleman undertake to introduce legislation to control such premises, and will he recognise the insanity of continuing with a tough furniture grants policy, when a different policy would enable people to go into cheaper accommodation and to enjoy greater stability there?

Mr. Fowler: I apologise to the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) for not replying to his point about furniture grants. The furniture grants policy is being considered, not only by the Social Security Advisory Committee, but in the review of supplementary benefit.

I shall consider the hon. Gentleman's first point, but he will surely agree with me that at the moment there are areas of abuse and of over-charging for board and lodging. He must want to see those problems tackled, just as I do.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Secretary of State said that there would be a debate on this matter later. I normally allow about half an hour for a statement. I shall allow questions to continue until half past 4, and I hope that in that time I shall be able to call all those hon. Members who wish to ask a question.

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): Will the right hon. Gentleman now answer the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser) about safety standards in board and lodging accommodation? Do the Government have any proposals to bring before the House to try to prevent tragedies such as that which occurred last week in the middle of London, where the deaths were probably the direct result of the inadequate, unsafe and substandard quality of the accommodation?

Mr. Fowler: I recognise the problem, but the hon. Gentleman must recognise that this is a matter for the Department of the Environment and the local authorities. I shall certainly talk to my right hon. Friend about it.

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe): Is it not truly astonishing that the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) should ask my right hon. Friend to desist from dealing with what the hon. Gentleman himself acknowledges to be an abuse of the system, on the ground that there is a different and unrelated abuse? Is my right hon. Friend aware that his measures will be warmly welcomed, not least in the seaside resorts to which young people travel, not in search of work, but in search of leisure at the expense of the taxpayer?

Mr. Fowler: Yes, I think that that is right. I have been impressed by the number of representations and letters that I have received—from my hon. Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) among others—about what is happening in seaside resorts. The Government's action will be welcomed. Many people of all parties are concerned about what is now taking place.

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): Is my right hon. Friend aware of how especially welcome his statement will be in my constituency, where there has been a positive flood of young people not seeking work into bed-and-breakfast accommodation.

It is estimated that there are now 2,500 young people from the Liverpool area alone in my constituency. Sadly, many of those young people are actively connected with drugs. The situation is most alarming for the resident population.

Is my right hon. Friend also aware that some of the payments made in my constituency for bed-and-breakfast accommodation are paid at a rate which is above the general level paid by the ordinary public for such accommodation?

Mr. Fowler: Yes, all my hon. Friend's points are correct. His comments underline the reason why it is important to act here. We have seen an astonishing growth of provision in this area, with young people taking up residence for three, four, five or six months in some resorts. That is not what the supplementary benefits system was designed for. I hope that the inquiries will recognise that.

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): The right hon. Gentleman's reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser) to the effect that the question of single payments is being reviewed is unsatisfactory. There is a need for greater urgency and for a decision at an early date, because of the problems of board and lodging accommodation. At the present time, because of the Government's policy, people are being forced into such accommodation, when there is spare accommodation available in certain areas. I know of constituents who have recently asked for single payments for cookers and have been told that, for a single person, a cooker is not essential. They have been refused payment. Supplementary benefit is not sufficient to enable them to dine out. How are they supposed to heat a meal? An urgent decision is needed.

Mr. Fowler: With respect to the hon. Gentleman, the review of supplementary benefit is being undertaken urgently. We are now only months away from proposals being put before the House and considered by the Government. It is sensible to wait for those proposals.

One of the general problems of social security over past years has been the willingness to look at everything in an ad hoc way. We are attempting to consider social security as a whole, and in the round.

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): My hon. Friend's announcement that there is to be a clampdown on the undoubted scandal of board and lodging payments, especially in seaside towns, will receive a warm welcome in Cornwall, where the invasion this summer was enormous. It is clear that in many cases the young people

[Mr. David Harris]

are not seeking work. They come to have a long holiday at the taxpayers' expense. Will my right hon. Friend speed up the review of the possibility of making payments direct to landlords, because there are many cases of money being paid to individuals but not handed over to the landlord, which means that those concerned chalk up enormous arrears.

Mr. Fowler: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his comments. I recognise the great concern that has been expressed in his constituency and in neighbouring constituencies in the west. We will certainly do all that we can in the proposed regulations to tackle the abuse. We will also keep the whole situation under review so that no new abuses spring up.

Mr. Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, East): The Secretary of State spoke of safeguarding the interests of the genuine job seeker. How does he propose to identify the genuine job seeker among the rest of the nation's dispossessed young?

Mr. Fowler: It is a question of fact. If someone arrives in an area and is given, say, two to four weeks to look for a job, that might be a reasonable period in which to find that work. If he is content to stay for month after month, one might reasonably suppose that he has given up looking for a job.

Mr. Roger Gale (Thanet, North): Will my right hon. Friend accept my thanks, on behalf of my constituents, for taking action to terminate an abuse which has done serious damage to the holiday trade which we are trying to revitalise? Will he, however, accept that the present frozen limits of benefit are based on high-season summer rates? Will he take action to reduce those rates as soon as possible? Will he also reaffirm that those who leave accommodation in other parts of the country for no good reason will not be entitled to benefit at all?

Mr. Fowler: As my hon. Friend knows, two new limits are being introduced. We are seeking to consult on the level of those limits and will listen to the arguments that are put forward. I recognise what my hon. Friend has done in this area and the way in which he has campaigned for change. I hope he will feel that the Government's proposition is some response.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that what he has just said and his statement are a disgraceful attack on the unemployed and are an attempt to blame young people for there not being enough jobs? Does he further agree that the real cause of the problem are voracious private landlords who have made a great deal of money out of the DHSS, the lack of job opportunities in many parts of the country and the way in which the Secretary of State for the Environment has deprived local authorities of sufficient money to build houses or flats for single people in my constituency and others like it? The problem of homelessness among single young people is enormous, is not being dealt with and is not addressed by the statement, which puts the blame where it does not belong. It makes young people scapegoats for the failures of Government policy.

Mr. Fowler: The hon. Gentleman cannot have listened to the statement, or, if he did, he must have listened in a strange way. We want to achieve a good private sector, and most of the private sector, especially in regard to residential homes, is excellent. However, there is abuse which we want to root out. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will want to root out abuses by some of the claimants. It is absurd to describe these proposals as an attack on the unemployed and the young. I put it to the hon. Gentleman that if we do not tackle abuses in the social security system, the system and its reputation will decline.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I was about to say that in the spirit of Christmas I would call the three hon. Members who have been rising in their places, but I see that there are rather more than three. I shall allow questions on the statement to continue for another five minutes, but then we really must stop.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): If my right hon. Friend recalls my correspondence with him concerning Dawlish, I am sure he will be aware of how welcome this news will be to people in that area. Does he agree that the fact that the system can be abused on isolated occasions means that public money is being wasted, which is bad enough and that people who are genuinely seeking jobs and are travelling around the country to do so are brought into disrepute? My right hon. Friend's proposals are extremely welcome, because that will now stop.

Mr. Fowler: I agree with my hon. Friend and pay tribute to his work in bringing abuses in the system to the attention of the public.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): What net savings are the Government intending to make? What are the employment implications for the private sector? Is it fair to say that when the former Secretary of State for Employment, now the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, said, "Get on your bike," he did not mean that people should bike to the nearest seaside resort?

Mr. Fowler: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his total support for my proposal, which I assume is what he meant by his final statement. We expect there to be savings of about £70 million in the next financial year.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (Norfolk, North-West): The residents of Hunstanton in my constituency will welcome today's statement. Is it not time that the DHSS took powers to blacklist certain premises and lodgings?

Mr. Fowler: I know that there has been a case of fraud in my hon. Friend's constituency. We shall examine it in the consultation process. The limits that we have put down will deal with much of the abuse, but if there is fresh abuse we shall act.

Mr. Jonathan Aitken (Thanet, South): Will my right hon. Friend accept congratulations on taking such swift steps to end a racket—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] —which, even if it is received with laughter on the Opposition Front Bench, is much resented throughout the country, and especially in seaside towns? Will he confirm that no genuine job seeker and no private nursing home owner has anything to fear from the statement?

Mr. Fowler: I know my hon. Friend's interest in this matter. I confirm that genuine job seekers and bona fide owners of nursing homes or residential homes have nothing to fear. We are talking about rooting out abuse in the system, whether by the provider or the user. I find it bewildering that the Opposition should support abuse.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels (Leicester, East): Will the consultation process include special consideration of the viability of the voucher scheme, as well as cash, because many people in Leicester unfortunately get behind with their payments, so landlords do not get the money back?

Mr. Fowler: I shall certainly examine that matter.

Skillcentres

4.35 pm

The Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Tom King): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement about skillcentres.

In the White Paper entitled "Training for Jobs" the Government set out their proposals for doubling the number of adults receiving training under Manpower Services Commission programmes, including a substantial increase in the number of unemployed training for jobs, and for ensuring that resources available for training are used in the most effective way. The Skillcentre Training Agency yesterday put forward to the MSC its proposals for improving the efficiency and cost effectiveness of the skillcentre network. Copies of the full proposals and background information are available in the Library.

The proposals will be considered by the MSC at its next meeting on 13 December. In the light of its considerations, the commission will advise me how it will propose to proceed. I shall of course keep the House informed of further developments.

Mr. John Prescott (Kingston upon Hull, East): The previous statement by the Secretary of State for Social Services was about saving money at the expense of people who are looking for jobs and this statement is about saving money by making it more difficult for people to get training. The statement in no way shows whether the Government are at all anxious about the MSC's proposal to throw 1,000 people on the dole—many of them are skilled training staff — and to close 29 skill training centres, or one in three of the total, most of which are in areas of extremely high unemployment.

Does the Secretary of State agree that the commission has made these proposals simply to meet the cash limits imposed on it by the Government? Does he note, yet again, that areas of the United Kingdom north of the Trent are to carry the extra burden of the cuts, once again exposing the Government's two-nation policies? Has the Secretary of State seen the Confederation of British Industry's statement on last week's survey saying that 57 per cent. of its members were experiencing shortages of skilled labour—reflecting yet again the small amount of money being put into training in Britain as compared to our international competitors?

The House will welcome the Secretary of State's commitment to double adult training but, in reality, because of the shortage of funds, it will be achieved by cheaper lower technology training, more in keeping with the part-time unskilled service-based economy which the Government are imposing on Britain and which will not be accepted by the House.

It is about time that the so-called wets in the Government—in that I include the Secretary of State—stopped whining, like the hon. Member for Harlow (Mr. Hayes) on television at lunchtime, about their concern for the unemployed and used their political muscle to reverse the Government's policy of deskilling the nation and driving it to ever-increasing mass unemployment.

Mr. King: The first thing that is clear from the hon. Gentleman's comments is that he has not begun to look at the proposals made by the Skillcentre Training Agency.

Mr. Prescott: I have read them all.

Mr. King: The hon. Gentleman talked about our saving money. The Government have doubled the provision for training since coming into office. We intend to provide more training opportunities in every region in the coming year. The hon. Gentleman talked about deskilling. When I look at the list of courses being operated, although admittedly not in the skillcentre network, I find that they include computing, computer-aided design and computer-aided draughtsmanship. The hon. Gentleman must understand that the nation must face up to rapidly changing circumstances.

Mr. Prescott: Like closing one third of the skillcentres?

Mr. King: The MSC is charged by the House with ensuring that it is training people for the real needs of the future——

Mr. Prescott: So it is closing skillcentres?

Mr. King: —where the real jobs will come. We have to face up to the need for new skills—it is no use training people for yesterday's jobs.

Mr. Colin Shepherd (Hereford): Is my right hon. Friend aware that for some time now it has been difficult for those living in rural areas to get to skillcentres to pick up the new skills that they need for tomorrow? Has he any message of hope within the new framework that those living in rural areas will have an equivalent opportunity to develop the full skills for tomorrow?

Mr. King: The proposals of the Skillcentre Training Agency include a massive provision for mobile instructors. *[Interruption.]* Labour Members on the Front Bench appear to be blithely ignorant. They seem to believe that training in Britain should be confined to the conurbations and that the rural areas should go hang. I am proud that, while the main provision is in the conurbations, far greater attention than in the past has been given to the provision of mobile instructors, so that training can go to the people and is not wholly dependent on the location of bricks and mortar.

Mr. Michael Foot (Blaenau Gwent): Does the right hon. Gentleman understand that any proposal at such a time as this to close or run down a skillcentre is an outrage? Such proposals have been made before. In my constituency the right hon. Gentleman's predecessor proposed to shut a skillcentre by cutting off its money and we had to fight to keep it. We did so in association with local industrialists who wanted the skillcentre and who used its services. If the right hon. Gentleman wants to increase Britain's total training facilities, he should add to the skillcentres that already exist. Therefore, will he give an undertaking that he will not close any skillcentre before the House has had a chance to vote upon that policy?

Mr. King: I do not know whether the right hon. Gentleman has had an opportunity recently to look at some of the performance figures of skillcentres which show the reality of the present situation. Unfortunately, it is true that many skillcentres giving training in the traditional skills are training many people who will not get jobs and that there is insufficient training in those skills which will give people the best prospect of a job. We must ensure that every pound that goes into training is spent in the best interests of the people whom we want to train. The right hon. Gentleman must look hard at the justification for paying for the maintenance of buildings that are under-used when there is a crying need to give our people more modern training. We shall be increasing the number of people in Wales, as well as in every other area, who will have the opportunity in the coming years to receive training more appropriate to their needs.

Mr. David Penhaligon (Truro): For the Minister's attitude to be credible, he must be able to tell the House those skills that are currently being taught by skillcentres which he believes to be redundant. Will he do so?

Mr. King: If the hon. Gentleman looks at the papers in the Library, he will see a list of such courses. Of course they are not completely redundant, but one must bear in mind the level of demand. All the traditional skills being taught are in some demand. We have substantially increased the amount of money that is going into training and we are determined to spend every pound in the best interests of those being trained. I am disappointed in the hon. Gentleman. I should have thought that he would approach the problem in a more objective way. We shall increase the number of people who get the chance of being trained. We shall double the adult training provision. Against that background, the hon. Gentleman should look much more seriously at the needs of his constituents. He should be anxious to see training maximised in that way.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): Is my right hon. Friend aware that it has always been a weakness of skillcentres that many of the people who become instructors teach obsolescent trades but that many of them will now, demonstrably, have learnt a new skill—that of dealing with young people? Will my right hon. Friend ensure that when the MSC makes staff adjustments it takes that into account and makes it possible for those who have shown a real skill in dealing with young people not to waste that skill but to deploy it elsewhere?

Mr. King: I do not know whether my hon. Friend has had a chance to consider the proposals, copies of which are in the Library. The proposals of the Skillcentre Training Agency include a substantial provision for the retraining of instructors. The massive development of the youth training scheme will also provide a massive opportunity for instructors. I hope that the Opposition will look more seriously at the proposal than, I suspect, they are doing at the moment.

Mr. Bruce Millan (Glasgow, Govan): Is the Secretary of State aware that those who have been following the matter for the best part of a year now have been clear all along that if the Government persisted with the determination that the Skillcentre Training Agency would be self-financing within three years, and put on a commercial basis, there would inevitably be wholesale closures, and that that is now happening? Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that in my constituency, where male unemployment is more than 30 per cent., the Govan skillcentre is down for closure? That is an utter scandal because it has a perfectly good building which has been there for only 10 years. It is utterly flexible and can meet all the modern demands for modern training. Will at least that proposal be reversed?

Mr. King: The right hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that if funds are used, perhaps to fund a deficit which is likely to be caused by the cost of maintaining buildings that are under-utilised and providing new buildings, that

money will be denied to people for training in more appropriate tasks. That is the reality. *[Interruption.]* No matter how much hon. Members shout and scream, they cannot walk away from that. The money that goes into the maintenance of under-used facilities is denied to people who could benefit from more appropriate training. That is the reality of the choice that has to be faced and which is contained within the paper on which the commission will have to reach its decision.

Mr. Timothy Wood (Stevenage): Is my right hon. Friend satisfied that the skillcentres and adult training are sufficiently responsive to the development and use of new technology?

Mr. King: There have been some encouraging developments in many skillcentres. The House will know that the main customer of the Skillcentre Training Agency is the training division of the MSC which has a duty to determine and provide the most effective training that it can for as many people as possible. Some skillcentres are doing excellent work in many fields. Others find it more difficult to provide the sort of training that is most likely to equip people for jobs. That challenge cannot be walked away from. Shouting and screaming is deplorable on an issue of this seriousness. People should be concerned with the real issues of training the British people.

Mr. Ron Leighton (Newham, North-East): Is the Secretary of State aware that, when the rumours first circulated that, as a result of Treasury pressure for Civil Service cuts across the board, training centres were to be shut down, I caused a telephone call to be made to the MSC on 23 August during the recess to tell it that, were those rumours true, I was certain that the Select Committee on Employment would want an immediate inquiry? Is he aware that the Government appear schizophrenic about training? They only pay lip service to training because we are told on all sides of the skill shortages and how our rivals train more effectively. Yet the Government's response is to send 450 instructors on to the dole queue. Does the right hon. Gentleman realise that, prima facie, the Government have a crazy and lunatic policy, which it is his duty to resist in the Cabinet?

Mr. King: Expenditure on employment and training measures is £2,000 million. That is a pretty funny form of lip service. This is not an attempt to reduce expenditure on training. The money that we shall save will go on the training of people. We are investing less in bricks and mortar and more in real training.

Mr. David Ashby (Leicestershire, North-West): Is my right hon. Friend aware that skillcentres at Long Eaton, Birmingham and Leicester are of little assistance to areas such as mine and that his statement that there will be mobile instructors is very welcome as there is a crying need for them in those areas?

Mr. King: I am absolutely persuaded that we must be flexible if we are to tackle the real problem of improving skills, giving people a better chance of employment and making it possible for the economy to expand by being able to man the new technologies sufficiently. There will have to be changes. I am discouraged by the reaction to this first announcement. I had hoped that hon. Members would be willing to look at the matter seriously, as I shall have to do in due course——

Mr. Prescott: It is a disgusting statement.

Mr. King: It is no good the hon. Gentleman saying that, because he is implying that he would rather that money was wasted on bricks and mortar than spent on training people.

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): Is the Secretary of State aware that his statement is totally disgraceful? Since his statement, any confidence that I had in him has completely disappeared. I have a skillcentre in my constituency that is on the list. Like a coward, the Secretary of State is hiding behind the MSC and blaming it for the decision that is to be made a little later. The closure of the skillcentre in my constituency means that people will go on the dole and that those already in the dole queue will be unable to get the training that they are used to. It is a disgusting state of affairs and the right hon. Gentleman should resign.

Mr. King: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman has even begun to look at the proposals, or whether he knows, for example, that a substantial increase is proposed in the training for people in his area, as in others— *[Interruption.]* If he is not interested, and just wants to shout——

Mr. Haynes: Well, do something, then.

Mr. King: ——I hope at least that some of his constituents will realise that. The hon. Gentleman accused me of hiding like a coward behind the MSC, but I have come at the first opportunity to make a statement in response to requests, although the matter is not yet before me. The MSC has not even reached a decision yet. The proposals were put forward, and I was anxious that, if the House so wished, it should have information about them. I do not think that the hon. Gentleman can accuse me of hiding behind the MSC.

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): Will my right hon. Friend agree that his statement is not his last word on the subject? The Middlesbrough skillcentre in my area is due to be closed, but obviously the officials who give advice have no concept whatever of what it is like in the north-east of England or of what the transportation problems will be for my constituents in Langbaurgh who will have to go to Billingham for the next nearest centre. Although I welcome the idea of the mobile training provision, it should be in addition to skillcentres and not at their expense.

Mr. King: My hon. Friend will obviously wish to make his views known at the appropriate time, and will be communicating his thoughts. I think that he understands the procedure involved rather better than one or two other hon. Members. The proposals were sent yesterday to the Commissioners and came from the Skillcentre Training Agency. They go before the commission on 13 December and it will advise me on how it proposes to proceed thereafter.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I realise the importance of the matter, but there is an important debate to follow. I shall call those hon. Members who have been standing in their places, but I am afraid that I cannot call any more than that.

Mr. Merlyn Rees (Morley and Leeds, South): The Secretary of State asked us to take the matter seriously and said that the issues had not yet been brought before him. He has mentioned the MSC and the Skillcentre Training

[Mr. Merlyn Rees]

Agency but what part is the House to play? Are we to have a chance to influence the Minister and/or the MSC, or did he say that the MSC would make the decision? Are we wasting our time?

Mr. King: My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House happens to have arrived in the Chamber at the right moment and he will have heard the right hon. Gentleman's comments on what further discussions there should be. However, I shall keep the House informed and it is for it to decide how it wishes to proceed, depending first on the outcome of the MSC's deliberations.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Will the mobile instructors relate to existing skillcentres such as the excellent Perivale skillcentre in my constituency? If so, will not that be a considerable gain to the skillcentres as well as to the surrounding areas?

Mr. King: Those who have studied the present situation recognise that there is considerable scope for improving flexibility. The sort of development that my hon. Friend is talking about is one example of that. There have also been developments in the increased use of employers' premises, and that may be more relevant to the needs of Langbaurgh. However, I am sure that flexibility is important and that we should ensure that instructors in the new technologies and skills are available, as that is very important to the development and efficiency of the agency.

Mr. Ian Wrigglesworth (Stockton, South): Why does not the Secretary of State come clean? Is it not true that industry's long-term interests and needs are being sacrificed in the short-term interest of the Treasury? Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that for years a reappearance of growth in the economy has met with a shortage of the very skills in traditional industries—not in the new technologies—that skillcentres are designed to overcome? Will he reconsider his statement and ensure that, instead of cutting skillcentres, he expands them in future?

Mr. King: I think that the hon. Gentleman will have heard my comments about the need to expand the number of people receiving appropriate training. One area of expansion is access to the new technologies. We are seeking to develop that. Part of that development is the successful development of information technology centres which are available for the youth training scheme. We are expanding the use of ITeCs to make them available to adults as well, and to ensure that they have access to the area of new information technology. Of course there will continue to be training in the traditional technologies, but it is a question of striking a balance and I hope that the hon. Gentleman will see that there is scope, and that the exact method is a matter for consideration by the MSC. But it is undoubtedly important to keep training provision flexible and appropriate to the country's real needs.

Mr. Forth: Although I understand, and indeed support, the thrust of this policy in seeking increased effectiveness and value for money in the training effort, I regret that the skillcentre in Redditch in my constituency is one of those to be closed—*[Interruption.]* I shall be seeking further information about the criteria upon which it was selected. Some of my constituents may now have to travel to the nearest skillcentre, which I believe will be in Birmingham, Handsworth. Will my right hon. Friend give an assurance that they will not find themselves out of pocket? At present I believe that they may have to pay the first £4 of additional travelling expenses. Is he prepared to look at the matter and to ensure that where possible people do not have to pay more for their training?

Mr. King: As I think is clear, I am prepared to look at any aspects of the matter; it has not yet been brought before me as it awaits further consideration by the MSC. However, I believe that that is one of the points that it has very much in mind.

Mr. Gareth Wardell (Gower): It is proposed to close the Llanelli skillcentre, which serves the counties of West Glamorgan and Dyfed. But it has one of the highest occupancy rates of any skillcentre in Wales and one of the best records of placing trainees in jobs and it has, over the past 18 months, developed new courses to keep up to date with the new technologies so that industry can be better served. Why is that skillcentre proposed for closure?

Mr. King: I think that the hon. Gentleman will have heard my remarks. The proposals have been put by the Skillcentre Training Agency, and it has judged the network's best operation and the best use of the funds available. I understand that the proposals include the Llanelli skillcentre, and obviously the MSC will consider that in its examination of the proposals.

Mr. Jerry Hayes (Harlow): Will my right hon. Friend assure the House in the clearest possible terms that these proposals will not in any way affect the total spending on adult training, and that any savings which may be made will go straight back into training more young people?

Mr. King: I am happy to give that clear assurance. The statement is about the most efficient use of resources. This is not a proposal to save funds on training. We seek to ensure that funds for training are spent on training people and not on maintaining under-utilised premises or on training in areas where there is no clear prospect of jobs when there is a desperate need to train people in areas where there is a real prospect of jobs.

Mr. Robin Corbett (Birmingham, Erdington): If, as the Secretary of State says, some skillcentres have run courses in obsolete skills or skills for which there is no real prospect of jobs, why has he tolerated it? Why does he not change that, instead of closing skillcentres? He proposes to shut the centre at Castle Bromwich in my constituency, where unemployment has trebled. Is not the sad fact behind the statement an admission that there is no point in keeping many of these skillcentres open because, as he knows better than anyone else, there will never be jobs for the people who pass through them to go to?

Mr. King: As I tried to make clear to the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Penhaligon), the skills are not necessarily obsolete, but they are skills for which there is not sufficient demand. I understood his second point to be a criticism — that, if changes are needed and the Skillcentre Training Agency should put them forward, it should have put them forward earlier. That point needs consideration.

Ms. Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood): Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that, when we unravel the double-speak in which all Government pronouncements are now couched, training for today's jobs means training

for no jobs and means less training? Is not that the underlying explanation of the statement? Will he confirm that his suggestion that there has been a doubling of training under the Government is an inaccurate assessment? We have seen a collapse of the apprenticeship system, a cut back in TOPS training and a lot of expenditure on low-level YTS entry-to-work type training, which does not produce real skills. Will he explain, if there has been a doubling of skill training under the Government, why, in the depths of the recession in the west midlands where people are desperately short of jobs and 30 per cent. of those in the inner core of Birmingham are unemployed, there are skill shortages in the city? Will he further explain why he proposes to close the Handsworth youth training centre, when in my constituency 80 per cent. of 16 to 18-year-olds are unemployed?

Mr. King: I completely agree with the hon. Lady's first point, that there are fewer jobs than we wish to see. The hon. Lady refered to skill shortages. It is absolutely vital that we ensure that every pound spent on training for jobs will give someone the best possible chance of employment. The hon. Lady is not the youth training scheme's greatest admirer, but I hope that she will concede that it has been much more successful in giving people a chance of full-time employment than she cares to admit.

Mr. John Fraser (Norwood): Mr. Speaker, you will be aware that one of the skillcentres to be closed serves your constituency and mine. When I wrote to Lord David Young about the closure of the Waddon skillcentre, he said that there would be a new building and increased adult provision at Lambeth young persons' training centre, which would provide a better geographical spread of adult training, with some redistribution towards the inner city. That is now to be negatived and Lambeth young persons' skillcentre is to be closed. The only thing that has changed since Lord David Young wrote to me is that there has been an increase in unemployment so that two out of three black and one out of two white school leavers in Lambeth are unemployed. Will Lord David Young and the Secretary of State support what Lord Young said two years ago, or will they support cuts by the training agency?

Mr. King: I am not aware of the letter from the then chairman of the Manpower Services Commission. I hope that he will support my statement, because he is making an identical statement in the House of Lords at present.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): Will the Secretary of State be totally honest with the House and assure us that yesterday's statement from the MSC and his statement today do not present a fait accompli, which will come about without a long and good debate in the House on the future of skillcentres and training? The reality of the announcement is the end of quality training for unemployed people.

It is no good the Secretary of State telling the House that the Government are doubling the amount of training. We know that this means the end of proper courses in skillcentres and a move towards the substitution of cheap short-term courses in skillcentres where they still exist, and to an unproven, extremely short scheme on the community programme, which will have a training element in future. Will the Secretary of State come clean and tell the House how much quality training there will be for both unemployed and employed people?

Many people will see the news of this great list. What is the statement about? Does it mean that, where there is high unemployment, there is no room for skill training? With a few exceptions, such as the golden triangle in the South, that is the truth. The statement means the end of skill training. Will the Secretary of State promise us that we shall have a full debate on the matter in the near future? The Opposition will not take this lying down, but will fight it every inch of the way. This presents a real cut and genuine deprivation of opportunities for our people. It means no skills, no tech and no jobs in the future. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. King: My hon. Friends took the words out of my mouth when they said that that was a little over the top. It was well over the top. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) has done his bit of shouting; perhaps he will have the courtesy to allow me to reply. I have already advised the House how the matter may be considered by the House hereafter. It is not a fait accompli. Owing to the slightly difficult structure of the MSC—there is this matter of documents going to the MSC—I thought it right that the House should be aware at this stage of a proposal which will go to the MSC. It has not even been considered by the commission yet.

For the hon. Member to say that this is the end of quality training is so fatuous that it almost beggars belief. The hon. Gentleman supported a Government who spent considerably less than we are spending on training. We are now spending more than double what the Labour Government spent when unemployment was rising substantially. There is undoubtedly a major contribution for skillcentres to make to training provision. But to assume that only skillcentres are capable of training, to deride completely the contribution being made, especially in some new technologies, such as computers and computer-aided design and draughtsmanship, by a number of the leading private companies, in which we shall be anxious to see provision for training, and to say that it means no tech and the end of proper training is absolute rubbish. I assure the House that that is quite untrue.

Immigration Service (Mrs. Yasmin Mundiya)

5.8 pm

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 10, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

"a report by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration of the results of his investigation into a complaint made by my constituent, Mrs. Yasmin Mundiya."

The report, published today, is extremely critical of senior officers in the immigration service and the Home Office. After they made a mistake in attempting to remove Mrs. Mundiya's husband from the United Kingdom, an attempt was made to cover up the mistake by claiming that her marriage was one of convenience. That is utterly false.

Two immigration officers, each with many years of service, asked for an explanation from the immigration service and the Home Office. Those officers refused to acquiesce or collude in what they saw as a cover-up of a serious mistake by senior officers of the immigration service and senior officials of the Home Office. Both officers have suffered personal and professional victimisation as a result of the stand that they took: one has been dismissed, and the second resigned from the immigration service.

The case demonstrates vividly that senior officers in the immigration service and the Home Office view immigration as a political battlefield where to admit a mistake, even one that has caused deep personal and family distress, is to hand a political victory to a political enemy.

The debate would be important because it would allow the Home Secretary to tell the public and the House what action he will take to ensure that the personal hurt and distress suffered by Mrs. Mundiya and her family is not suffered by others; to enable him to tell the public and Parliament what action he will take to ensure that his Department will never again try to conceal mistakes by deception; and, finally, to tell the public and the House what action he will take to ensure that public servants who are unwilling to acquiesce or collude in deception of the public and of public representatives are not victimised personally or professionally.

Such a debate would be most important because of the great anxiety about the way in which immigration policies are implemented by the immigration service and the Home Office. A debate based on this extremely critical and important report would be a public service and would be welcomed by many hon. Members.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman asks leave to move the Adjournment of the House for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that he believes should have urgent consideration, namely,

"a report of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration of the results of his investigation into a complaint made by Mrs. Mundiya of Bradford."

I listened with great care to what the hon. Gentleman said, but I regret that I do not consider that the matter which he has raised is appropriate for discussion under Standing Order No. 10 and I cannot, therefore, submit his application to the House.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Of course, I completely accept your ruling on the application by my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden). The matter that my hon. Friend raised in seeking a debate under Standing Order No. 10 is not, as he will agree, simply one between him and a constituent and the Ombudsman. My hon. Friend deserves the greatest praise for the way in which he pursued this matter with the Ombudsman. This is also a matter for the House of Commons, which has rights in relation to the answerability of Ministers for what happens in their Departments. However much the Ombudsman may have criticised with great severity the actions of civil servants, and whatever apology may have been received from the permanent secretary, what happens in Departments is the responsibility of the Ministers.

The appalling acts that my hon. Friend outlined to the House stem from policies laid down by Ministers — policies which many of us regard as racist. After such a serious report from the Ombudsman, Ministers should tell the House what measures they intend to take to prevent acts such as my hon. Friend described from happening again. We ask for your assistance and advice on how to bring Ministers to the Dispatch Box to make the statement that the House has the right to expect.

Mr. Speaker: I do not deny the importance of the matter, but I am bound by the criteria laid down in Standing Order No. 10 . I have nothing to add to what I said to the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden). There are other ways in which this matter can be brought before the House.

BALLOT FOR NOTICES OF MOTIONS FOR MONDAY 17 DECEMBER

Members successful in the ballot were:

Mr. Michael Colvin
Mr. Michael Stern
Mr. Hughes Dykes

BILL PRESENTED

Law Reform (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Scotland)

Mr. Secretary Younger, supported by Mr. Solicitor-General for Scotland, Mr. Michael Ancram, Mr. Allan Stewart and Mr. John Moore presented a Bill to amend the law of Scotland in respect of certain leases, other contracts and obligations, certain courts and their powers, evidence and procedure, certain criminal penalties, the care of children, and certain procedures relating to crofting and the valuation of sheep stocks; and to make, as respects Scotland, certain other miscellaneous reforms of the law: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 14.]

The Royal Navy

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Durant.]*

5.15 pm

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. John Stanley): The past year has been one of significant progress for the Royal Navy. Major new ship orders have been placed, new classes of ships have been started, large-scale exercises have been undertaken, and some important operations have been successfully carried out. In addition to making a review of the service in opening this debate, I shall refer to certain maritime aspects of defence policy, and to the Trident programme in particular.

I start with the maritime threat, which is the basic yardstick against which we must measure the adequacy of our naval investment. Even outside the NATO area, we have seen with persistent regularity since the second world war the immense value to Britain of being able to deploy the right numbers and right types of ships in a timely and effective way. But, of course, the in-area commitment —the NATO commitment—is the primary justification and rationale of the size and shape of the Royal Navy. Maritime power—the ability to project military strength over and from the sea — is fundamental to NATO's strategy of deterrence, both nuclear and conventional.

Conventional deterrence would not be credible if it depended on our in-theatre forces alone, especially given the self-evident capability of the Warsaw pact to reinforce early on a massive scale, and along lines of land communications stretching from the inner German border deep into the Soviet Union. Of course, airborne reinforcement and the pre-positioning of some heavy equipment in continental Europe avoids total dependence on reinforcement by sea. However, there is no question but that for ourselves, for the Canadians and above all for the Americans, the ability to transit forces and equipment by sea will remain a fundamental requirement for the forseeable future.

On the nuclear side, the sea provides the one environment in which a key arm of NATO's strategic deterrent can enjoy invisibility and therefore invulnerability, again for the foreseeable future.

The near monopoly of sea control that the NATO navies had in the 1950s and the 1960s has come under increasing challenge in the 1970s and 1980s. The Soviet Union now has a surface navy of about 320 ships of small frigate size and above, and the warships under construction include the first Soviet carrier capable of taking catapult-launched fixed-wing aircraft, which is likely to be completed in four years' time. The Soviet amphibious landing capability, although modest in the past, continues to expand. It has one of the largest merchant fleets in the world, and the largest fishing fleet, and frequently uses both on naval tasks. It has the largest oceanographic fleet, which is another important naval asset. It has the largest mining capability, and it has by far and away the largest submarine force, with about 400 submarines in service, approximately half of which are nuclear-powered.

Despite this, Soviet submarine production shows no signs of slowing. No fewer than eight different classes of submarine are at present under construction simultaneously, seven of which are nuclear-powered, with a new Soviet submarine being completed once every 35 to 40 days.

As one would expect, Soviet ships and submarines are improving all the time—electronically, acoustically and in the capability of their weapons systems. Of special significance is the new submarine-launched strategic cruise missile, which is assessed to have a range of up to 3,000 km and which is likely to become operational within the next year. A still faster, long-range submarine-launched cruise missile is also under development. No less significant is its growing maritime air capability with aircraft such as the Badger, Bear and Backfire able to attack NATO surface ships using stand-off missiles with ranges of up to 400 km.

All the Soviet maritime forces to which I have referred can deploy very suddenly and very fast, as they vividly demonstrated in an exercise in March this year. There is no doubt, therefore, about the fundamental importance of the maritime dimension to NATO's deterrent strategy, and equally there is no doubt about the significant and growing challenge coming from Soviet maritime power on the sea, under the sea and from the air.

Meeting that challenge is, of course, a matter for the Alliance and not just for ourselves. Exercising with the navies of other NATO countries is therefore a high priority task for our own. Over the last year, the Royal Navy has participated in three NATO exercises in the Mediterranean and in the biggest single NATO amphibious exercise ever conducted, exercise Teamwork in Norway, in which the ships of nine NATO navies took part. I am sure that NATO's determination to safeguard the territorial integrity of northern Norway was well noted.

Ours is, of course, also very much an operational Navy, operational every day of the week and every week of the year—providing our round-the-clock deterrent, watching the naval activity of other countries, maintaining the Falkland Islands protection zone, being ready to safeguard our interests in the Caribbean and in the Gulf, preventing illegal immigration into Hong Kong and helping to combat terrorism in Northern Ireland. The continuing operational responsibilities of the Royal Navy are diverse in character, far-flung geographically and of very high national importance. They are discharged extremely professionally and extremely effectively.

I should like to mention one particular operation carried out since our last debate. Earlier this month, five Ton class mine counter-measures vessels and their support ship returned home having been away since last March. They were the group that was deployed to the Red Sea to locate, clear and if possible obtain for examination the mines that had been laid there. Of the various navies deployed on the same task, the Royal Navy was the only one that succeeded in locating, disabling and retrieving a modern live mine. That mine is now being examined in the United Kingdom. As we have previously announced, it is of Soviet manufacture.

We have no reason to believe, however, that the Soviets either laid it, or were aware that it was being laid by a third party.

The whole process of actually locating that mine was extremely skilful, and the process of disabling it so that it could be safely brought back to the United Kingdom was self-evidently dangerous to those concerned. I know the whole House will want me to express our admiration and appreciation for the way in which that operation was conducted.

Before I leave operations, I shall refer to merchant shipping. As the House is well aware, the merchant

[Mr. John Stanley]

marine, both through the Royal Fleet Auxiliaries and through merchant ships that we would need to take up from trade in a time of crisis, is critical to the operational effectiveness of the Royal Navy.

The House of Commons Select Committee on Defence has rightly expressed its concern about the possible operational implications for the Royal Navy if the decline in the British merchant marine continues. This is a matter to which we shall want to return, but I should like to make two points to the House at this stage.

First, at the present time, with the possible exception of vessels suitable for mine counter-measures, the size of the British flagged merchant marine in the particular categories of ships that we would require in any emergency is such that we can discharge our NATO obligations. However, it is also clear that this might not continue to be the case, at least in certain categories of vessels, if the decline in the British merchant marine continues for several more years.

The Department of Transport, in conjunction with the Ministry of Defence, is therefore launching an in-depth study into the likely future trends in the size of the British merchant marine. We shall be assessing the defence implications most carefully when that study is completed in the middle of next year.

Viscount Cranborne (Dorset, South): I am sure that the study will be extemely useful and will be read with the greatest interest if ever my right hon. Friend feels able to publish it. However, would it not be more constructive even than what he has proposed now if he were to co-operate with our right hon. and hon. Friends in the Department of Trade and Industry and in the Treasury? They could see what incentives can be given for the generation of more trade for British merchant ships than is happening at the moment, thereby ensuring the situation that we should all like to see, in which the Navy can draw on the merchant fleet in times of trouble.

Mr. Stanley: What the Navy can call on in times of trouble is a specific defence requirement. We have a precise view of what our requirements are for the Royal Navy, for those merchant ships that can support the navy, and for those that would assist on the mine clearance operations, on the cross-Channel and north Atlantic reinforcement. I assure my hon. Friend that in advance of the completion of the study, we shall be looking carefully at the current position and the trends. As I said before, there is no cause for anxiety in meeting our NATO obligation, and we are looking, on a contingent basis, to what the implications might be, and to alternative options that we could follow should the decline in certain categories continue.

Mr. Richard Ottaway (Nottingham, North): In that case, why, in exercise Lionheart, was it necessary to charter in so many foreign vessels?

Mr. Stanley: As my hon. Friend will know, as a matter of course we seek to secure the availability of vessels that are suitable for our requirement at a particular moment. There is always a basic difference between wartime and peacetime. War is a period of tension, when the relevant legislation has been passed. It is then possible to use all sorts of ferries that would normally be going about their holiday traffic. When one undertakes an exercise in peacetime, inevitably one does not wish to disrupt the holiday arrangements of the ferry traffic more than one has to. Therefore, one goes to the market, and does not necessarily have to call on our flagged ships because other vessels are available. We have much greater flexibility in a peacetime exercise than we would in war.

I now move on to the size and the shape of the Royal Navy. I am glad to tell the House that expenditure on the conventional Navy is now substantially higher in real terms than it was when the Labour party left office. This year we expect to spend about £500 million more on the conventional Navy in real terms than was spent in 1978-79 — and that excludes Falklands war replacement expenditure, which is additional.

By the end of this year, we expect to have spent some £2,300 million more in real terms on the conventional Navy, again excluding Falklands expenditure, than would have been the case if expenditure had been maintained at its 1978-79 value. We are now seeing the fruits of that higher expenditure in the shipbuilding programme.

Some 41 ships have been ordered since May 1979, and 32 are currently being built with a total value of about £2,800 million. Moreover, many of the ships ordered over the past five years are vastly superior in capability to the vessels they will be replacing, which is why the hull numbers tell only part of the story.

Mr. A. E. P. Duffy (Sheffield, Attercliffe): The hon. Gentleman has just said that the hull numbers tell only part of the story. The House will be interested to learn how many of the surface units to which the Minister is referring joined the fleet last year, and how many joined the fleet this year.

Mr. Stanley: I cannot give those figures immediately. I suggest that one has to look at the whole pattern of ship ordering. As I said, 41 ships have been ordered since May 1979, and the expenditure on the conventional Navy is vastly higher than it was when the Labour party was in office.

The type 22 and 23 frigates represent a quantum jump over frigates such as the type 12s and the Leanders that they are replacing. The Hunt class mine counter-measures ships are in a wholly different league from the old Ton class ships. The Trafalgar class SSNs have capabilities well in excess of our earlier SSNs, and the new 2400 Upholder conventional submarines are a generation-plus ahead of the Oberons and Porpoise class boats that they will replace. Over the last year, we have in fact set in motion the procurement of no fewer than five completely new classes of RN and RFA vessels. The order for the first of class Upholder conventional submarine was placed in November 1983.

The order for the first of class type 23 frigate, HMS Norfolk, was placed in October this year. Also in October we went out to tender for a design and build contract for the first of a new class of RFAs — the "one stop" auxiliary oiler replenishment vessel. Earlier this month we invited a tender for the first of class of the new single-role minehunter. Last, but by no means least, we are currently out to tender for the first of the Trident SSBNs.

I should like to take this opportunity to announce that we have now settled where the refitting of the Trident submarines will be carried out; it will be at Rosyth.

I now want to turn to the different components of the Fleet — starting with the carriers. The third Invincible

class carrier, the Ark Royal, is currently undergoing trials prior to joining the Fleet in the middle of next year. As the House knows, we are committed to having two carriers operational at any one time whilst the third will usually be in refit. HMS Hermes represents an additional carrier, over and above that commitment, and we are currently evaluating whether she should be sold or retained in mothball for the time being.

As for the destroyer and frigate force, the announcement by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to maintain eight additional ships in the running Fleet rather than place them in the standby squadron has been warmly welcomed in the House and by NATO. This decision will enable the destroyer and frigate force to remain at around the 50 mark.

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): May I take the hon. Gentleman back to the Trident refit decision? It may be that later in the debate my hon. Friends and I will be able to expand on it. However, to facilitate our understanding, we are talking about a refit programme beginning at some time in the 1990s. When is the order for the Trident likely to be placed, and how many jobs and what capital expenditure can be expected in Rosyth between now and the refit period?

Mr. Stanley: I said just now that we were currently out to tender on the first Trident SSBN. I cannot give the hon. Gentleman a precise date for when the order will be placed, but it is out to tender.

My right hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement will be able to deal specifically with the employment implications for Rosyth.

Our amphibious forces and their specialist shipping represent a unique asset — a unique asset that was fundamental to the success of the Falklands landings. As well as being a unique asset, the Royal Marines also have a remarkable versatility. There are not many formations in the world — if any — that can perform the Arctic warfare role, the infantry role—and in Northern Ireland conditions — the air defence missile role, the artillery role, the special forces role, the close protection role, a variety of support roles, and, not least, the ceremonial bands role — all performed with exemplary discipline, toughness and skill. The Royal Marines and the Royal Marine Reserves do us much credit and perform invaluable services.

In terms of our amphibious shipping, we are restoring the pre-Falklands numbers of logistic landing ships. Contracts were placed with Tyne Shiprepairers in July for the repair of the Sir Tristram, and with Swan Hunter in September for the replacement of the Sir Galahad. Both HMS Fearless and HMS Intrepid will remain in service until the mid-1990s.

Studies are currently in progress in the Ministry of Defence on the cost and capability options, which have a considerable range, for replacing our specialist amphibious shipping in time, if agreed, to allow preliminary design work involving industry to commence in the second half of 1985. Our decision on the replacement of our amphibious shipping must await the completion of these studies.

I referred earlier to the massive Soviet mining capability. The approaches to Britain's naval bases and reinforcement ports are bound to be a prime mining target, so we have in hand an extensive programme for modernising our mine warfare ships.

The multi-role Hunt class which can both hunt and sweep mines is proving highly effective. Eight are now with the Fleet; three are building; and tenders were invited for two more earlier this month, with the option of a further two being added, making a potential order for four Hunts due to be placed early next year. As I mentioned earlier, a tender has also just been invited for the first of class of the new single-role mine hunter, the order for which is also planned for next year.

A key role in countering the Soviet mining threat is played by the Royal Naval Reserve. I am glad to tell the House that since our debate last year the first three of the River class minesweepers, being built specifically for operation by the RNR, have now been accepted into the Fleet, and that the remaining nine ships in the class are all building. For the first time, the RNR will have an entire class of new ships that is almost exclusively its own.

In addition, as my noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces announced on 7 November in another place, we are aiming to increase the planned strength of the RNR by well over 40 per cent. over the next few years from its present level of around 5,400 to 7,800.

We greatly value the time, commitment and professional skills of the members of the RNR.

The contribution of the Fleet Air Arm has never been more important. In the era of long-range, precision-guided missiles which can be launched from submarines, surface ships and aircraft, it is vital to be able to project the Fleet's eyes, ears and hitting power well beyond the range of the weapons and sensors on our surface ships themselves.

This year we have ordered nine additional Sea Harriers, which will take the numbers available for combat air patrol to well above those available at the time of the Falklands conflict. Looking ahead, we are proceeding with plans to give the Sea Harriers a mid-life update particularly to enable them to counter the increasing missile threat.

Today, the capability of the ship's helicopter is as important as the weapons and sensors that are fitted in the ship itself. Two thirds of the Fleet's anti-submarine warfare Sea Kings have now been converted to the mark 5 standard, and the balance of the front line Sea Kings will be converted by the middle of next year.

Improvements to the Fleet's Lynx helicopters are in train, which will give increased capability from 1988.

The first Sea King air-borne early warning squadron was commissioned earlier this month, plugging a gap that was exposed during the Falklands conflict.

The memorandum of understanding for the helicopter to replace the Sea King, the EH101, was signed with the Italian Government in January this year.

Finally, in March 1984, Harland and Wolff was awarded a contract to convert a merchant ship, the Contender Bezant, into an aviation training ship to be known as RFA Argus which will principally serve the helicopter training needs of the Fleet Air Arm.

For the Fleet Air Arm, it has, I think, been a year of good progress.

Lastly I come to the underwater navy. The newest of our present conventional submarines was launched in the mid 1960s; the oldest in the late 1950s. We have now started on their replacement. The Upholder class of conventional submarine, the first of which is now being built, will provide a much improved capability against both surface ships and other submarines—both nuclear

[Mr. Stanley]

and conventional. We believe it will also be exceptionally hard to detect. The first of class is now building, and follow-on orders are planned to begin next year.

The nuclear-powered attack submarine programme continues to go steadily forward. There are now 13 SSNs in the Fleet, with four more building, and a further SSN order is planned for next year. In the battle for sea control, the role of the SSNs will be critical, and even though their cost is greater per boat than any RN surface ship currently building, their capability and their survivability makes them very potent and cost-effective naval assets.

Sir John Farr (Harborough): The House was glad to hear what my right hon. Friend said about the submarine underwater fleet. Is he absolutely sure that it will be the equal of what are reported to be built and produced in Soviet Russia as underwater vessels of exceptional speed and capacity?

Mr. Stanley: As my hon. Friend will appreciate, we do not begin to be equal in numerical terms. The technical quality of our latest conventional submarines, our SSNs and new class SSBNs will be a match for, and in many ways superior to, what is available within the Soviet navy. Having said that, the Soviet navy has a substantial numerical preponderance in that area.

I come finally to our nuclear ballistic missile submarines. I wish to make it clear beyond any doubt that the Government are firmly committed to the Trident programme, and that they are proceeding with it vigorously. Our commitment to Trident does not stem from dogma, history, fixation or any of the other irrelevancies that have been suggested in certain quarters. It stems from a cool, rational, dispassionate assessment of Britain's defence needs and Britain's defence priorities in the world of the 1990s and beyond.

That world looks like being no safer from nuclear blackmail — perhaps less so — than the world of the 1960s and 1970s in which previous British Governments of all complexions concluded that it was right not only to maintain Britain's strategic deterrent but to modernise it at very considerable cost. In safeguarding ourselves against nuclear blackmail in the world of the 1990s and beyond, Britain has available to her a unique defence option.

No other European member of NATO, apart from France, builds ballistic missile-firing submarines. No other European member of NATO has the access to the relevant American hardware and technology that we do.

The question for us, therefore, is do we keep or do we discard that wholly unique defence option? The Government's answer is that it is very definitely in our overall long-term national interest to keep it.

We have every reason to think that in Soviet eyes NATO's deterrence is materially strengthened by not being wholly dependent on the strategic nuclear forces of just a single country. The Americans want Britain to continue her strategic deterrent, and so do the European members of NATO.

For Britain herself, there is no additional expenditure on conventional weapons systems, even of the sort of sums required for Trident, that could purchase more than a fraction of the deterrence represented by Trident. Put another way, there is no scale of conventional retaliation that offers any real deterrent to nuclear blackmail with the massive nuclear armoury that the Soviet Union now has.

Can it seriously be argued that the threat of retaliation by British or even NATO conventional forces alone, would act as a deterrent to a nuclear strike, or threat of a nuclear strike, against even a single British city?

The argument that Britain should unilaterally give up her unique option of a strategic deterrent because she would be better off strengthening her conventional forces simply does not hold water in defence terms.

If it really does make better sense to exchange all one's own strategic nuclear weapons for conventional ones, I am afraid that the soundness of that argument has clearly entirely escaped the Soviet Union.

The fact is that the attempt of the official Opposition and the Liberal Party to justify their policy of abandoning Britain's deterrent on the grounds of strengthening our conventional forces is simply and frankly a fig leaf to try to conceal their adoption of one-sided disarmament policies.

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil): The Minister says that we should not take unilateral action. Does it not strike him as curious that while he opposes unilateral action in arms reduction, he is in favour of unilateral action in arms increase by increasing the number of warheads from 64 to 512? How does he justify that?

Mr. Stanley: The hon. Gentleman is incorrect. Neither this Government nor any previous Government would disclose the number of warheads involved. It is not an escalation but a continuation of a capability that the hon. Gentleman's party is unilaterally seeking to abandon.

If Britain's strategic deterrent is to be retained, what is the most cost-effective way of replacing Polaris-Chevaline and what is the timetable for doing so? It has been suggested first, that we do not need to take a decision now and, secondly, that sea-launched cruise missiles would be a better bet than Trident. I want to deal with both points.

On timing, of course I acknowledge that there is no precise moment in time when our present deterrent ceases to be effective. The process is gradual rather than sudden. But I must tell the House that on the basis of all the advice available to us — advice that is necessarily highly-sensitive — the Polaris-Chevaline system will require replacing in about the mid-1990s. That means that in order to produce a dedicated replacement system with mid-1990s in-service date, the key procurement decisions have had to be taken by now.

Of the alternative systems to Trident, the only one that has been canvassed with any seriousness is a submarine-launched cruise missile system, rather than a ballistic one. That comparison has, of course, already been studied with great care and in depth by the present Government. It was studied in the period before the initial Trident decision was made in 1980, and it was re-examined again before the decision was made to go for the Trident D5 missile rather than the C4. Nothing has happened since then to alter the view the Government came to that a cruise missile system would be less cost-effective.

The arguments are well set out in open government document 80/23 "The Future United Kingdom Strategic Nuclear Deterrent Force" published in July 1980—and I draw particular attention to paragraphs 35 to 43—and in open government document 82/1 "The United Kingdom Trident programme" paragraphs 14 to 16.

I shall explain the basic reasons why in the United Kingdom context the arguments come down in favour of a ballistic rather than a cruise system. First, we must have submarines that are dedicated to the deterrent role. The idea that we can combine both the hunter-killer conventional attack role and the nuclear deterrent role in the same submarine is an operational illusion. The two roles are, in fact in direct conflict. The essence of the hunter-killer role is to get into a position to attack an enemy vessel and then to make that attack. The act of attacking inevitably reveals the presence of a submarine.

In contrast, the absolute essence of the task of the submarine in the nuclear deterrent role is to remain undetected, and therefore invulnerable in all circumstances and at all times, to provide the guaranteed deterrent of an assured second strike capability. The two roles cannot be combined if one's strategic deterrent is to have the credibility that is conferred only by remaining undetected at all times. Britain's strategic deterrent has, therefore, to be placed in submarines that are exclusively and permanently dedicated to that role.

We then have to compare the relative cost-effectiveness of a dedicated ballistic missile submarine force with that of a dedicated cruise missile submarine force of the size necessary to achieve the minimum level of assured destruction assessed to be unacceptable to the Soviet Union. The House will, I am sure, understand that it is only possible to reproduce a general outline of that comparison in non-classified form.

I can outline the essential points, however. Though cruise missiles are cheaper, missile for missile, we need very many more of them to secure the same degree of deterrence achieved by a ballistic missile force. We need more cruise missiles because they carry only one warhead whereas the Trident ballistic missiles will have several. We need more cruise missiles also because cruise missiles will, for the foreseeable future, be much more vulnerable to Soviet defences than ballistic missiles.

Because we need more cruise missiles than ballistic ones—in fact many more—we need more dedicated submarines on which to carry them than the four boats planned for Trident with the resulting additional costs.

The cruise missile solution not only makes for a more vulnerable missile, but for a more vulnerable submarine launch platform. The submarine is made more vulnerable because the maximum range of American sea-launched cruise missiles under development, which we of course would have to use, is around 1,500 nautical miles, giving vastly less sea room in which the submarine can hide than the Trident D5 missile with about three times the range.

The House can be assured that the Government have as much interest as anyone in ensuring that our replacement deterrent is the most cost-effective available. If the cruise missile alternative had been more cost-effective, the Government would have adopted it, but for the reasons that I have spelt out our studies have consistently showed that a submarine-launched ballistic missile deterrent is more cost-effective than a cruise missile one. The cruise missile alternative to Trident would not confer the same assurance of deterrence. It would not be a cheaper means of securing equivalent deterrence. In short, it would be a bad buy.

For any disinclined to believe this, I would point out that five countries either already have or are developing a submarine-launched strategic missile capability—the United States, the USSR, China, France and ourselves. All have the same preoccupation, albeit from different standpoints, with their own security. All are bound to have done the same intensive analysis as we have done of the relative cost-effectiveness of ballistic and cruise missile systems.

Though both the United States and the USSR are supplementing their ballistic systems with strategic cruise systems, it is significant that all five countries have chosen to place their primary sea-launched strategic nuclear capabilities on ballistic missile, rather than cruise missile, submarines.

For the United Kingdom the only real policy options are between having a credible strategic deterrent which to be cost-effective needs to be ballistic, or having no strategic deterrent at all. For Britain to waste valuable resources on a halfway house deterrent, which in Soviet eyes—and those are the eyes that matter—would represent no real deterrent, would be the worst course of all. It is for these reasons that the Government remain committed to the Trident programme that we put to the electorate last year.

Mr. John Browne (Winchester): I accept my right hon. Friend's arguments on Trident versus cruise, but what about the independence argument — the control mechanisms and so on?

Mr. Stanley: The degree of independence is exactly the same for Trident as it would be assuming that a cruise agreement with the Americans could be completed on the same terms. It will make no difference. We would have an independent system, as with Polaris.

Mr. James Callaghan (Cardiff, South and Penarth): In the Estimates, the cost of Trident is based on an exchange rate of $1·53 to the pound. Now that the rate is $1·20, the cost will be increased substantially. In view of the Government's firm adherence to Trident, is the right hon. Gentleman giving an assurance that that additional cost will be borne in any circumstances, no matter what the rate of exchange and, further, that that will be without cost to the conventional Navy? If so, how will the cost be borne?

Mr. Stanley: Our view of the importance of maintaining the Trident programme is taken against the background that about half the cost is in dollars and that there is some vulnerability because of the exchange rate. Despite that element, our view is still that the overall economic and defence advantage is with continuing that programme.

Procurement is extended over about 18 years and the exchange rate over that lengthy period is a matter for speculation. If there is a deterioration in the exchange rate the overall sterling cost of the Trident programme will increase and fewer funds will be available for conventional forces. That goes without saying. However, we must consider the relative balance of advantage to the country as a whole between the Trident programme and what is at the margin of our conventional expenditure. As a result of Government action we have already increased our defence expenditure to about one fifth more than it was when the right hon. Gentleman's Administration left office.

In conclusion, those of us on both sides of the House who have had the good fortune to serve in the Ministry of Defence know what a privilege and a pleasure it is to work with the armed forces. In the last year I have seen a great deal of the men and women of the Royal Navy and the

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Royal Marines—in surface ships and in submarines, in the cold of Arctic Norway, in the heat of the middle and far east, and in the gales of the south Atlantic.

Those at sea with the Royal Navy today have to contend with electronic and engineering complexities that even in the last world war would never have been dreamt of. They also have to contend with the natural elements whose ferocity at times is changeless. The Royal Navy contends with both with skill, with style and with abundant good humour. I know that the whole House wishes the senior service well with both admiration and affection.

5.55 pm

Mr. A. E. P. Duffy (Sheffield, Attercliffe): More than in any year that I can recall, given the widespread speculation and publicity about the defence budget, Parliament's assessment of the naval Estimates must turn on certain basic but well-tried judgments. How far are they credible, given Britain's need for maritime power? How far do they take us towards the right size and shape of the Fleet in the late 1980s? How far are they affordable, given the soaring costs of defence technology, in particular Trident? How far do they provide for the right priorities, balance and sustainability, and how far are they in line with NATO's needs? How far do they pursue less nuclear reliant strategies, given the present state of public opinion across the Alliance, and are therefore in line with current thinking about arms control? Finally, how far are they acceptable to public opinion in Britain?

The defence Estimates involve a study of individual trees, not a wood. They make no attempt to draw a panorama of a landscape in which separate forests can be seen in relation to each other.

Let us consider the Navy. We hear of this weapons system or that ship. We know that the Navy has special responsibilities in the eastern Atlantic and the Channel, but nowhere can we find a fundamental up-to-date statement on why we need a navy. The case for a strong Royal Navy is only implied. The case for a strong Merchant Navy is not even mentioned. I suspect that references to the plight of the merchant service by the Minister were afterthoughts.

The sea is the vital link in Britain's growing industrial, commercial and agricultural dependence on imports. All the United Kingdom's international trade must cross the sea. Over 98 per cent. of it is carried in ships. A total of 232 million tonnes was carried by ship in 1980. No other means of transport could cope with such vast quantities of raw materials, food produce and manufactured goods.

That is why the law of the sea treaty is so important to Britain. Why do we not sign it? For a decade or more the United Kingdom has invested time and effort in drawing it up and has taken the lead in its drafting. Reservations about some of its provisions, notably sea-bed mining, are understood. Do the Government have a serious reservation or hesitation about it? It is important to be an original signatory.

Once we sign the treaty, we can work towards acceptable forms. Refusal to sign would mean that we would be the odd one out within the Commonwealth and, Germany apart, the odd one out within the European Community. It is vital for the Royal Navy and Britain to have freedom of passage for ships and aircraft. Should there not have been at least some reference to this in the defence Estimates? If this matter was dealt with in the Cabinet this morning and it was decided not to make a statement to the House this afternoon before our annual debate on the Navy, that will be seen as a grave contempt of the House.

There is another reason why I feel that the shape of our strategy as set out in the defence Estimates—in so far as it is possible to find a cohesive strategy between the rows of trees set out in it—is wrong. Of course we have commitments to continental Europe which we must respect, but our defence policy does not reflect the priorities which should be held by an island nation. It does not point the way to the effective exercise of sea power. To exercise seapower, as well as having an effective Navy in defence of our interests and in furtherance of them, we must have an effective mercantile marine to sustain it. We must also have an understanding among the electorate and here in Parliament of how seapower affects us all as individuals.

Britain's primary need as one of the most outward-looking and sea-dependent of nations, and as Europe's anchor man within the Alliance, is for maritime power. Almost every sector of Britain's maritime industry is beset by increasingly severe pressure on its operations, thereby posing a variety of threats to the country's trade, performance and security. That is why Jim Slater, general secretary of the National Union of Seamen, and Ken Gill, general secretary of AUEW-TASS, have joined forces to help Britain's crisis-torn shipping and shipbuilding industries. They have produced a plan under which it is intended to reserve Britain's coastal trade and offshore supply sector for United Kingdom flagships alone and to require the extra tonnage needed as a result to be built in British shipyards. The plan would add about 110 ships to the United Kingdom fleet, guaranteeing jobs for 20,000 shipbuilding workers and creating work for 2,500 seafarers. My hon. Friend the Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) will have more to say about the plan when he replies for the Opposition.

I know that Jim Slater and Ken Gill will welcome the setting up of the study announced by the Minister; but that study will have to produce some results, because of the present decline in merchant shipping. It is now down to around 400 vessels with a projection of 300 by the end of this decade and with 5,000 men a year leaving the Fleet. At present there is no provision for training, and more and more of our trade will be carried under foreign flags. Such a crisis can await only a very brief study before it is tackled.

At the latest of the biannual Sealink conferences held in Annapolis this summer, which I, my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) and Conservative Members attended, Admiral Wesley McDonald, the Supreme Allied Commander Atlantic, warned his audience of parliamentarians, military officers, civil servants and strategists that his primary job was the protection of military resupply and economic shipping, but that this was becoming more difficult to do. This is the other side of the coin. He pointed out that 90 per cent. of military cargoes would have to come by sea, and studies showed that this would need up to 800 sailings a month, but the decline of the Western shipping industry meant that fewer ships would be available to transport the men and materials needed.

SACLANT also estimated that he had access to only half the warships that he needed for the convoy and escort

role and that force goals were simply not being met. He was increasingly concerned about the deficiencies in NATO's ability to sustain a long conflict in the Atlantic. When challenged, the Government insist again and again that they are meeting force goals, but we should recall that we are responsible for providing 70 per cent. of ready forces in the eastern Atlantic. Given the decline in our own surface warship numbers—the Minister did not deny my implication—we are bound to wonder how serious the Government can be when they say that they are meeting force goals. If they are, whom did Admiral McDonald have in mind when he said that force goals were not being met?

It is true that in the spring, after a similar public warning by the Admiral earlier in the year, the Government announced that eight ships which should have gone into the standby squadron would be retained for the active fleet, and that two Rothesay class frigates which were to be stood down would be kept on for perhaps another year or so. In addition, I do not think the Minister will deny that he has come under at least as much, if not more, pressure from the Opposition Front Bench and some of my hon. Friends. Despite the retention of those ships, whom did Admiral McDonald have in mind when he said that force goals were not being met if he was not thinking of us?

In *Navy International* in March—he uttered the same warnings in June—Admiral McDonald wrote:

"Today I have less than half the carriers and escorts I need . . . I have only two thirds of the SSNs, between 80 per cent. and 90 per cent. of the MPA"—

maritime patrol aircraft—

"and far fewer MCMVs than I need".

This warning from SACLANT, together with the long-standing reminders from the Opposition Benches, no doubt explains the Secretary of State's reversal of policy, because it was nothing less.

For the third time, I ask whether we are meeting our force goals. In its early days NATO had a maritime superiority over the Warsaw pact of greater than 3:1. Based on historic examples such as world war 1 and world war 2, that ratio is just about what is needed for a maritime alliance to prevail against a land power with internal lines of communication.

Sir Anthony Buck (Colchester, North): I have great sympathy with what the hon. Gentleman is saying, but does he agree that he has never met an admiral with enough ships? Does he not also agree that the admiral to whom he has referred is greatly alarmed at the possibility of our nation departing from the nuclear commitment?

Mr. Duffy: What the hon. and learned Gentleman says about admirals is the usual disclaimer which all Ministers and former Ministers make when cornered about their responsibilities. On this occasion, I am not with the hon. and learned Gentleman. I do not share his criticism of admirals. Indeed, I shall quote another admiral later whom he knows and admires, and I think that the hon. and learned Gentleman will find it difficult to reject his advice.

In the last decade or so, because of economic crises, austerity campaigns and cost cutting, along with each nation's attempt to maintain balanced forces, the ratio between NATO and the Warsaw pact has changed completely and is now only 1:1 or less, yet, even though our maritime forces are stretched globally as well as in the NATO area the trend in the number of surface units continues downward.

The president of the United States-based ultra high-tech Microelectronics and Computer Technology Corporation took the Annapolis conference into the future of naval conflict. Telecommunications were in the midst of an unending revolution, he said, and the problems of managing them would soon be even more complicated by Third world countries crowding into the area. Micro-electronics would soon provide embedded computers for weapons systems which would allow them to perform missions now requiring half this Chamber full of equipment.

It was also prophesied that future commanders would be able to detect and target thousands of objects in seconds, but there was caution about the prospects of a radical breakthrough in anti-submarine warfare technology. It was doubted whether there were signs of a broad area sea surveillance system able to see a submarine unless it was fairly near the surface. In other words, technology will not come to the rescue of this Government or the Secretary of State. There are no great new discoveries or strategies just around the corner, and no panaceas in the wings, for the Government's maritime shortfalls or deficiencies. There are just the cold, hard facts of force levels, ships and numbers, which are becoming more disturbing as time goes on and the facts become clearer. This was highlighted in the closing portion of the Minister's speech. His comments about Trident represented more than anything else an apology to those Members on both sides who believe in the importance of a surface fleet. We would give priority to that concept, but the Minister was effectively arguing the opportunity cost of Trident in terms of surface units.

The financial squeeze imposed by the 1981 White Paper extended right across the surface Navy. In addition to the demise of Invincible, Fearless and Intrepid, now rescinded, the sustainable level of the frigate and destroyer force would, other things being equal, have been halved and has been only partially reprieved. The Minister talked about new classes. Let us see them come on stream. Apart from short-term reprieves and including the eight ships that were to have gone into the standby squadron, the planned frigate and destroyer strength is now 50 or 52. No matter how one does the sums, and whatever soundings one takes, we still cannot agree on the number. Conservative Members, including former Navy Ministers, are not given the clear picture that they seek when they table questions about this. Conservative Members may care to consider the written answer at column *88* of the *Official Report* for 27 February, which shows how difficult it is to get a clear picture of the surface strength.

The question now is whether finance will be provided to maintain a new construction programme large enough to sustain that reduced force. It is disturbing enough to note that the strength is now only 50 or 52—a decline of at least 15 per cent., perhaps nearer 20 per cent., since the Minister took office. The Minister knows that one must have ships coming on stream to sustain that strength, because ships are going out all the time. Five frigates and a destroyer are going out this year, and six frigates next year. The Minister himself gave that information to the House. Ships are going out in larger numbers than they are coming in.

Delays in completing the latest of the Navy's Sea Dart missile destroyers will mean that only one major surface warship and one submarine will be completed for the Navy this year. That is the smallest number of ships to join the

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Fleet in any year this century. Only one destroyer, one frigate and one submarine were completed last year. At this rate, there will be no warship building at all by the end of the century. The same applies to merchantmen. Yet numbers are vital, numbers have a quality of their own —or is the Navy now firmly in the grip of structural disarmament?

The Minister mentioned the type 23. Perhaps the most compelling argument for its introduction was that it would be cheaper. When it was announced, a figure as low as £60 million was mentioned. What is the present cost? Has it become gold-plated like some other classes? We have been hearing throughout the year that the first order was being placed this year, but what about the next order and the one after that? What numbers do the Government have in mind? Conservative Members should be trying to wring that information out of the Government. We also need to know how long the type 23 is to run.

Perhaps the Government have realised that we have been investing too much in costly and sophisticated new equipment. In *The Naval Review*, a magazine circulated only to serving naval officers, one officer writes:

"Reliability . . . means that any weapons system will work the moment I want it."

Recalling his experience in the Falklands, he added:

"There were times when mine did not."

His report highlights the fact that sophisticated new equipment might be motivating structural disarmament. It might also be too much for crews to handle. The new equipment also gave rise to a large number of health problems.

Support for that officer's view that simple, easy-to-use and, one hopes, cheaper weapons might hold the key to efficient ship defence in the future came from Admiral Sir James Eberle, a very distinguished former Cincfleet and latterly Cincnavhome, whom I know the hon. and learned Member for Colchester, North (Sir A. Buck) admires. Admiral Eberle, who supervised the assembly of the task force, is on record as saying:

"Many of us had very deep worries about how well our ships and weapons would do in the South Atlantic. Frankly, people's expectations weren't very high. Reliability wasn't nearly good enough; some systems obviously didn't work."

He continued:

"The navy has allowed itself to be taken in by sophistication. We sacrificed reliability and simplicity for highly complex weapons that were highly unreliable."

The Select Committee heard as much this year.

In that context, Admiral Eberle comments that, when he was briefed by civilian colleagues at the Ministry of Defence before appearing at a Select Committee,

"I was told to say no more than I possibly had to. If we put as much effort into preventing problems as we do in stopping skeletons coming out of the cupboard, things would be a bloody sight better."

Is not the Navy in danger of being smothered by procurement? Cannot lead times, and thus costs, be reduced? When will we do something about Bath? When will someone take those people by the scruff and preferably get rid of most of them? Must we commit ourselves to pure, ever more sophisticated and costly Rolls-Royce warships? It is doubtful whether there will be a commensurate increase in naval Votes, given what we have heard from the Minister today about the Trident programme. How will this affect the proposed new offshore patrol vessel codenamed OPV Mk 3, which is currently under discussion? What about the review that the Navy is carrying out of the shipping that it will need to maintain its ability to mount amphibious operations from the mid-1990s?

The most radical developments of the next few years may well occur not in the shipyards but in the infrastructure, manning and training of the Navy, and that is where our priorities should now be. The Government never tire of telling us that Trident will absorb only 3 per cent. of the total defence budget over the period of its procurement and only 6 per cent. of the equipment budget, but the absorption of 6 per cent. of the equipment budget by Trident is almost double the 3·2 per cent. being spent this year on "war and contingency stocks". At the annual conference of NATO's parliament in Brussels earlier this month my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, North and I heard more vigorous claims for those two items and sustainability generally from all quarters than for anything else. We heard no calls for the type of system that the Minister was defending today.

As the Falklands war showed, modern warfare consumes a far greater amount of ammunition and all kinds of stores than had been estimated. Linked closely with inadequate force levels, therefore, is the question whether we can properly support the forces that we have. For example, do we have enough missiles, gun ammunition, sonobuoys and spare parts? In other words, what about the bread and butter? And can we get those vital sustainability items to our platforms whenever and wherever required, given the experience of the Falklands?

What is being done to redress the critical inadequacy of Alliance mine warfare capabilities? My hon. Friend the Member for Clackmannan will have more to say about that later. That is where the greatest need and perhaps the greatest gap exists. Is the Minister satisfied with survivability as well as sustainability in vital areas such as ASW and air defence equipment, electronic warfare and communications systems? In the light of the Falklands experience, is the Minister satisfied that enough is being done to improve damage control? Despite all that sorrowful experience, one still hears that there are gaps.

The use of civilian assets is on the other side of the defence spectrum. Why is there no reference to the recommendations of the joint committee comprising the Ministry of Defence, the Department of Transport and the General Council of British Shipping to stockpile such items as light guns, "chaff" radar and torpedo decoys for the self-defence of merchant ships? Is it not now perfectly clear that, wherever possible, we must back up high-priced warships with low-cost force multipliers such as portable soft kill defences, helicopter decks and a replenishment capability for earmarked reinforcement ships?

The defence statement said that the total of 66,400 officers and men in the services before the 1981 defence review would be reduced by 11,000 in the early 1990s. With three shore establishments closing by the end of 1985 and others later, the intention is to reduce the number of men ashore by 25 per cent. between 1981 and 1988, and thereafter a further reduction of 15 per cent. is expected. Inevitably, that will mean that more sailors' part two professional training will have to be done at sea. Will there be sufficient ships to meet current tasks and give younger officers and ratings practical experience at sea? Will not more sea time, with a substantial reduction in shore training, affect signing on for further service, particularly among the more experienced?

Is it not the case that, over and above those problems, the Navy is still trying to make larger manpower cuts than previously planned, while operating more ships than the number for which allowance has been made? The House will welcome the Minister's announcement of an increase in the Royal Naval Reserves complement.

We come to affordability. Is there any truth in the article on 25 November in *The Sunday Times*, which stated that the current examination of long-term costings reveals that, on current commitments, the Navy is £1·5 billion over budget? The Secretary of State has assured the House that a review of the cost of buying Trident is to be speeded up in response to fears of a serious increase in cost. Since he made that statement, the financial pressure has increased as the pound continues to wilt in the shadow of the United States dollar and the problems of public spending become less tractable.

This year's defence Estimates used a sterling-dollar rate, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Callaghan) reminded the House, of $1·53 to the pound, but this week the rate has dropped below $1·20 to the pound. A drop of 20 per cent. in the exchange rate boosts Trident's cost, at 1983-84 prices, by about 10 per cent. It is instructive to compare current with previous estimates of the Trident programme. Because of the limitation of time I shall not cite the figures, but it is instructive for Conservative Members to look at the past four years and see how, year after year, Government figures have steadily increased. Initially, about 30 per cent. of the work was done in the United States, with 70 per cent. scheduled for Britain. By June of this year the split had become 45:55, and it is now estimated that the fall in the sterling-dollar rate has raised the dollar component above 50 per cent.

There is a curious arrangement by which Britain pays for the American components in advance and loses interest which would otherwise accrue. There are Conservative Members as well as the senior figures in the Navy, Army, and Air Force who see the Trident programme as gravely damaging to a coherent defence policy for Britain. In June, in the debate on the defence Estimates, the Minister of State for the Armed Forces defended Trident, as he did this afternoon. My reply to him is that NATO is a political as well as a military organisation.

The deployment of cruise underlined the importance of public understanding and support. I am therefore bound to ask him, whatever his defence of Trident, whether he will be able to carry it through. We must carry a more sensitive public opinion with us than we had to do at one time. The reassurance of public opinion is an important job for the Government as well as for NATO. Reassurance is a complement of the policy of deterrence.

At one time the basic Allied approach of adequate strength, political solidarity, the pursuit of a more stable relationship between East and West and the repeated commitment to significant arms control measures provided a sound basis for public support, but not so today. We now have to go beyond that. The emphasis now must be on reduced tension, lower levels of armaments and the pursuit of less-reliant nuclear strategies, through improved conventional forces.

If, earlier this month in Brussels, my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, North and I heard one bid more than any other—apart from those which I have mentioned, which are bound up with sustainability—it was for conventional forces right across the Alliance. That call came from American senators and congressmen as well as from Dutch and German Socialist MPs. At that recent conference we were reminded by some speakers, that General Rogers, SACEUR, had told them, either individually or in speeches, which they had heard during the year, that he was looking for a better infrastructure and improved sustainability—not more missiles or improved strategic weapons systems such as Trident. In so far as this country insists on going ahead in this way, it will only be duplicating the United States' contribution, and in doing so it will cut across NATO's and Britain's priorities.

We have the means and the capacity, thanks to ET, to place more reliability on conventional arms and thereby fulfil all the more effectively our maritime obligations to NATO. We lack the will on the part of the Government. We lack a credible, affordable naval policy likely to yield the right size and shape of the Fleet. The Government prefer other priorities, arising from a different conceptual framework. If the Government continue to bear the "£10 billion headache", as Max Hastings put it in *The Standard* tonight, we shall not get the right size and shape of the Fleet. Whatever economies the Secretary of State secures, if the Government proceed much further down this road they will be brought up sharply—the *Daily Telegraph* warned of this on 16 May last — against a further defence review as well as an erosion of our conventional fighting capability. That is the prospect which the Government have shown no sign of confronting.

6.27 pm

Mr. Edward du Cann (Taunton): I am not sure that I altogether followed the argument of the hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Duffy) at the end of his speech. I simply content myself with saying that the House always recognises the warm sincerity in anything that the hon. Gentleman says on this subject.

At the end of the last Session, on an initiative of the right hon. Members for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Callaghan) and for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen) and myself—the right hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth was a driving force — the all-party maritime affairs group was established with the excellent Commander Rankin as secretary. The group has begun its work. It has almost 100 members and is organised along the lines of the former parliamentary and scientific committee. Put shortly, the group's purpose is to inform Members of Parliament better about maritime matters and to draw the attention of Government and Parliament to matters of significance and national importance in maritime affairs. I have no mandate of any sort to speak for that group, but I am sure that I speak for all its members and many others both inside and outside the House when I express deep anxiety about the maritime scene. Seafaring is in crisis, and it is necessary for us to extricate ourselves from this position.

I should like to bring four matters to the attention of Ministers, especially my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence, whom I greatly admire for his practical experience and competence.

My first point follows the comments by the hon. Member for Attercliffe. The deadline for signature of the convention on the law of the sea is 9 December. More than 140 countries out of the 159 members of the United Nations have signed the convention. Those signatories include the whole of the European Community—with the exceptions of Germany, where there are special

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problems and Britain — and many members of the Commonwealth. We should be given a plain answer. Why has the United Kingdom not signed the convention? It is said in the corridors of the House that the matter was discussed this morning in Cabinet. If that is so, the House is entitled to know the decision. The convention is an attempt to replace anarchy with order, and in my opinion it is right that the United Kingdom should sign.

Secondly, I should like to come to the state of the merchant marine. My hon. Friend referred to it in his speech which was wholly admirable, especially at the end when he discussed trident and cruise. The hon. Member for Attercliffe also referred to the merchant marine. There is no doubt that a big, effective and prosperous merchant shipping fleet is the fourth arm of Britain's defence. That has been stated often. It is true. More than 90 per cent. of our trade is carried in ships. Without ships to carry goods, raw materials and food to and from our country, we should neither work nor eat as we are accustomed to. Our whole standard of living depends upon shipping.

The state of our merchant marine gives rise to the gravest possible anxiety. In 1975, we had 1,600 ships—50 million tonnes deadweight. We are now reduced to just over 700 ships, a deadweight tonnage of 18·5 million. That is a decline of nearly two thirds within eight years. I understand that the General Council of British Shipping estimates a fleet of no more than 400 to 500 ships by the end of 1986.

There is worse to come. United Kingdom shipowners have ordered less than 100,000 tonnes deadweight during the past 12 months. During the past three months no orders have been placed for ships, yet, merely to maintain the present level of our merchant fleet, orders need to be given for about 1 million tonnes deadweight each year.

I appreciate that my hon. Friend said that there will be an in-depth study. There is no need for that because we are aware of the position now. If his Department does not know, it should and could find out the facts quickly. What is needed, is urgent action.

The position, which was already serious, will be exacerbated by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor's 1984 Budget measures. They removed the 100 per cent. first year allowances, as the House will remember, and also the free depreciation which the shipping industry had previously and specially received. At the same time, the Chancellor altered the overseas earnings tax relief provisions. That hit seafarers hard. It has probably also increased staff costs in British ships this year by no less than 3 per cent. Those measures have adversely affected costs and investment in the industry.

The implications of a declining merchant navy for defence, as the hon. Gentleman said, for maritime employment, for our balance of payments, the carriage of our trade and reserves for the Fleet are well known.

I understand that the General Council of British Shipping has proposed a number of measures to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer to reverse the current disastrous trends. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence will say immediately to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor that he should consider those proposals with the utmost attention, with a view to implementing at least some of them.

I hope that in his 1985 Budget the Chancellor will heed those representations, because at the moment there is no other leading maritime country which treats its shipping industry as badly as we do.

I am all for competition, but the competition which the British merchant fleet is experiencing at present in comparison with other nations is unfair, and something must be done about it.

I come to my third point. I thought that the hon. Member for Attercliffe used excellent language when he spoke about naval shipbuilding. His question about the cost of the type 23 frigate was pertinent. When he said that numbers have a quality of their own—I think that that was something that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State once said—I wholly agree with him. I also agree with the hon. Member for Attercliffe when he said that we do not want gold-plated ships. We want more, simpler and cheaper ships. We could have them if we tried. We used to have them in the war, as many of us in the House remember well. There is no reason why we should not have them now.

I listened to my hon. Friend when he described the size of the Soviet submarine fleet. I am bound to say yet again —I knew the figures before, of course—that I was horrified by what I heard. We have nothing like enough ships to begin to cope with that menace. The sooner we alter our procurement policy to ensure that we receive better value for money, the better.

I wish to share with the House my deep anxieties about another matter—the present position of the hydrographic department and the naval surveying service. The House is aware that I have raised this matter before. I do not apologise for doing so again. I am sure that I speak for the whole House when I pay a warm tribute to the splendid men and women in the Navy, and their civilian counterparts. Their competence, skills and dedication are a credit to the service and to our nation.

It is invidious to mention individuals, but I hope that the House will not mind if I refer directly to two of them. One of them is Rear-Admiral Ritchie, an outstanding Hydrographer of the Navy, who is now retiring after 10 years of work at the International Hydrographic Bureau. The second is Rear-Admiral Sir David Haslam, who retires in February after 10 years as Hydrographer. They are exœllent men. They have been outstanding leaders in this subject.

My interest in hydrography derives not just from the fact that the hydrographic department is in Taunton but because, like countless other mariners, sailing professionally or for recreation, I am a wholehearted admirer of the high quality of the publications that it produces. As the House will confirm, the term "Admiralty chart", the only world series of charts, is synonymous all over the world with the highest quality. We are proud of the hydrographic department in Taunton. There are many good reasons for being proud. Unlike almost all other defence efforts, it is no mere consumer of resources. It earns huge amounts for the taxpayer from sales. It is a pity that the "blue paper", if I may call it that, does not set out how much is earned, not least in foreign currency.

The department is also indispensable to Great Britain's general trading effort. Remembering, as I said earlier, how much of Britain's trade is carried in ships, the point is obvious.

With the resources of the sea bed awaiting commercial exploitation, the need for competent and thorough survey work, particularly around our own waters, is re-emphasised.

Last but by no means least, as my right hon. and hon. Friends who are Ministers will know well, the development of Trident and the towed RAY frigate and the need to be effective in anti-submarine warfare make it plain that hydrography is crucial to the defence of the realm. On every count, therefore, hydrography is crucial, yet this arm of the service is dangerously neglected. It lacks proper attention and adequate resources. The history of its management by the bureaucracy in recent years is a tale of muddle, failure to make decisions and incompetence on a staggering scale.

It will be within the knowledge of many hon. Members that the recommendations of the hydrographic study group of 1974 have never been implemented, although they are still valid. The House may well ask why not. What is the point of having a study group—we are now to have this other study group — if its recommendations are not followed?

I shall give the House five exa nples of what I described. First, a glance at one of the charts included in the 1983 report of the Hydrographer shows that well below one third of Great Britain's coastline is surveyed to modern standards. Surely that is a scandal. Secondly, there are three large ships in the surveying fleet—the Hecla and Hecate, commissioned in 1975, and the Hydra, commissioned in 1966. Those ships are 16 or 17 years old.

The House will remember the brilliant service that those ships gave as hospital ships during the Falklands conflict, where their work earned universal praise and admiration for the men who sailed in them, yet nothing is scheduled to replace them. What is the position? Are they to sail on until they fall to bits, rusted rotten? It is right, I am sure, to demand that a programme for their replacement should be announced in the near future.

Thirdly, I turn to the smaller ships in the surveying fleet. It is good that the Gleaner has been commissioned, and there is a new coastal survey vessel. However, the three inshore survey craft in the fleet are now 25 years old and are due, I believe, to be paid off at the end of the year. It seems extraordinary to me that, with only a month to go, we do not know what is to replace them.

The 1982 report by the Hydrographer told us that hovermarine surface effect ship trials were under way. They were, I believe, successful. I hope that my right hon. Friend will tell us whether that is so. I hope that he will tell us, either today or very soon, what will replace the inshore craft, and how soon.

Fourthly, I turn to the civilian side. In 1978 the civilian complement, almost all based at Taunton, numbered 1,066. By 1983, it had fallen to 987. In the business of management, the bureaucrats seem to proceed by a series of salami cuts. That is not the way to get the best effort out of some dedicated people, many of whom are my good friends in my home town. The nation owes much to their devotion, as was demonstrated at the time of the Falklands conflict.

I do not know what the present numbers are. Last year's report by the Hydrographer has still not been published, although we have nearly reached the end of 1984.

Who in the Ministry of Defence is responsible for this inexcusable dilatoriness? By the time the report appears it will be almost a year out of date and much less useful than if it had been published earlier. I consider late reporting to be an insult to the House and to the taxpayer. I hope that my right hon. Friend can give us an undertaking that the Hydrographer's reports will be published more promptly in future.

I believe that I am right to say that, when the figures for last year are published, we shall learn that the civilian numbers have been reduced below 900 and that further cuts are intended.

I hope that my right hon. Friend will allow me to state plainly that the process of cuts should stop. It is no longer the fat that is being cut, if there ever was any; it is the bone that is being cut into. If there are any more cuts in numbers, functions will have to be reduced, and that will be very much to the disadvantage of the hydrographic fleet.

As the hydrography department is a productive department, it should surely be possible to exempt it from the rule of cuts by numbers, irrespective of function, applied by the Ministry of Defence. There should be some formula under which allowance is made for the productive nature of the work that Taunton is engaged in.

I have a sneaking feeling that the reduction in the scope of the official hydrographic effort is to some extent a deliberate policy. I hope that I am wrong—no doubt my right hon. Friend will tell me if I am—in thinking that some inexperienced bureaucrat believes that we can safely turn the whole fleet—or a major part of it—over to the private sector.

No one is more passionate for the private sector than I am. I earn my living in industry, and always have done during the years that I have been in the House. I do so partly because I value my independence and partly because I believe that, if it is possible for an hon. Member to be active in business, he may prove to be a better judge of many practical matters which are discussed in the House, such as taxes, trade and many aspects of commerce and administration. *[Interruption.]* Right hon. and hon. Members may agree with me or not, but that is my view, and I am happy to see a reinforcement of the national surveying effort by commercial firms. There is much that they can usefully do. However, it would be folly further to reduce our naval hydrographic effort. Any reduction in the naval supervision would be a most dangerous course from the point of view of defence, and would break an undertaking which my hon. Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mare (Mr. Wiggin) was good enough to give me a couple of years ago in an answer to a question.

I do not believe, either, that such a course of action would necessarily provide the best value for the taxpayer's money. We must maintain a strong staff of naval specialists and they must remain in overall command of the effort, whichever Government Department is, for the time being, responsible for the bulk of the funding.

I am sure that it is a matter of infinite regret to many hon. Members besides myself that although a number of these points have been made before in interviews with Ministers and in public debate both in the House and elsewhere, the Defence Ministry has treated hydrography with a carelessness that verges on the discreditable. I hope that Ministers will be prepared to give the House credible assurances that that will cease to be the case in future.

I repeat what I said when I began my speech. In my view our maritime affairs are in a state of deep crisis, but

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what is wrong can be put right. I have confidence in my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Department. I look to them to see that what is wrong is put right.

6.46 pm

Dr. David Owen (Plymouth, Devonport): The right hon. Member for Taunton (Mr. du Cann) has made a trenchant speech, and I agree with every word of it. I agree with his commitment to the necessity to sign the law of the sea convention. I hope that the Government will carefully assess their position on the issue. I agree with the right hon. Gentleman about the decline and serious state of our merchant marine. I agree with him about the need to consider the high cost of some of the surface ships that we are producing at the moment, and whether there might not be alternative methods. I agree with his every word about the hydrographic service, both as someone who formerly had responsibility for the Royal Navy and as someone who sails around our shores.

I have an apology to make to the Minister. I have a long-standing engagement this evening which would have been very difficult to cancel, so I may not be in my place throughout the debate, although I will try to return. I hope that neither the Minister nor the hon. Member who winds up for the Labour party will take my absence as a disservice.

The Minister has made a speech on the central question that faces the Navy—the Trident expenditure—and has produced detailed arguments for the Government's case to an extent that we have not heard before. I thank him for that. I shall try to deal with the matter as he suggested we should deal with it — in a cool, rational and dispassionate way.

The facts facing the overall defence budget are stark, and are only just becoming clear to the country. For well over a year, I have warned of the dangers to the defence budget in 1986-87. In the February White Paper, for the first time, we saw that there was to be a dramatic drop from a funding of 3 per cent. for 1985-86—an increase in real terms—to zero growth.

My own fear is that we will see an absolute reduction in the defence budget for 1986-87. That will put intolerable pressures on all the armed services—not just the Royal Navy.

It would be absurd to pretend that the Trident programme alone is responsible for the pressure on the defence budget. However, that programme now represents a massive cost to the defence budget, and the way in which it has been arranged has put the heaviest pressure on the naval budget. When we first committed ourselves to the Trident programme, the cost was an addition to the defence budget. It is only in recent years that it has been placed on the naval budget.

As many aspects of the Navy are now under review, it is very sad that the Minister failed to say anything about the sword of Damocles that hangs over the royal dockyards, which have now existed for months under the prospect of a report recommending an agency provision of shattering proportions. Some hon. Members may not realise the enormity of what is proposed. Men who have for decades given service to our country would be placed on a five-year contract and employed by private contractors who could, after five years, withdraw those contracts. The men would lose all their certainty of employment.

Privatisation in many other fields has never dreamed of treating the work force in such a way. At least there has been continuity of employment. I must urge the Minister not to pursue the Levine agency proposal. It is damaging to the dockyards, to confidence in the Government's word, to employment and deeply damaging to the servicing of the Royal Navy.

We do not know what will happen. We have accepted that a frigate and a submarine should go out to private contract——

Mr. Douglas: We?

Dr. Owen: Well, I have accepted it.

Mr. Douglas: Oh.

Dr. Owen: The reality is that they are going out to private contract. That has been proposed repeatedly by Select Committees and, whatever we might feel about it, that is what is happening. Having accepted that reality, however, prejudging the assessment of the cost-effectiveness of private repair as opposed to dockyard repair is unfair in the extreme to the work force.

The Trident programme is the central issue which faces the Government in formulating defence policy and the Royal Navy. The official cost of Trident in March 1984 was given to the House as £8·729 billion, with 45 per cent. of the money being spent in the United States. The estimate was calculated on the then exchange rate of $1·53 to the pound. It is now $1·20 to the pound. Each drop of 1 cent costs an additional £26 million, so the cost of the Trident programme has risen by £780 million since March. That gives a new estimate of £9·480 billion at 1983-84 prices. When that figure is converted to approximate 1984-85 prices by adding a modest 4 per cent. for United States inflation and 5 per cent. for United Kingdom inflation, we get an estimate of £9·9 billion. It is effectively £10 billion, the inflation factor contributing between £420 million and £450 million to the total. That is a pretty conservative estimate of the present running costs of the Trident programme. Others are putting it higher, at £11 billion or even £12 billion. Let us assume, then, that the programme costs £10 billion. Each £100 million of extra cost of Trident means a cut of 0·1 per cent. in real terms in the defence budget. If we take an assumption of zero growth in the 1986-87 budget and an addition of £1·2 billion in extra costs, there will be an absolute reduction of 1·2 per cent. in the defence budget in 1986-87. Nobody believes that that will not be devastating to the defence budget.

The problem in all this is that the dollar might fall against the pound but at that time the British economy would be in reasonably good condition and could absorb the difference. If however, we were to have a one-dollar pound, which is not wholly out of the question, we should be at maximum weakness and our defence budget would be under incredible pressure. Expenditure on Trident so far has been only about £200 million, but £600 million has been committed. By 1988, one third of the total, or more than £3 billion, will have been committed. To revise the cost of Trident at about £10 billion at 1984-85 prices would mean that it would account for 13 per cent. to 14 per cent., instead of the previous estimate of 11 per cent., of the total

defence equipment budget and 36 per cent. to 38 per cent., instead of the original 33 per cent., of the Royal Navy's budget.

The peak of Trident expenditure will coincide with the Royal Navy's heavy building programme for new ships. Between 1985 and 1995 there are to be built eight new type 23 frigates at a cost of £200 million each and at a gross cost of £1·6 billion, and a hunter-killer submarine programme costing £1 billion, type 2400 submarines are going out at £100 million and the EH101 helicopter programme is to cost £1·2 billion. Above all, what will happen in regard to replacements for HMS Fearless and HMS Intrepid, the specialist amphibious vessels which are vital to the Royal Marines and the southern flank?

Mr. Stanley: There is one misapprehension under which the right hon. Gentleman is labouring. I should like to draw attention to what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said in a letter to the Leader of the Liberal party. He was quite clear about the impact of the Trident programme on the Royal Navy's expenditure. He wrote:

"As for the effect on Royal Navy expenditure I would emphasise that individual Service programmes are not considered in isolation from the remainder of the Defence programme."

It is therefore not correct to envisage the burden of Trident falling exclusively on a limited area, which is now perceived to be the naval budget. We take a tri-service view of priorities in the defence budget.

Dr. Owen: That has always been the case, but the fact remains that if it were to fall only on the naval budget, it would represent 36 per cent. to 38 per cent. of that budget. I am reassured that it will not fall exclusively, but it will still fall on the three services and I look on the defence effort as being across the services.

We must face the fact that if Trident continues, it will gouge critical items of equipment out of our crucial defences and gravely weaken our conventional defence. If the Government were pursuing a steady 3 per cent. per year real terms increase in the defence budget beyond 1986-87, the cost could be absorbed, but they are not. The fact is that we shall not make our conventional commitment to NATO which the new Secretary-General, Lord Carrington, wants us to make and which we all know we shall have to make in Europe if we are to avoid the consequences of Senator Nunn's amendment. That was just a warning shot across the bows, but there is no doubt that the United States Senate will not put up with the net European contribution to its conventional defence effort during the next decade being zero growth. There has to be some growth in that contribution. Against that background, I shall now consider the alternative to Trident of which the Minister spoke.

I urge the Minister not to go on talking about the independent nuclear deterrent. We do not talk about independent aircraft, independent Lance or an independent brigade of military. We are making our defence effort within the context of NATO. Any naval or nuclear effort that we make is a contribution to NATO and it is in that sense that we must examine what we contribute in terms of nuclear defence. I believe—I have made it quite clear in the past and stick by my words—that if Britain can afford to make a contribution to the nuclear defence of NATO, it will strengthen the overall nuclear deterrence in NATO. However, I believe that that is a mimimum deterrence.

I take issue with the Minister on his talk of the five nuclear weapons states. It is not possible to compare Britain with any of the other four. Two are by any standards super-powers, so nobody believes that we should match the weapon system that Britain might contribute to NATO with the Soviet Union or the United States. The Minister then mentioned China. China is wholly independent and potentially a super-power. The comparison is not realistic.

The most realistic comparison is France, but the difference between Britain and France is that we are wholeheartedly committed to the integrated command structure of NATO. We are also in a quite different position. Moreover, France is not making a replacement decision. It is not as yet facing the fact that its submarine force will be out of date, as the Minister said, in the mid-1990s. When France decides in the early part of the next century to replace its nuclear submarine fleet, what it will be able to afford is an open question.

I shall now examine the alternatives and the criteria which the Minister gave. He said that if we have a submarine-launched deterrent system it must be dedicated to the deterrent role. I disagree. I know that the Minister examined the issue closely in 1980 and he tells us that he looked at it again in 1983. I looked at it extremely hard between 1977 and 1979. If we take the Minister's view of a minimum deterrent having to have a super-sophisticated ballistic missile system capable of penetrating the Galosh defences around Moscow, I have no doubt that we come out with Trident. However, I do not believe that those are any longer realistic criteria against which we should judge a minimum deterrent contribution to NATO. We must consider the alternatives. They are not perfect. Anyone who pretends that submarine-launched cruise, were that thought advisable, is a better system than Trident, judged by any military or naval criteria, is deluding himself.

The question that is now being asked by the *Daily Mail*, the *Daily Telegraph*, *The Standard*, and increasingly by serious commentators looking at Britain's force levels for the next 10 or 20 years, is: can we afford the price of purchasing such a super-sophisticated system? Trident is not just a natural follow-on from Polaris. It is a substantial increase in megatonnage and warhead numbers. It means that we are contributing to the arms race. Therefore, we are not levelling out at a Polaris level.

Then comes the question of the deterrent role having to be dedicated. The nuclear-carrying cruise missiles that are now being deployed in ever-increasing numbers in the United States navy, will not be wholly dedicated to the nuclear deterrent role. They will have a mixed role. It may be said that on top they have a super-sophisticated deterrent system.

It is interesting that the Sturgeon, Permit and Los Angeles classes are first going for eight cruise missiles using existing torpedo tubes and then increasing it by 12, adding a vertical launch and adapting and modifying existing submarines, making 20 in all. All the arguments have been gone through.

One may come to a different conclusion. The submarine launch is not the only one. Many serious people have said that the Polaris system should be replaced with a similar system and have argued the case for that. I prefer to stick with existing technology.

I then ask what the Soviet navy is doing. I do not need to ask very hard, because the Government describe in their White Paper how

[Dr. Owen]

"the USSR is actively engaged in a test programme to develop long-range cruise missiles for launch from ground, sea and air platforms. These will be primarily for nuclear strike and have ranges estimated up to 3,000 km. The air- and sea-launched versions have the potential for intercontinental strategic strike, depending on the platforms".

The cruise missile, as presently designed by the United States, has a range of 2,500 km. Its warhead is between 200 and 250 kilotonnes. Britain is after a different type of deterrent from the one it has had before. It is a contribution to NATO. It is a minimum deterrent. To say that it is necessary to have that vast number of cruise missiles to produce saturation defence is to take a criterion which is unrealistic. The criterion taken is to match Trident.

If one is in the business of spending money on a submarine-launched cruise missile to get exactly the same effect as Trident, I have no doubt that the Minister's figures are correct. One needs a large number of cruise missiles and dedicated extra SSNs and that will be costly.

Mr. Stanley: First, will the right hon. Gentleman acknowledge that neither the Soviet Union nor the United States is making as its assured second strike capability a cruise missile system? They are certainly not. They are resting on a ballistic system. Secondly, will the right hon. Gentleman acknowledge from his previous background that the criterion is not a minimum deterrent? The only justification for being in the deterrent business, with all that is involved, is not a minimum deterrent but what is a credible deterrent to the Soviet Union. The right hon. Gentleman is not addressing that issue.

Dr. Owen: Minimum and credible are exactly the same thing.

Mr. Michael Mates (Hampshire, East): No.

Dr. Owen: Yes they are. There is no point having a minimum deterrent unless it is credible. Therefore, the question is: what is the minimal level that is credible? The assumption throughout the Minister's speech is that only Trident is credible. He might even tone that down to say that only Polaris is credible. He may say that the decision was taken to go for Chevaline and, therefore, the Moscow criterion is still the most vital element of credibility.

In retrospect, to be blunt, I think that once the anti-ballistic missile treaty was signed in the early 1970s, it was probably unwise to go for the hardened programme. But I took my share of responsibility for continuing with the hardening of Chevaline from 1977 onwards, largely because so much had been spent on it and there was a great political danger of a public cancellation affecting the credibility of the deterrent. It was perfectly reasonable not to disclose a decision on the updating of a weapons system which was going through at the time. I do not think that we would have lost anything by making it known. But the decision was taken by the Heath, Wilson and Callaghan Governments, and I am prepared to support that. The only difference in the Government's announcement was the name of the Chevaline programme.

Mr. Martin J. O'Neill (Clackmannan): Will the right hon. Gentleman consider another criterion which arises as a result of SLCMs — verification? Surely that is important if, as we are led to believe, the Minister would wish to use that as some sort of negotiating counter. It is a highly provocative weapon, not one which is likely to result in any enthusiasm for planned disarmament.

Dr. Owen: The hon. Gentleman has put his finger on one of the problems of submarine, air and land-launched cruise missiles. Their verification is a serious problem in arms control. But we must face the fact that they are already being deployed in massive numbers — over 4,000 SLCMs will be deployed by the United States and substantial numbers are being deployed by the Soviet Union. We are into the problem of verification. Many of us talked of that issue in the context of the SALT 2 agreement. There was a strong case for limiting cruise missile deployment on verification grounds. That is one factor that must be borne in mind, but it is only one factor. It is one reason why I would put any of the deterrent systems on the table for negotiation.

In the context of deep cuts in nuclear weapons, I would consider whether the price that we pay is worth it. But I am not prepared to disown the logical, rational case that the contribution to the NATO deterrent is not solely and exclusively the United States'. If we can do that by maintaining a strong conventional commitment to NATO, many of our NATO allies would like Britain to make that contribution. That has been the view of successive German Governments and I think that it is the view of French Governments.

The question is: what is credible for a country that is in economic decline, that is having to cut is defence budget, that is unable to make all the contribution that it wants to conventional defence, and is having to make difficult decisions across the whole range of defence? I cannot put it more bluntly than that.

The Minister is making a false comparison. He is making a comparison between Trident and a ballistic missile system. He is arguing that we either have everything or nothing. He may well end up with nothing, and that is the most serious point to be made. The point was made well by someone who said that the deterrent had to carry credibility with public opinion in Britian. It has to carry credibility with opinion in the services. There are growing signs that people in the services are questioning that.

After all, we are talking about whether we shall have the Royal Marines again. The Government nearly got rid of the Royal Marines in 1981. They made cuts in the defence budget in 1981 that put our forces in severe jeopardy. Fortunately, we learned enough from the tragic experience of the south Atlantic war to remind us that those cuts would do great damage.

Britain is now facing a climate of opinion on defence which is not dissimilar to the climate of opinion in the 1930s. We are not living up to our defence contribution. The record that the Minister points to over the past few years is a good one. The Government have reason to be given credit. Frankly, the Prime Minister of the previous Labour Government also merits a tribute. It was he who in 1977 had the courage to take through the NATO decision for a 3 per cent. increase in a difficult expenditure climate.

Many of the figures that the Minister now prays in aid had their foundation laid in the 1977-78 decision of the Labour Government. The tragedy of modern times is the way that the Labour party has moved away from its solid commitment to NATO and the knowledge that NATO is a nuclear and a conventional deterrence collective, decision-making body. One does not go to Moscow and negotiate with the Kremlin on the consequences of taking American nuclear bases out of Britain. If one wants to

make that choice, one does it first and foremost in the context of NATO. One does not fall for the oldest ploy in the game, and for the 1978 statement that the Soviets used to try to fragment NATO by saying that they would save NATO countries from the threat of nuclear attack if NATO disowned nuclear deterrence. Not even the Dutch, Belgian Norwegian or Danish Socialists have fallen for that naked ploy by the Soviet Union, and it is a tragedy—although we do not expect anything else from the Leader of the Opposition — that the Opposition's foreign affairs spokesman, the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey), who was one of the most distinguished Secretaries of State that this country has ever had, should lend his name to that.

The issue will not go away. The Government have made the wrong decision over Trident. It is the hardest decision ever to have to reassess, but when the Minister said at the beginning of his speech that he wanted to make the Government's commitment clear beyond any doubt, those of us who had heard such words before knew very well that that was the start of making things far from clear. The fact is that there is deep doubt within the Ministry of Defence, and among some of the most serious people to be advising the Minister, about the rightness of that decision on Trident. The Minister will best serve the interests of this country during the next 20 to 30 years by reassessing that decision—and the sooner the better.

7.10 pm

Sir Antony Buck (Colchester, North): It is always interesting, although difficult, to follow the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen). I agreed with him in his castigation of the Socialist party and its defence policy, but I found myself in some difficulty as to his own attitude. I believe that the previous Labour Administration continued to update Polaris by going for Chevaline for precisely the same reasons as the Government think it appropriate today to update our nuclear deterrent. I hope that Opposition Members will not suggest that Conservative Members do not go in for open government, because the Labour Government updated Polaris with the Chevaline programme without saying one iota to the House.

Dr. Owen: The idea that it was just the Labour Government is complete and absolute nonsense. The decision was initially made by the Heath Government but, rightly, it was never announced to the House then.

Sir Antony Buck: I think that I implied that the original decision was made by the Socialist Administration without giving any indication of what was going on. It was probably a mistake not to make the original decision clear to the House. I concede that, and I can see no reason why it should not have been. As an Under-Secretary of State, I was not privy to that decision. But Opposition Members cannot castigate us about open government when all the major secret spending was undertaken by the Heath Government and was then implemented by the Socialist Administration. I accept that it might have been appropriate for the Heath Administration to have said that they intended to update Polaris, but our intention to maintain an independent deterrent has always been part of Conservative policy. We have never been deflected from that policy, although that has not always been true of Opposition Members.

My right hon. Friend the Minister of State will deal with the speeches that have already been made and we look forward to that. I think that he is speaking from the Front Bench for the first time in a defence debate and we welcome him. I think that he has answered questions before, but that this is the first time that he is to conclude a defence debate. We look forward with interest to his speech. Of course, from his experience as a Minister in the Northern Ireland Office he will have had considerable contact with the armed forces, and his experience can only be reinforced as he has more and more contact with them. I know that my admiration for the armed forces is shared by him and by hon. Members on both sides of the House.

I welcome this debate, because hon. Members on both sides of the House had doubts about the reorganisation of the Ministry of Defence with respect to ministerial responsibilities. Some of us were worried that an individual Minister would not be responsible for a particular part of the armed forces and that we would not have an opportunity to debate the affairs of each service. In some ways, our worries were dispelled by the assurances that we received that the single service debates would continue. I know that the hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Duffy), like me, thought the matter important. Such debates at least allow us to go into greater detail on the affairs of the individual services, thus mini.. ising the necessity for parliamentary moles, with people fighting a service's cause outside Parliament, or in an irregular manner. Thus, I welcome the debate.

I am in some difficulty, because I have just returned from a services visit to Cyprus which was superbly and efficiently conducted by all the armed forces, including the Royal Marines who are out there. That is another role that they play as part of our general peace-keeping mission there. But the efficiency ended the moment that I became civilianised, because all my baggage was lost in the early hours of this morning. The hours that I had hoped to devote to preparing a succinct speech were devoted instead to retrieving my baggage. I had complete faith when earlier I was in the hands of the Royal Air Force, but I am afraid that civilians failed me at London airport.

Some of us treasure the fact that we civilians can be brought into close contact with the Royal Navy through politics. I toyed with the idea of going into the Royal Navy, but my mathematics was so appalling that I did not attempt to go to Dartmouth to train even in some minor operational capacity for a warship. It is vital to have an understanding of mathematics for that. Thus I was very pleased—just as the hon. Member for Attercliffe was when it happened to him—to end up as a Minister with responsibility for the Royal Navy. Mathematics is important if one is a navigation or gunnery officer on a frigate, but it is less important at ministerial level, because there are excellent advisers who keep the mathematics relatively straightforward.

The fact that I have been brought into close contact with the Royal Navy has given me great satisfaction. I know that the hon. Member for Attercliffe, like me, regards his time as Minister as his finest time in politics. We should pay tribute to the Royal Navy. Without being jingoistic about it, I think that all hon. Members will agree that we have the best sailors in the world, the best training and much of the best equipment. That is not just jingoism, because in 1982 the efficiency and expertise of the Royal Navy, along with the efficiency of the other armed forces, proved it in the Falklands war. It was my privilege to lead

[Sir Antony Buck]

the first British parliamentary delegation to that part of the world after hostilities had ended. Going down there, one pounds hour after hour in a Hercules across the south Atlantic. One then realises the vast distances involved and the magnitude of our effort achievement.

Of course the war was a tri-service effort but it was largely a Royal Navy effort, and its magnitude was outstanding. It has had a tremendous effect on the credibility of the western alliance. If a tough man in the Politburo had wondered whether the democracies of the Alliance would ever take action, he would have seen the United Kingdom using its maritime strength to ensure that a Fascist junta did not get away with a blatant invasion of the Falkland islands, and ensuring that the people there could continue to live in freedom.

I turn to the future of the Falkland Islands and the Navy. The Navy plays a significant role in maintaining their independence. It is sometimes suggested that the difficulties and expense of retaining the islands are more than we can bear. I do not agree. No more is needed than a battalion of strength armed with Rapier, a reinforcement capability with jets able to land on the extended runway, and the additional airport. Regarding the Navy, we need a nuclear hunter-killer submarine on patrol nearly all the time. We are to have about 17 such submarines, and one on patrol there most of the time would be a significant and singular deterrent to any foolish successor to Galtieri who contemplated a similar invasion.

The Royal Navy will have an extensive role to play in defending those islands. That leads me to the question of Trident and the replacement of our nuclear capability. Hon. Members may wonder how the Falklands conflict leads to a consideration of our nuclear deterrent. I shall explain. We must consider the scenario in the south Atlantic if it had been a little different. The Argentinian junta could have acquired a nuclear weapon. It probably would not have been highly sophisticated, but a nuclear weapon would not have been beyond the capability of a second-rank power such as Argentina. Under those circumstances had we not had our own nuclear weaponry, we would easily have been subject to nuclear blackmail. The junta could have told us that, if the task force did not turn back, a nuclear bomb would be targeted on it. That is not an unreal scenario.

The fact that we have, as a last resort, our nuclear capability, should enable us to sleep more easily in our beds at night. The arguments for retaining it are precisely the same as those which led the Labour Government to update the Polaris missile by continuing the Chevaline programme. The Minister will deal with the costing of it when he replies. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State dealt with the matter in some detail at the Conservative party conference and at many other venues.

The important point to remember about the cost of Trident is that it will be spread over many years. In October the cost was estimated at £9 billion, and now it is just more than that. That cost would be spread over about 20 years. As a proportion of the defence programme it is significant, but it is not of such a transcendent character as to be unaffordable. We must consider the effect on our allies, especially the Americans, if we gave it up.

A serious result could be the decoupling — to use jargon — of the United States of America from our own defences. It may react with a resurgence of isolationism. Not surprisingly, such a force is always present in America and ready to point it out if Europeans do not do enough in their own defence. If one lives in the mid-west, New York is far away and Europe is an enormous distance away. If we Europeans were seen not to be properly deploying our defences or maintaining our capability, such a resurgence might occur in the United States. That would bring the position of the United Kingdom and the Alliance into jeopardy.

I welcome what my right hon. Friend said about ordering new ships. Further decisions must be made. It is important that we maintain our amphibious capability in the Royal Marines and Royal Navy. In the long term it is important to maintain our maritime role and ensure that our contribution to NATO is, in particular, a maritime one. It is also important that we maintain our capability to act outside NATO geographical guidelines. In that context, I believe that our German allies should be prepared to bear a greater burden of the defence of Europe, to enable us to contribute even more to, for example, the rapid deployment force.

The Government have proved that they are devoted to the Royal Navy and I know that many Opposition Members are similarly devoted to it. I fear what would happen if Opposition Members were returned with a commitment to lowering our defence capability to the lowest common denominator in NATO. For them to say that they will cut Trident and our independent nuclear capacity, does not let them off the hook. First, the costs do not fit; secondly, if they pursued that non-nuclear course, it would be a severe threat to NATO, possibly even causing its breakdown and certainly risking a decoupling of our connections with the United States. I hope that we shall maintain our Royal Navy capability. If my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench do not ensure that we maintain it, many Conservative Members will cause them severe difficulties.

7.27 pm

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): We have had interesting speeches from the Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Duffy) and others who have shared responsibility in government for naval affairs. I include in them the quite extraordinarily able speech of the right hon. Member for Taunton (Mr. du Cann), virtually every word of which I agree with. That is not surprising, because I am also associated with the parliamentary maritime group. Our proceedings have been dominated by the discussion of Trident, to which I shall refer shortly.

The hon. and learned Member for Colchester, North (Sir A. Buck) mentioned the Falkland Islands. The Minister has not told the House the nature of our present commitment to those islands. I understand — the Minister may not wish to speak about this for strategic reasons or on grounds of secrecy — that we have committed there between four and five frigates with back-up support services, which are extremely costly. Although, theoretically, those figures can be devoted to NATO, the 8,000-mile journey is a long and difficult one. The commitment strains our resources considerably.

The right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen) said something about Labour defence policy. I was a member of the defence study group that drew up the policy, and one of its cornerstones is a firm commitment

to NATO. There should be no question about that. We can discuss how far and how fast we should proceed to a non-nuclear role, and we can discuss American bases in Britain, but it is clear from the defence document that the Labour party is firmly committed to NATO. It also states clearly — this is a reversal of previous Labour party policy—that we recognise that former commitments to reduce defence expenditure will not be valid if we switch from nuclear to non-nuclear defences. It is obvious that that will be an extremely costly commitment.

There has been some discussion this evening about Trident, and the Minister owes us an answer on that. I have pursued the matter with the Secretary of State several times, and in effect he has replied that we must update the costs every year. With the value of sterling at present only $1·20, the increase in cost will be considerable. We can debate the percentage of the capital spending programme for all services that would be taken up by Trident, but it is obvious that much money will be devoted to that weapon. This may or may not be the time to discuss our commitment to NATO and NATO strategy, but it is ridiculous for Government supporters to give the impression that Britain will use this so-called independent deterrent on its own. I cannot imagine a time when the United Kingdom would use Trident, presumably as a second-strike weapon, on its own.

The real guarantee of NATO and the real coupling with the United States is not necessarily Trident but the presence of more than 350,000 American ground forces in Europe. That is the essential ingredient of the coupling.

Some time ago the Select Committee on Defence visited Holy Loch. I stood on a tender and looked at the support ship for the American Poseidon submarines, and at that time—my friends in Scotland will not necessarily thank me for it — there were four Poseidon-type submarines. They were the equivalent of our entire sea borne strategic nuclear deterrent, and I understand that they are targeted through SACEUR. If Britain tries to play in that league perpetually, we must consider the repercussions of cost not only on the Navy budget but on the entire defence budget.

The right hon. Member for Devonport was right to say that some service men, a growing number of the public and some Conservative Back-Bench Members are questioning our expenditure on one weapon system. It will have the effect of crowding out other, especially naval, equipment. There is no question in my mind about that, because if we cancel the 1985-86 commitment to 3 per cent. growth, the implications will be great. The Select Committee on Defence will examine the matter, and I do not wish to anticipate the results of its searching examination, but it would appear that there will be considerable implications in terms of surface vessels and other naval equipment. Questions are beginning to be asked not only in the Labour, Liberal and Social Democratic parties, but in the Conservative party.

There was an announcement about Rosyth, and if my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) catches your eye later, Mr. Deputy Speaker, he will wish to expand on that. It was a typical Government trick. If they have little to say in a debate, they throw in some extremely futuristic suggestions. They said that Rosyth will refit some vessels in the 1990s, but the vessels have not yet been ordered. When can we expect those vessels to appear at Rosyth dockyard? I caution my constituents to remember that if pressure mounts on expenditure, the programme will be cancelled or severely modified. Doubts have already been voiced. Even if the programme is introduced, it will "safeguard" only about 2,500 jobs at Rosyth. The 5,000 jobs that are related to the conventional Navy will be in severe jeopardy in the 1990s, because Britain will have no conventional Navy.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East and I have collaborated on this debate, and he will take up the point made by the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport about the Levine proposals. It is extremely unfair for the Government to dangle those proposals month after month before a dedicated work force and not to come to a conclusion. If they were wise—I hope that they will be—they would throw out the proposals; I fear that they will not throw them out completely, but will introduce modified proposals. It would be stupid to lease part of Rosyth dockyard to a private concern to carry out nuclear fitting. That would cause great uncertainty, and its unfairness would not be tolerated by the labour force.

The Government are competition-mad. I note from the White Paper on Defence that

> "Competition will also be rigorously pursued in the areas of support, supply and maintenance services. Warship refitting provides an example of this developing policy."

The right hon. Member for Devonport was annoyed when I questioned his statement that the Labour party had approved the fitting of a submarine and a frigate going out to private tender. I am sorry that he is not in the Chamber now to hear me explain why I do not accept that. There is no guarantee that the Government would compare like with like. The Minister who will reply to the debate has some interest in shipbuilding, and I challenge him to tell the House tonight whether the capability of Humber dockyards to refit the Otter is on all fours with that of a yard run by British Shipbuilders.

I am quite willing to repeat what I am about to say outside the House because I would not want to malign the Humber dock, which I have visited, and I would not wish to say something in the House that I could not repeat outside. The Government got a dumped price for that vessel. Anything between £5 million and £10 million was on the table. Perhaps the Minister will give us some idea about the figures, between the price at which the Humber dock booked in the vessel and what Trafalgar House or Cammell Laird offered. The final result was a dumped price. There is no way that that yard can perform like a dockyard and give the standard of finish.

Another thing that was not considered, but which is vital, is the capability of keeping within a yard such as Trafalgar House—which is now at the Scott section of the Scott Lithgow yard — a design team capable of coping with the successor for the type 2400. That was not considered. All that was considered was the price; this is why I dispute what the right hon. Member for Devonport was saying. The result of the tender was the contract going to the lowest price, which was taken without looking at the capabilities of the yard or of the consequences of keeping design teams in the national interest.

A particular subject has arisen in the Scottish press and is mentioned in the Select Committee report on the Defence White Paper. In paragraph 55 we say:

> "In supplementary evidence the Minister modified this statement. We now understand that HMS Challenger, the seabed operational vessel, two SSNs . . . and an MCMV will be late joining the Fleet."

In the Scottish press there has been some speculation about the Challenger. I am not one to malign our yards.

[Mr. Dick Douglas]

Any deficiency in the Challenger is specifically related to the saturated diving system, which was designed by the Navy, although not supplied by it. However, the Navy bears the responsibility for the design, not the yard. That is important, because the yard has had a lot of criticism. On this occasion, when the contract was modified or renegotiated, the yard received a modest bonus payment for delivering slightly ahead of time. I hope that the Minister will reply to these remarks, and clarify the issue, and I hope that other hon. Members will pursue the matter. I declare my interest in diving and divers. We must clarify the points about the saturated diving system, such as whose fault it was, what the cost of modification will be, and how it will be modified to make it safe.

Referring to the contemporary Challenger leads me to the Challenger of 1870, which was responsible for the first time for acknowledging that we had mineral nodules on the sea bed. This leads me to the law of the sea, referred to by the right hon. Member for Taunton (Mr. du Cann). Nobody will be surprised that I wish to refer to this. It is ridiculous that the Government are trailing behind the Americans. The only person I can find who is giving the advice not to sign the law of the sea convention is Mr. Ian MacGregor.

The Government have to supply cogent reasons for their refusal to sign. So far, we have concentrated on mineral provisions, but there are other provisions in the convention that are of vital importance to us as a maritime nation. For example, there are provisions on passage through straits, safety of passage, and so on. We should have some statement, if not tonight, before 9 December, as to the Government's attitude and intentions.

As a former Merchant Navy officer, I agree with virtually all that has been said about the importance of the merchant fleet, and I note that we shall have another study. However, as the right hon. Member for Taunton said, do we need another study, when the General Council of British Shipping has given its views? Again, this was referred to in the Select Committee's report on the Defence White Paper in paragraph 52, where it said:

"For example, numbers in the UK owned and registered fleet (vessels of 500 gross registered tons and over) fell from 1,194 in 1979 to 769 in 1983, and the General Council of British Shipping has forecast a further reduction of 400 ships by the end of 1986."

Do the Government reject that view? Are they at odds with it? What will the further analysis do? If the Government reject the view of the General Council of British Shipping, on what grounds do they do so? Here is an organisation that is responsible for assessing the position. It is saying what is likely to happen. The Government have some responsibility to give us their view on that proposal. We are not talking just about ships. As a maritime nation, we are talking about manpower and seafarers. If we do not have ships, we do not have proper training for our seafarers, and that can be extremely costly in wartime.

The Trident is a virility symbol which is very costly to the country. I am not a unilateralist. I concede that here I part company with some of my colleagues, if not the majority of them. However, I am firmly opposed to us possessing a Trident system. It will mean that, at the end of the day, we are endangering our capability of fulfilling a unique and specific role for NATO within our treaty obligations. It will crowd out our conventional Navy, and will be extremely damaging to the work in the dockyards. The Government, in their wisdom, should reconsider the Trident decision and abandon it.

7.47 pm

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Bristol, East): I hope that the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas) will excuse me if I do not directly follow his points. I shall not be dealing with Trident, which has been dealt with well by my right hon. Friend the Minister.

I wish to raise a number of points today, and in deference to the wishes of Mr. Speaker and to the fact that many other hon. Members wish to speak, I shall try to keep my remarks short. Although I shall not have time to develop them fully, I hope that my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement will be able to answer some of the points that I make. However, I apologise in advance, because I shall not be here to hear his answers as I have a long-standing engagement. I look forward to reading what he says in the *Official Report*.

Even though this speech will be something of a pot pourri of points, the common strand running through my remarks will be the wish for more costing less. Therefore, it is right and proper to start with the ships that we build. When I joined the Navy 19 years ago, the Leander class frigate, fully equipped, cost £4 million. Today, a frigate costs 34 times that. I accept that it is better armed, has more sophisticated equipment and a far superior set of capabilities, but 34 times the cost means that we must be getting someting wrong. Four times the Leander's initial cost is the annual amount that it costs to keep one of the type 22s at sea. This mass escalation in price, well beyond the figure for defence expenditure inflation, has meant that we do not have enough ships.

We need to examine the ships we build and the methods we use. I am convinced that we are not getting it right. I suggest that after the right hull shape is agreed, bearing in mind its sea-keeping qualities and the job that it is meant to do, we start modulising our building so that most of the internal structure can be built away from the dockyard. The weapons systems developed for various ships could also be made on a modulised basis so that, when a ship was re-armed or fitted, a new weapons system could be slotted into it. The defence specification for that weapons system should deal not just with what it has to do but with the size, the shape, the centre of gravity and so on of the weapons module.

I also believe that our ships are too sophisticated. Because we do not get a long enough run of ships, the individual parts are too expensive. I consider the cost of £40 million for the communications room of Invincible to be money unnecessarily spent. We need good communications, but £40 million for one ship's communications, even if it is a battle leader, is far too high.

I also believe that we need to look at the propulsion system of our ships. It is not necessary these days to have such fast ships. Therefore, it should be possible to have single-screw ships, with single engines, especially if the vessels are fitted with bow thrusters which will give low and medium-speed manoeuvrability.

Frigates should be able to operate not just their own helicopters which are kept on board but also, though not housed on board, VTOL aircraft. These could be kept on board RFAs and be able to operate and be refuelled from frigates. In that way, a squadron of frigates would be able to be detached and take its own air cover with it.

Having been around a variety of modern ships over the past year, I have been surprised at the standards of habitability, because they are unnecessarily high. I do not suggest that we return to the hammock. I am not suggesting that we go back to the broadside mess, where a seaman slept, as I did when I first went to sea, on the deck, with the next layer being on a bench, the third layer being on a table and the fourth layer being in a hammock. However, for the same size ship, the Russians have 50 per cent. more weapons systems. The main reason is that the standards of habitability on our ships are far too superior. I do not want what the Russians do, but I want a far more sensible standard of habitability, recognising that men do not spend so long at sea for continuous periods and do not spend so long away from home.

This reduction in accommodation is also possible if we do what we should have done a long time ago, which is to cut down the numbers of crew per ship. I suggest that a frigate should not have more than 80 men and a destroyer more than 120. We also have to accept the concept of expendability of our ships. The idea that we should so arm a ship that 60 per cent. of its weapons system is defensive and only 40 per cent. has an aggressive ability is the wrong way round. We have to accept the expendability of ships even though the idea runs contrary to much of Navy thinking and it means that we have to automate far more.

Large manning levels used to be considered necessary as it was possible to replace a man but impossible to replace a piece of equipment at sea if it was damaged. As a result, we used to have lots of men aboard ship and not too many pieces of sophisticated equipment. With modern weapons, if a ship is hit once with the right weapon, as we saw with HMS Sheffield, it is out of action. We have to automate, but we have to accept expendability and produce cheaper ships with smaller crews. If we do that, we have a good chance of building ships which are more exportable.

We shall never have enough ships, of course, because we do not have enough money. That is why we must continue to rely on the merchant fleet. That policy has at last become possible because our 30-day war stock replacement policy is being implemented, and not before time, but I suggest that we must not consider ships which have been flagged out but which are under British beneficial ownership as being part of the British fleet. It will not work. It will not happen. Even if there is a minority interest overseas and that interest can obtain a lien on a ship at the time, it will not be available to us. Nor must we consider that the red duster Hong Kong fleet will necessarily be available to us in times of conflict.

I realise that the Royal Navy has at last accepted that the merchant marine can not only provide a support role but can defend itself in time of conflict. It has accepted the Arapaho system, but again it has gold-plated it. It has made it far too expensive. I suggest that my right hon. Friend should look at the British Aerospace SCADS, which is a ship conversion system, to produce seven ships with different capabilities—helicopter carriers, Harrier carriers, helicopter support ships, amphibious support ships, logistic ships and so on—all with their own point defence systems based on a Seawolf vertically-launched missile system and providing a full set of equipment. For the cost of £168 million it is possible to provide seven ships for the same cost as one type 22's capital cost and running cost for two years.

We shall need to use armed merchantmen capable of protecting themselves in convoys, and we need to look now—not in a few years—at how we arm merchantmen effectively. We shall not have the frigates, destroyers and aircraft carriers to do the job.

While referring to ship types, I should like to add a quick word about assault ships. I believe that they were far too small in capacity and that they cost too much. I think that they will fall to bits fairly soon, and I wonder with what we intend to replace them. We may want them, but can we afford purpose-built assault ships? If we cannot, we have to look at what roll-on/roll-off ships are available. We have to do better than the the mexefloats which are now proposed for use with Ro/Ro vessels. We must give the Royal Marines the capability of getting ashore fast and doing the job which they are superbly trained to do.

If we are to keep down costs, we must analyse the procurement system. I understand that it takes about 14 years from the inception of an idea to having a piece of equipment fitted. I am sure that MINIS will have some effect, but, because the procurement system works in autonomous committees staffed by experts who have a belt, braces and string round the waist mentality, they over-gild every piece of equipment and every single system for which they ask. There is no one senior enough on each committee to say, "Stop. We have to cut the cost of this piece of equipment."

I echo the comments about mine warfare. As far as I know, we do not have any really sophisticated ground mine systems, and it is about time we did. We know that the Russians have them. Our coasts are vulnerable not only to mines but to ships and submarines operating on the continental shelf and between various temperature layers in the sea. We will need to lay down effective minefields during times of conflict and we do not have the modern mines necessary.

What are we doing about airborne early warning radar? Following the Falklands, it was realised that that was absolutely necessary. A Heath Robinson airborne dustbin was put on the Sea King, which worked quite well. What proper, designated system will we eventually have for airborne early warning?

What will happen about torpedo manufacture? The Conqueror fired three torpedoes—two of them hit and worked, one hit and did not work. What happened? How effective are the Mark 8s? How is torpedo development progressing?

Why do we need a Sea Harrier as well as the RAF Harrier? I grant that the radar is different, but the Navy has shown that it is possible to operate RAF Harriers. It understands about corrosion, so it is not necessary to work with much more expensive and heavy titanium materials that are non-corrosive. The materials that corrode easily must be continually washed. The Navy dealt with that problem during the Falklands conflict and could do the same with RAF Harriers. It would be a cheaper system, although the Harriers would need a different type of radar.

The most important factor is the man. Is there any intention to make it obligatory that, after leaving the Royal Navy, a man must spend some time in the Royal Naval Reserve? It is important for the reserve to have the recent experience of people who have just left the full-time service.

One reason, apart from the obvious one, why we need more ships, is that that will engender much greater job satisfaction. It is regrettable that a senior officer should,

[Mr. Jonathan Sayeed]

at the most, obtain only two commands in his lifetime. Many junior officers of lieutenant commander and commander rank will never get a ship to command, even though they are perfectly capable of doing so. If there were more ships, greater expertise would be built up. Because men do not spend so long at sea and are not so long away from this country, perhaps we do not need all the expensive housing and welfare capabilities of the Royal Navy. There is some scope for saving in that area.

I want briefly to follow the remarks of my right hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Mr. du Cann) about the law of the sea. My understanding is that the Government do not intend to sign the convention, on the basis that they do not sign that which they do not intend to ratify. There have been at least three occasions since 1970 when Britain has signed conventions but not ratified them. I refer to the Geneva convention on the laws of war, the International Maritime Organisation convention on the carriage of nuclear material at sea and another IMO convention whose title I cannot remember.

We should definitely sign the convention by 10 December, because not doing so will increase maritime anarchy. However, we should reserve our position on part II. I recognise that, potentially, part II could be damaging to Britain. We should do what we did with the MARPOL convention of the IMO. We signed it, but did not ratify until there was an acceptance that we would not have to adhere to certain annexes.

When I was in the Navy we used to write what were known as Nelson essays. My first said why Lord Collingwood was a rather better and attainable example than Lord Nelson. My second suggested that we must get away from the idea that ships should be preserved regardless of cost and that we should move towards the idea of expendable ships, which meant low manning levels and cheap ships in large numbers. I admit that those views did not meet with universal acclaim. The old but not so bold told me that my ideas would never happen. I believe that they must.

We must move towards a cheaper Navy, with more ships and a far greater capability. The Royal Navy is known as "The Service", and its officers and men wish to give that service to their nation. It is our job to serve them well by providing them with the equipment and ships to enable them to serve us.

8.5 pm

Mr. Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, East): I shall do my best to follow the wide-ranging contribution of the hon. Member for Bristol, East (Mr. Sayeed). I heard him ask for less space for the crew in modern naval vessels. I heard him suggest that their conditions of service should be altered so that there would be compulsory service as reservists after they left the service. When he said that he was going to speak about the man, I thought that he might call for a maximum height for the crew so that they would fit more economically into the spaces available in the ships.

I do not think that such issues should dominate a debate about the Royal Navy. The crucial issue is that of Trident versus the money that will be spent on the remainder of the service. I strongly support the Labour party's defence policy, which includes membership of NATO. Labour party members constantly have to reiterate that, because the Conservative party tries to take that away from us in public forums. We wish to retain membership of NATO. Our policy includes the development of a non-nuclear defence policy for Britain. It is important to reduce the risks of a nuclear war in Europe, not least because our nation is peculiarly vulnerable to such an attack.

The hon. and learned Member for Colchester (Sir A. Buck) raised the important question of nuclear blackmail. It is an important argument, but it is not the preserve of our nation alone. It is the duty of the Government of this country and the Governments of every civilised nation to discourage nuclear proliferation. If our nation can say, "We must possess a nuclear arsenal so that other nations with such arsenals cannot threaten us", that same argument is logically, even morally, open to every other nation whose economy can sustain such an arsenal. Indeed, there are a few nations with stronger economies than ours which, by the Government's argument, could claim to be entitled to the same approach.

It is important to develop a defence policy for Britain that relies upon conventional armaments and that pays due regard to our foreign policy and our neighbours' foreign policies and which takes into account our international interests and commitments. There is a crucial role in that for the Royal Navy, but not a Navy with a Trident programme flung like a financial albatross around its neck.

I agreed with the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Merchant)—I do not often agree with him—when he questioned whether our nation could afford Trident. It was a courageous question for a Conservative Member, but he found some support among his colleagues. I urge the Government to consider what he said and to think again before going along the road towards a Trident programme. More than 90 per cent. of our nation's trade is carried by sea. We must protect our North sea oilfields and fishing interests—but we will not protect them with a nuclear deterrent.

The Minister tonight envisaged our nation threatening the Soviet Union with Trident. He suggested that Great Britain would threaten the Soviet Union separately from the United States. That is folly. Whatever the outcome of such an exchange, everybody in Great Britain would be killed. Our country would be devastated. To say that any outcome could be a victory goes well beyond anything that I can comprehend. My constituents feel the same, as I am sure do all hon. Members.

The Government should commit themselves to western European disarmament and seek a reduction in Soviet conventional forces. Within a conventional defence strategy, our nation's contribution should emphasise the Navy's role and ensure that we can respond to pressures other than a suicidal European nuclear exchange.

Our maritime role is vital to our country. If we cancelled Trident and left the nuclear role to the United States rather than attempting to duplicate it ourselves, we could meet our conventional commitments.

We should not allow our merchant fleet to decline. Other hon. Members have spoken about the importance of the merchant fleet and I endorse everything that they have said. We must preserve a British-owned merchant fleet, not only for trading but for defence reasons. We should not under-value the role of merchant shipping in defence matters, but the Government are presiding over the death of British merchant shipbuilding.

Admiral Wesley McDonald was mentioned by the Opposition spokesman at the beginning of the debate. Last

August he called for an increase in the United States carrier force. We could contribute to that with the resources freed by abandoning the Trident programme. We would not need to mothball Hermes; or, if she were sold, we could contemplate building another aircraft carrier. At least we could make a bigger contribution to the provision of destroyers and mine sweepers.

I am disappointed that no statement has been made tonight to announce which yard will get the order for the two type 22s. That statement has been delayed many times. That delay fuels the suspicions of people in shipbuilding areas such as mine that the Government intend to clear the labour force out of the yards prior to privatisation, paying no heed to the effect that that will have on the communities and no heed to our nation's defence interests. The overriding issue for the Government is expediency rather than the interests of the nation.

It will be impossible to meet the future needs of the Royal Navy if the Government allows the domestic shipbuilding industry to collapse. That is the direction in which their current policy is heading. In post-1945 conflicts, mines have played an important and significant part. However, does our island nation have the necessary resources to meet our commitments in that regard? I suspect that it does not. The number of vessels available, as well as their quality, is important.

The needs of NATO and of our nation are being neglected by the foolish and false security which the Government think they have from the Trident programme. Our economy cannot sustain both needs, and the Government have chosen the wrong option.

8.13 pm

Miss Janet Fookes (Plymouth, Drake): In deference to colleagues who want to speak later, I propose to condense my planned speech. I am one of those in the House who support the Trident programme. It is important that we retain a credible nuclear deterrent of our own. I take issue with the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen). One can make a logical case for dispensing with the nuclear deterrent—although I regard that as most unwise—but to seek to have a nuclear deterrent on the cheap, a third-rate cut-price version, has no merit. One might just as well do without it.

The chilling catalogue of the Soviet Union's conventional forces makes it imperative for us to have a nuclear deterrent. I urge my hon. Friends in the Government to continue their policy. In the past, much has gone wrong and we have wasted much money through chopping and changing our policies. I hope that we shall not do that in the future.

Let us consider the number of ships on order since May 1979. My right hon. Friend the Minister of State announced the orders with a flourish. He seemed somewhat coy in explaining how many were coming into service. I should like to have that information. I have a nasty feeling that there may be some unpleasant gaps in the way that they are coming into service. One cannot fight a war, or even undertake an exercise, without the real thing. Paper orders are not much use if the ships are not there on the high seas.

At the risk of being considered tedious, I inquire again about fire hazards and the progress made in overcoming them. That was an important feature of the Falklands campaign and made a deep impression upon me. I hope that we do all in our power to make all the ships in service as fireproof as possible and that every step will be taken to ensure that new ships coming into service are made fireproof. Some progress has been made, but I feel that I must act as a little hornet and ensure that the Government do not go back.

Like many hon. Members on both sides of the House I am worried about our merchant navy capability. I am less than enthusiastic about the in-depth inquiry. I fear that some months later it might announce with a flourish all sorts of interesting facts which tell us only what we know already. We are looking for an explanation of what action the Government propose to take to remedy that important defect. I hope that we shall hear from the Minister tonight.

Plymouth has a major dockyard. It is one of the biggest in western Europe and the biggest in the United Kingdom. I do not object to inquiries to ensure that each dockyard functions as efficiently as possibly, but I share the concern about the length of time that it is taking to come to a decision. That causes a loss of morale and enables rumours, some extraordinarily wild and unrealistic, to abound. Without definite information, it is difficult to stem them. When people feel that their jobs might be at stake they are particularly vulnerable to rumours and, on occasions, to mischief making.

I urge my right hon. and hon. Friends to make a decision and to announce it. I hope that such an announcement will be made by a Minister in one of the dockyards—for preference in Plymouth—so that he can deal with any queries. I hope that the statement will not be made from a crow's nest in the Ministry of Defence.

I have received glowing tributes of late from naval officers whose ships have been refitted in Devonport dockyard. An excellent service was provided there in support of the Falklands campaign. I hope that it will be possible to make an announcement which will allay the fears of the work force and enable the dockyard to continue more efficiently. I go along with that, but we must have a decision soon.

8.20 pm

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil): It is always a pleasure to speak after the hon. Member for Plymouth, Drake (Miss Fookes), whose knowledge of naval matters and support for the Navy is well known and respected throughout the House. I hope that she will forgive me if I strongly disagree with her about the Trident missile.

When I asked the Minister whether Trident was a unilateral weapon, he said, "No." I noticed that he was supported by a number of his hon. Friends. Must we go back into the dictionary to decide this matter? Trident is an independent weapon which is capable of being used unilaterally. That makes it a unilateral weapon. What other definition of unilateralism can there be?

It is curious to find that this Government condemn outright in the strongest language even the smallest independent step by Britain towards arms reductions, yet are now contemplating an independent unilateral weapon in favour of an arms increase. I stress arms increase, not just arms maintenance, because the Minister knows as well as I that the current level upon which the credible deterrent is operated is 64 warheads in Polaris. Hide it though he will, he knows perfectly well that the Government intend to increase that massively. The figure bandied about is 512 warheads, but the maximum figure is 896. That is more than a tenfold increase. It is odd that a Government who claim unilateralism to be such a bad thing should be taking

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such a unilateral step to increase weapons when they refuse to take the smallest of unilateral steps to decrease the number of weapons held.

More important, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen) said, Trident is the cuckoo in the nest of defence expenditure. It will turf out all other sensible expenditures. NATO has a 40 times capacity to destroy our enemy. It may be arguable that a deterrent should be able to destroy an enemy once, twice or three times but, to put it mildly, 40 times is somewhat self-indulgent.

If we were to launch the nuclear weapons that we hold at the rate of one Hiroshima weapon every second, it would take 11·6 days to do so. Against that background, the Government are prepared to increase the number of nuclear weapons which they are prepared to deliver independently and unilaterally. That consequently decreases the amount of money—this vital and limited resource—that we are prepared to spend on NATO at the point where NATO is weakest. As good Alliance partners committed to NATO, we should make our defence contribution to that area where NATO is weakest, not add to weapons of which we have too many already.

Dr. Alan Glyn (Windsor and Maidenhead): Does not the hon. Gentleman agree that our possession of Trident is part of NATO strategy and that if we were to give it up we would lose credibility in the eyes of our American allies? We could not possibly match the conventional forces of the Soviet Union, and the hon. Gentleman knows that perfectly well.

Mr. Ashdown: I merely direct the hon. Gentleman to the statement of the British Atlantic Committee, which supports NATO and which says that there is no prospect that the Soviet Union could mount a conventional attack on us which would have any prospect of success. When Lord Carrington took over as Secretary-General of NATO he said that we do not suffer militarily in the balance with the Soviet Union at the moment. He was referring to conventional military balance. The folly of the Trident decision is that at a time when we should be strengthening NATO where it is weakest, we are spending more money on an area in which it already has too many weapons.

There is another folly. As we approach September next year and the non-proliferation treaty review conference, many people believe that that is the last occasion on which that treaty will have any chance of continuing as an effective means of cutting back on proliferation. A serious problem lies ahead if the NPT ceases to become effective. There is no doubt in my mind that the purchase of Trident contravenes our signature of the NPT as it stands at present.

Article 1 states:

"Each nuclear-weapon State Party to the Treaty undertakes not to transfer to any recipient whatsoever nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices or control over such weapons or explosive devices directly, or indirectly".

The Minister will no doubt argue that the weapon is supplied by us, and that that is what goes on top of the warhead. That is laughable. It is like saying that the bullet is only the thing that comes out of the end of a gun. This is a direct transfer of nuclear weapons technology and delivery systems.

Article 6 of the treaty states:

"Each of the Parties of the Treaty undertakes to pursue negotiations in good faith. . .to the cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date".

The Government have signed that commitment to the cessation of the nuclear arms race, but they honour it by increasing almost to a factor of 10 the number of warheads that we shall possess, and they shall do so as early as possible. That puts at risk our capacity and moral right to be able to persuade others to observe and adhere to that vital treaty, which is our only bulwark against the increasing proliferation of nuclear weapons.

It does so at a terrible cost. On the Government's argument, we shall obtain a spurious kind of independence. Let us assume that Britain has the political independence to be able to use the Trident missile. I ask hon. Members to think of the massive political pressures placed on the Government by the Americans if we seek to use the Trident missile at a moment when they are not prepared that we should do so—in other words, wholly independently.

Let us assume that those pressures are overcome. We all know that the Trident missile is obtained from the Americans. Fair enough; we purchase enough for our needs. But, because of the D5 decision they will now be maintained by the Americans. Fair enough; so while one third are maintained we shall still possess two thirds. So we stick the ones that we are left with on to boats and push them out to sea. When will they be fired? Presumably that will be done when incoming Russian missiles are spotted, but the only way in which we shall see those Russian missiles is via the ballistic missile early warning system which is in the hands of the Americans.

Alternatively, we can sit tight and wait for Birmingham to go bang before launching our Trident missiles. Then we come to the last problem in the the chain. For the Trident submarine to fix its position accurately to fire the missile it will need to use the Navstar satellite. Indeed, the missile will need to use that satellite for mid-term correction. But that satellite is in American hands and, we understand, can be turned off or used only by those whom the Americans wish to use it.

Mr. O'Neill: For the benefit of the House, perhaps the hon. Gentleman will clarify a doubt in my mind. Is he in favour of Polaris and Chevaline, against Trident and in favour of submarine-launched cruise missiles?

Mr. Ashdown: The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that from the time Polaris was considered the Liberal party has been opposed to the independent nuclear deterrent. So it remains. In my opinion, we do not need an independent nuclear deterrent for Britain, and that is the opinion of my party. It always has been.

The price we have paid for all this is a spurious non-existent independence. The Trident decision undermines NATO in the sense that it undermines NATO's political will and its capacity to have the conventional forces which it needs. If the Minister believes that Britain can defend herself independently, he is entitled to believe in the folly of an independent deterrent. Anything less means the removal of a resource that is vital to NATO. In addition, it undermines the non-proliferation treaty and our support of that treaty. Furthermore, it is a unilateral act and, after all that, it is not even independent. The question of cost was eloquently dealt with by my right hon. Friend the Member for Devonport. It may be £10 billion or £12 billion. No one knows precisely.

When I say that the threshold will be lowered, I mean that there will be a reduction in the conventional forces that we need. The Minister made glowing comments about the Royal Marines and the need for a decision on the replacement of Intrepid and Fearless. But for the Falklands crisis, those ships would have gone to the knacker's yard. We are now told that they are to be spun on until the mid-1990s. I am very worried about their effectiveness at that stage. I hope that the Minister will take a decision very soon.

Without Fearless and Intrepid, we shall not have the capacity to do what I, as a Marine officer, had to do. We shall not be able to carry out the vital job of deterrence in northern Norway. The Minister said that we were determined to be able to do that. But the contingency plan to carry Royal Marine commandos to northern Norway in the absence of Fearless and Intrepid is to take them there in a Sealink ferry. That may satisfy the hon. Member for Bristol, East (Mr. Sayeed), but anyone who believes that one can land in hostile territory and hostile conditions on the northern coast of Norway in a Sealink ferry is living in cloud-cuckoo-land. Unless Fearless and Intrepid are replaced, we shall be unable to carry out that task effectively. The Minister's decision is therefore vital. We are worried that expenditure on Trident will interfere with our ability to perform that vital NATO task.

I am particularly concerned about escort vessels because that is the centre of the problem. For all the Minister's good words, the supreme commanders of the Atlantic fleet and C-in-C fleet have recently said that our commitment to the north Atlantic fleet in escort vessels is now 40 per cent. lower than is required. It is a disgrace that the Government of a maritime nation cannot fulfil even its current maritime commitments to NATO, and that is just the present position. What will happen in the near future?

The type 23 vessels now coming on are the key. The first was due to be produced in 1984 with the frigates coming on series in the 1990s. We now understand that the first—the Norfolk—will come off in 1989 and the rest following the sea trials of the first of class. Those trials may well take six or 12 months, so it is likely that we shall not be into series production of type 23 frigates until the mid-1990s. Will the Minister confirm that estimate when he winds up the debate?

I ask the Minister now to follow me in a little mathematics. When asked by the hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Duffy) how many ships were launched last year, the Minister with responsibility for the Navy made the astonishing admission that he did not know. He may not know this, either. According to my calculations, assuming an in-service life of 25 years—I should be interested to know the length of life on which the Ministry is now working—we shall have only 52 escort vessels. Of those—one Bristol, two County class, 12 Sheffields, 13 Broadsides, 6 Amazons and 18 Leanders —only 30 are likely to be immediately available in the front line, the rest being in for maintenance, repair and refit. Taking the much more likely case of a 20-year in-service life, the figure reduces to a total of 38 with an operational fleet of 20. Is that what the Minister wants? Is that how he proposes to honour his NATO commitments? And even that would mean keeping our 13 Leanders until their last gasp.

Our Navy is already weaker in relative terms than that which faced Hitler in Operation Sealion in the early 1940s, and the cost of Trident will merely make things worse. For any conceivable scenario, the Trident missile decision will make us not stronger but weaker both in fulfilling our vital responsibilities to our NATO allies and in our ability to conduct our own defence. The cost of a type 23 was originally announced as £67 million. It is now believed to be £110 million. There is a desperate need for the Minister to take urgent steps to increase the escort fleet as quickly as possible. If the decision on and production of the type 23 cannot be speeded up I hope that he will very quickly go for the Mk 3 offshore patrol vessel equipped with a helicopter. That vessel could be built in a year at a cost of about £35 million. I hope that he will take that decision very early indeed.

Finally, I wish to develop some technical points on torpedoes relating to the issues raised by the hon. Member for Bristol, East. I believe that a major scandal is now occuring in our procurement of the new series of torpedoes. Our current heavyweight torpedo is the type 24, the so-called Tigerfish. This followed a naval staff requirement laid down in 1959. It was supposed to be in operation in 1965 but actually came into operation in 1972. As has been pointed out, that torpedo showed significant inadequacies and failures in the Falklands campaign, during which several were fired. As a direct result, a modernisation programme is now under way.

The update programme was initially announced at £12 million but I am told that it will run out at £70 million. Even then, its design is nearly 30 years old, its maximum speed is 35 knots and its maximum range about 15 km. It is already completely unable to cope with the modern class of Russian submarines in terms of its ability to catch them or to dive deep enough. The updating will require not just a new propulsion unit but better propulsion mechanisms, a replacement sonar, replacement electronics and the solution of certain auxiliary supply problems. It is liable to be at best inadequate.

The long-term replacement for the Tigerfish is the Spearfish. The cost of 100 pre-production models is £500 million and the defence Estimates recently published made provision for a further £775 million for the development of the new Spearfish. That is a total of £1,250 million for the development of a torpedo which is not even running adequately. I am told that it uses a very unsafe fuel called HAP/OTTO — for the technically minded, that is hydroxalymine perchlorate and a mixture of the OTTO fuels—and that even now that mixture has never been put together adequately so as to make the torpedo run effectively without a severe risk of detonation. Indeed, I understand that there have been two explosions at Ministry of Defence establishments testing that fuel.

We need a replacement torpedo capable of carrying out the tasks required in a modern naval environment, and we need it now. We cannot expect the new Spearfish programme adequately to achieve that. Having spent more than £1,000 million producing a torpedo that is not even running properly, I suggest that the Minister might do better to fill in the gap by buying some United States Mk 48 torpedoes which I gather would cost about £150 million for a fit of 200.

Regrettably, that is not the end of the torpedo problem. We are also developing a lightweight anti-submarine torpedo to replace the US Mk. 46. I understand that that torpedo has been developed and is coming into service. It was announced that it would cost about £200 million, but the actual cost is about £1 billion. It has already been

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admitted that that new lightweight torpedo is incapable of catching the Russian submarines that are currently at sea. I understand that it was admitted last year to the Select Committee. A total of more than £2 billion will therefore have been spent on producing torpedoes which appear not to work or to be incapable of catching the current class of Russian submarines they are supposed to catch. I hope that the Minister will address those points.

The development of an effective conventional Navy, capable of honouring our commitments to NATO, is placed severely at risk and in jeopardy, because the Government wish to have an independent, unilateral weapon when that independence is spurious and does not exist. That expenditure will so corrupt the Naval budget that we shall have a Navy which is in all senses not stronger but weaker. That is the reason why the Government should cancel the Trident decision.

I predict that the time will arrive—it is not far away—when the Minister will have to face up to reality and, no doubt, announce the cancellation of the Trident missile programme. The alliance looks forward to that day with some pleasure.

8.41 pm

Mr. Robert Hicks (Cornwall, South-East): The hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) made a strong technical contribution. His speech confirmed the reason why some of us are always reticent about contributing to defence debates.

I shall consider the Royal Navy's future role with specific reference to its manpower requirements, before concentrating on the Government's proposals for the future management structure of Her Majesty's dockyards. It is a fundamental responsibility of any Government to safeguard their citizens from any potential internal or external aggressor. That implies the possession of a meaningful and effective defence capability.

There is no alterntive but to have nuclear and conventional weaponry at our disposal. It worries me when I read and hear, as we have done this evening, that, because of financial constraints, one of these two essential ingredients may have to suffer at the expense of retaining and developing the other. Those aspects are complementary, and until we can obtain meaningful disarmament both are necessary.

As one who is known to take a relaxed view about public expenditure, the public sector borrowing requirement and the rest of the somewhat questionable economics of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, I hope that the Defence Ministers will not be pushed, for reasons of economic dogma, into a corner in which they are obliged to take decisions which prejudice our defence capability.

The last occasion on which I spoke in a defence debate was in 1981 when the House was discussing John Nott's defence review. Had the proposals then outlined been enacted, the Royal Navy would have been the principal casualty. We all know what that would have meant, given the subsequent events in the south Atlantic. This is an appropriate moment to mention HMS Raleigh, the shore establishment in my constituency which takes all the non-officer intake into the Royal Navy. As a result of the defence review, training is undertaken at that establishment, involving an annual throughput of 24,000 naval personnel a year. That training is at all levels and a great variety of skills is imparted. It is a highly successful, streamlined process, and I am sure that the House would wish to pay tribute to those personnel—both service and civilian — who are employed there and provide that excellent facility for the training requirements of Royal Navy personnel.

Many previous Governments have looked at Her Majesty's dockyards and have sought to make them more efficient and accountable to financial controls. That is a right and proper approach, but the problem is that refitting ships will never be as controllable as constructing them. There is the inherent difficulty of the customer-supply relationship, as was pointed out in the most recent inquiry by Mr. Levine. It is difficult to fault the Levine analysis, but I have little enthusiasm for his prescribed remedies. His agency proposal — whereby the assets of the dockyard would be retained by the Ministry of Defence but the actual work, including the labour force, would be the responsibility of a private contractor on a five or perhaps seven-year leasehold basis—is a recipe for confusion at best and inefficiency at worst.

Given the weaknesses of the existing system, it would seem to be sensible to return to the proposals of my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Mr. Speed) who made a similar investigation when he was Under-Secretary of State for Defence. He proposed the establishment of a dockyard trading fund. The Speed report specifically rejected the agency concept advocated by Levine. That happened just four years ago. As the House knows, the Speed report suggested a trading fund for Her Majesty's dockyards, with a separate dockyard Vote, thus taking it out of the overall defence budget. That would have had the effect of improving the existing unsatisfactory customer-supply relationship by placing it on a more businesslike basis, and, at the same time, allowing greater freedom of management within the overall financial budget. Ultimately, the dockyards would be accountable to the House for their funding in a more precise manner than at present.

The Levine proposals prompted an adverse response, in varying degrees of hostility, from the work force at Her Majesty's dockyards in Devonport. I gather from my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford that, when he made his report known, he was able to obtain support for his proposals from management and from trade unions representing the work force.

I make one urgent request to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence — please, end this uncertainty. There are 13,300 employees at Devonport, 800 of whom have only just moved into our area following the closure of Chatham and the reduction at Portsmouth. In addition, by March 1985, there is a target of 13,065 employees, so a reduction at Devonport of almost 240 has been requested. That adds to the anxiety and uncertainty. The Government have made Devonport the premier United Kingdom dockyard. The loyalty and competence of the work force, management, industrial civil servants and non-industrial civil servants are not in doubt, as their response at the time of the Falklands conflict clearly demonstrated.

Those essential attributes for the servicing of our Royal Navy are currently being sorely tested by the present indecision and the resulting uncertainty. We are talking

about people, their livelihoods and their pattern of family life. I believe that we owe it to them to relieve those anxieties as quickly as possible.

8.50 pm

Mr. Gordon Brown (Dunfermline, East): Although this debate has ranged widely, the major contributions have concentrated widely on the escalating costs of Trident, which, set against the falling pound, put at risk our conventional defences.

I wish to concentrate upon the future of the royal dockyards. The subject was mentioned by the hon. Members for Cornwall, South-East (Mr. Hicks) and for Plymouth, Drake (Miss Fookes). The Minister announced this afternoon that the refit of the Trident submarine will take place at Rosyth dockyard. The work force at Rosyth will undoubtedly welcome one part of that—the belated recognition of their skill and dedication, evidently forgotten by the Government since the appreciation of their work in July 1982 after the Falklands campaign. That has been forgotten for the narrowest of ideological reasons as Ministers, in pursuit of privatisation policies, have sought to belittle the public sector and loyal civil servants.

The work force at Rosyth, like the Opposition, will find little to reassure them about their jobs and immediate prospects. The announcement means that once Trident is built, if ever it is, and once it is commissioned, if ever it is, it will be refitted at Rosyth dockyard perhaps in the last years of this century or the first years of the next.

Even if I were an enthusiast for the Trident programme, which I am not, I shall find it difficult to return to my constituency this weekend and tell those in work and out of work to forget about the millions of pounds that they have lost in regional development grants as a result of an announcement yesterday, to ignore the fact that 4,500 people are now unemployed, with unemployment rising faster than almost anywhere in Europe, and to ignore the fact that Rosyth faces the threat of compulsory redundancies. I am supposed to say that in 15 years' time work may be available from the Trident programme if the dream of the Secretary of State for Defence becomes a reality.

The sudden and abrupt loss of development status, the threat of compulsory redundancies and the disruption that privatisation is causing, and will continue to cause, is of more immediate interest and of more direct relevance to my constituents and to the employees now and for the foreseeable future than any benefits which might accrue from a refit programme which, if it ever happened, could begin at the earliest in the late 1990s.

As even the Minister will concede, many uncertainties surround the Trident programme: not just the cost or the falling pound, but the increasing hostility being shown to the programme by the Labour party and the doubts being raised on the Conservative Benches and by the Minister's allies.

When I was in America during the summer, I found that the NATO chiefs whom I met believe that the Trident programme seriously weakens this country's conventional defences. I met Brigadier-General Anthony Smith, who is the principal director at the pentagon for European and NATO policy. He referred me to a report which had been prepared showing the gap that will arise in our conventional defences at sea and on land if the Trident programme continues.

The report is entitled, "Improving NATO's Conventional Capabilities". In a letter to me Brigadier Smith says that although there is no unclassified version of the report in America, he has sent it to the Secretary of State for Defence. He suggests that I approach the Secretary of State who, he believes, will be pleased to show me a copy of the report. I shall, of course, approach the Secretary of State, but it is interesting to note that the report confirms everything that the Labour party has been saying about the economic absurdity and military folly of the Trident missile.

Many people believe that the Minister has come to anounce what will happen after the arrival of Trident in order to convince himself that Trident will arrive. His statement today about refitting at Rosyth rings hollow. If he were announcing real jobs from a real project of real importance to the real defence of this country, I for one would welcome the announcement. Unfortunately, Trident represents none of those things.

My constituents will find it strange that the Minister can be so certain about the fate of the dockyards in the late 1990s when he has made a virtue of uncertainty about their fate in the late 1980s. They will find it strange that he can tell us what might happen in the last half of the next decade, but cannot tell us what will happen in the last half of this decade.

The Minister has confirmed that he is considering proposals to privatise the dockyards, but today he tells us that the most powerful, lethal and destructive weapon ever built is to be refitted at Rosyth. Apparently he cannot tell us who will be running the dockyard in the 1990s and servicing the weapons.

Among the measures which the Minister is still considering is a proposal which would privatise the management of the dockyard, perhaps placing it in the hands of a foreign or multinational operator on a four-year franchise — something which is more familiar to the world of fast food.

Is the Minister saying that he proposes to buy the most expensive weapons system known to this country and run it on a franchise? Today, Rosyth faces the threat of redundancies, ever-increasing privatisation and increasing contractorisation within the dockyard. If the Minister could allay the fears of dockyard workers about those things, his announcement about Rosyth might be taken more seriously.

The Minister was saying that Trident, of unknown and unknowable cost, with at best an uncertain future, is to be sent to a dockyard which would be run by an unknown and untried operator, with a work force of unknown size, over which Ministers would have unknown and unspecified control. In those circumstances, the Minister's statement comes more from the world of public relations than from that of defence.

It is now eight months since Mr. Peter Levine's proposals were discussed, and four months since he left the employment of the Secretary of State for Defence. That is four months during which uncertainty over the future of the dockyard has been damaging morale within the dockyard. They have been months during which, without public announcement or the approval of the House, creeping privatisation appears to have become the way of life in the royal dockyards. When the dockyards exist to serve the Navy, when nothing should be done to affect the effectiveness of their relationship with the Navy, and when the onus should be upon the Government to demonstrate

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the need for any change or any privatisation, the measures that have been taken in the dockyards have not been tested for security, for viability, for capability or for capacity to respond in an emergency. At no point, either, have we considered the financial implications for this country. The opposite is the case. For the Government, as a matter of dogma, privatisation is the panacea, and, as a matter of policy, cutting public sector manpower is the prescription.

Now that it has been denied its promised increases in manpower, Rosyth's resources are being stretched to the limit. The dockyard is depending to an increasing extent on private contractors and casual labour. The Transport and General Workers Union representatives at Rosyth have told me that in July, as a result of the manpower recruitment ban, casual workers were brought into the dockyards. Five casual workers were used to clean the radiation departments of Resolution and Warspite. The union claims that the workers were given inadequate training and were not fully informed of the risks. Within a few days one worker had been subjected to two thirds of the maximum yearly radiation dosage and all five had been subjected to more than half of it.

That is an example of the dangers that can arise from increasing dependence on casual workers and outside commercial contractors. Under wholesale privatisation, with casualisation of the work force and contractorisation —which may be the fate of the dockyard—the Minister cannot guarantee either safety or security. He certainly cannot guarantee savings.

The test which the Secretary of State applies before putting projects out to privatisation is quite different from the tests applied by other Departments. The Secretary of State says that he will keep projects within the public sector only if the public sector can prove that it is significantly cheaper than the private sector. Even in American dockyards, privatisation of in-house services can be justified only if the private sector is at least 10 per cent. cheaper than the public sector. To the right hon. Gentleman, it is the public sector that must be cheaper. That policy is wrong and unfair.

The Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement visited America this summer before I did. He visited some of the dockyards that I visited later on. He must have seen that the model which Mr. Levine chose for the dockyards, and which he said was based on American experience— the model of agency management — can be found nowhere in the management of the shipyards which deal with naval refits in America. It is taken entirely from armaments manufacture — a model with which Mr. Levine is familiar because of the other hats that he wears. That model has no relevance to the future of the royal dockyards.

The Minister must also have heard the views of the chief of the naval sea systems command, Vice-Admiral Fowler, who has said repeatedly—in America, the land of free enterprise—that in the refitting of naval ships the public sector is far more efficient than the private sector. Vice-Admiral Fowler has recommended that public sector shipyards should be building ships as well as refitting them.

I wonder whether the Minister also knows that the American navy is resisting Government proposals to contract out more and more vessels and submarines for refitting. Does he know that study after study has led the American shipyards and naval sea systems command to reject the privatisation of naval in-house services—the very thing being proposed for our dockyards?

American and most European experience leads us to reject the Levine proposal for agency management, any further movement towards privatisation of in-house services in the dockyards, and any further contracting-out of refitting work.

The Minister has not reassured us about the future of Rosyth dockyard. He has simply added to the uncertainty, anxiety and sense of frustration at the dockyard. Neither management nor work force wants the disruption of privatisation, the Navy does not want it, and the nation certainly does not need it.

9.4 pm

Mr. Robert Banks (Harrogate): I hope that the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) will forgive me if I do not follow on his debate about the dockyards.

I should like to congratulate my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces. What he has said today suggests to me that he and I share an understanding about the importance of sea power. I am convinced that the control of the oceans is fundamental to the deterrent that we in NATO have to maintain. NATO is the cornerstone of our defence policy. Our commitment to it is always taken into account, and never more so than by the United States. It is easy to settle down under the umbrella of the United States' military forces, but unless we make our contribution we cannot expect NATO to hold the peace as it has for the past 35 years.

I praise the Americans for their contribution in Europe. It is up to us to make ours. That is one of the reasons why it is important that we hold fast to the decision to go for Trident. It is the best. It is expensive, but one has to pay a lot for the best. A system that is deep in the oceans of the world and capable of launching one of the most deadly weapons is the deadliest deterrent. That is the way to counter the ever-growing threat of Russian forces and nuclear armaments, which my hon. Friend the Minister described.

My hon. Friend the Minister also spoke about the style of the Navy. It was a privilege for me to serve in it for a short time many years ago. What my hon. Friend said about the Navy's esprit de corps and reputation throughout the world is true today. Much of that goes back to tradition, and the person who founded that tradition was Lord Nelson. He is our most revered naval figure, and formed the modern Navy. He inspired by his unique leadership and injected a new strand of humanity into the running of the Navy, to say nothing of his skill as a naval commander.

Those qualities are epitomised by HMS Victory, which is in commission in the Royal Navy. It is an important part of the Royal Navy's central tradition. The Navy maintains it and it would be a fundamental mistake if HMS Victory were taken out of the Navy's hands and handed over to private enterprise to be exploited as a tourist attraction. The presence of HMS Victory and its connection with Lord Nelson and all that that means to the tradition of the Royal Navy is important in training and is an inspiration to the Navy. HMS Victory is not to be just a tourist attraction. It means something special to the Navy and must be kept under its control and care.

I should like to conclude by considering the old and rather hairy story about the sinking of the Belgrano. I am

convinced that the decision had to be made in a short time. It was impossible to allow a naval commander to have the ship in his sights and not give him the order to sink it. The sinking was in the interests of all who were at sea in the Falklands area and elsewhere. I do not believe that the order was given on any ground other than that of securing the safety of those at sea. It bottled up the Argentine navy and was one of the most significant events of the war, which changed the pattern of it. I praise that courageous and almost monumental decision, which enabled the campaign to be concluded successfully. I hope that, when the story dies, people will realise the importance of what was done.

9.9 pm

Mr. Martin J. O'Neill (Clackmannan): We have had a wide-ranging debate tonight, characterised by interest and affection for the Navy. Understandably, hon. Members with many constituents who are dependent on the Royal Navy for employment have shown an interest —as also, it is fair to say, have those hon. Members who, over the years, like my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Duffy), have developed an affection which began during their service days and which they have carried with them during their time in the House. The debate has been characterised by an interest, affection and desire on both sides to see what hon. Members regard as the best possible deal being made available for the Navy.

However, virtually every hon. Member has put the decisions to be made before us in terms of one side or other of the Trident debate. The Labour party considers Trident to be too expensive, quite apart from any other considerations of nuclear weapons. It is likely to jeopardise other aspects of our budget. Virtually every hon. Member has made some kind of guesstimate on the cost of the project. Figures between £10 billion and £12 billion have been bandied around. I hope that when the Minister replies he will be a little more frank and forthcoming than the Minister of State was when he opened the debate. The House is entitled to a clear and concise update. I realise that in the past annual assessments were intended, but, given the press interest, the amount of speculation and the rapid depreciation in the value of the pound over the past few months, it is only fair that we should be given some idea of the cost of the project.

We are also entitled to that estimate because it is possible that the British share of likely contracts for Trident might be worth less than the 60 per cent. which was suggested some time ago. It may have gone down to as low a figure as 40 to 45 per cent. We shall be interested in whatever information the Minister can give us on that aspect.

Furthermore, it is only fair that we be given some information about the time scale. My hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas) effectively questioned the certainty of the proposals for the refitting of Trident at Rosyth. I live by the river Forth and I have watched the ships going by. My two sons, who at the moment are aged three and five, are not likely to be staying in my home when the Trident submarine goes up the river Forth for a refit.

Assuming that the project were to go ahead, I understand that the department of audit of the United States Government and the Congress procurement sub-committee have been informed that Lockheed is behind time and also beyond contract. It has been estimated that the first flight by Lockheed will not, at the very earliest, be before 1992. That suggests that it will be well into 1996-97 before we take delivery of Trident, assuming that we carry on with it.

If we do carry on with Trident, another anxiety is the possibility that, if we continue with the Polaris/Chevaline project, Chevaline will be well into obsolescence by the time Trident arrives. Indeed, at that stage there could be a gap in our defences. At that time we would not have the independent nuclear deterrent about which the Government are so proud and enthusiastic. When the Minister has finished consulting his parliamentary private secretary, perhaps he will tell us whether the other option that the Reagan Administration has been toying with, the star wars project—which probably involves even more of a guess than anything that we have heard of so far tonight — would render the whole Trident project unnecessary and irrelevant. That was one of the horses that the cowboy rode once again into the White House on, and we are interested in the Minister's views.

The Government normally look to the press for succour and support, but virtually no one in the press has any hope that the Trident project will be completed. Even in tonight's edition of *The Standard*, Max Hastings — a man who is not unsympathetic to the Government or the Ministry of Defence—wrote in the final paragraph of his article on Trident:

> "As long as the Defence Secretary must remake policy with the vastly expensive lumber of Trident and Fortress Falkland immovably shackled to his own neck, it seems unlikely that our defence posture for the rest of the century will be any more than another in the long sad series of half-hearted compromises grudgingly achieved by his predecessors."

That shows the level of support that the Government can now expect in virtually all sections of the British press. As a result, other hon. Members have put forward alternatives to Trident. The right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen) gave us a lengthy exposition in which he almost came to the conclusion that sea-launched cruise missiles might be a worthwhile alternative. But he was not really very sure, which is the characteristic position of the alliance, or at least of one part of it. We are still not very sure whether the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) was completely anti-Trident, anti-all——

Mr. Ashdown: I do not believe that the hon. Gentleman can possibly be in any doubt, but in case he is, I shall remind him of the position. The Liberal party has opposed an independent deterrent for Britain from the time that Polaris was first considered. There is no equivocation about the matter. We are opposed to an independent deterrent. The situation could not be clearer.

Mr. O'Neill: As a member of the Labour party, I know that there is a fashion in the party for it to say one thing and for the leader, on occasion, to say another. The only thing is that the leader of the Labour party quite often has the opportunity to test his policies in office rather than being in permanent opposition.

Mr. Ashdown: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. O'Neill: I shall not give way. I have made the point sufficiently, and I shall not give up any more time to the hon. Gentleman. He has had his opportunity to make his position and, indeed, that of the alliance clear. After

[Mr. O'Neill]

all, he kept referring to the right hon. Member for Devonport as his right hon. Friend, so I imagine that they both agree.

But we do not see sea–launched missiles as an alternative. The reasons advanced by the Minister were quite correct, and we must add to them the question of verification. That is an important point, because, although we are talking now in the context of defence Estimates, we must appreciate our responsibilities with regard to disarmament. If our weapons were ever used as counters in disarmament talks, verification would be of considerable importance. As a result of the Government's commitment to Trident, our commitment to Polaris is probably masked. Some 7 per cent. of the total defence budget is still accounted for by Polaris, with the hidden support costs of training, repair, refit and research and development.

The other major drain on our resources is our massive commitment to the south Atlantic. Such out-of-area activity has an impact, especially when we are short of warships with which to mount a south Atlantic patrol. We now realise that the proper defence systems which are required for our ships are not coming through at the rate that they should.

The Government must recognise that the Government of President Alfonsin in Argentina are different from the one against whom we were at war two years ago. We should consider the prevailing circumstances in Argentina and recognise that if we do not move quickly, the opportunity of dealing with the democratic leader there may be denied us for years to come. We must recognise that our commitment in the south Atlantic must be considered against the defence budget and the stretching f resources.

Our responsibilities are primarily in the north Atlantic. A major and increasingly important role for our Navy is its continuing commitment to the north Atlantic. Our superiority there must be maintained. We must defend our convoy routes and offset any Warsaw pact superiority on land. Nevertheless, we must ensure that we have the vessels in which to do the work. My hon. Friend the Member for Attercliffe spelled that out adequately. We must ensure that existing equipment is adequately supported and provided.

The report in *The Daily Telegraph* of 6 November gives us cause for anxiety. It is headed:

"Shortage of spares hits Navy helicopters."

I hope that the Minister will comment on this when he replies. It states:

"The operational effectiveness of some of the navy's front-line ships and aircraft is being seriously hit by lack of spares. The Sea King anti-submarine helicopters of 814 Naval Air Squadron in the carrier Illustrious have only two sets of a particularly vital piece of equipment to be shared among seven aircraft."

That is in contradistinction to the points raised by the Public Accounts Committee. It said that the Minister of Defence holds too large stocks of stores and spares. From the article in *The Daily Telegraph* it does not appear that that is the experience of the ship supplies officers of the fleet.

When my hon. Friend the Member for Attercliffe was Minister in 1977 he gave the go-ahead for the installation of computers on ships. There is a considerable way to go before they are all installed. I hope that the Minister will make a statement on those matters, of which I am sure he is well aware because they have featured in *The Daily Telegraph*. I can imagine that, when such matters are buried in, for example, the *New Statesman* under the names of journalists like Duncan Campbell, Ministers will choose to avert their gaze. But as they are jumping out from the pages of *The Daily Telegraph*, he will probably have read about them over his cornflakes in the morning.

The problems include more than merely supplying the individual ships. My hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) referred to the problems of the dive systems on HMS Challenger on the Clyde. I wrote to the Minister about that because there has been considerable anxiety on the Clyde. As a Scottish Member, I am aware of the nervousness caused by anything which affects the yards there. Quite correctly, there was much public interest. My hon. Friend pointed out that we were not trying to over-egg the pudding. We recognise that it is not intended to reflect on the Scott Lithgow yards or work which has been done there.

Will the Challenger's dive system have to be refitted? If so, where will it take place? How much has the present dive system cost so far? Will there be a review of the procurement arrangements? We were led to believe at an earlier stage that there were alternatives, but they were rejected in favour of an MOD design which has now been shown to be less than satisfactory. Will the Minister estimate the cost of the replacement and how long it will take for the system to be corrected?

With the hon. Member for Yeovil, I was interested in and was going to mention torpedoes, but in view of the time remaining to me, I shall not do so. The hon. Gentleman and I used much the same sources for our arguments.

Several hon. Members with constituency interests mentioned privatisation. Everyone who takes an interest in such matters must be aware of the anxiety of naval dockyard workers. There are problems with morale, and worry about the availability of future capacity and the flexibility that has traditionally been available to the Navy, when dockyards have accepted at short notice increases in demand or changes in approach. Those anxieties have been expressed to Opposition Members by the trade unions, and not only by the unions which one would associate with ideological opposition to privatisation. The Civil Service unions, which represent the entire political spectrum, spelt out in a thoughtful and important document their views on agency management. Their opposition to it was mentioned by hon. Members on both sides of the House.

The unions have also expressed fears about the diversion of warship repair work to the ship repair industry generally, and they are worried about the possibility of fleet maintenance bases taking on unprogrammed work. The workers are not simply worried about their jobs; they have committed their lives to the service of the Navy and of our security. It is only fair and reasonable that their anxieties should be allayed as quickly as possible. It goes without saying that the Opposition believe that their fears could be allayed by the complete rejection of the Levine report and the maintenance of the status quo. However, we recognise that the Government might try to do their worst, for whatever perverse ideological reasons they choose.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, West outlined the American experience, which was contrary to many of the attitudes that are normally adopted by the Americans. It is rare for the Opposition to pray in aid the

American experience. One could expect the Soviet navy to be opposed to privatisation, but when that happens in the home of free enterprise, it puts the matter into perspective. We are not talking about the franchising of hamburgers or the changing of cleaning and catering arrangements in hospitals. Many of us believe that the security of the nation should not be jeopardised on the altar of private profit, as the Minister seems to have chosen to do.

Hon. Members have been almost unanimous tonight about the need to protect and to enhance our merchant marine force. The right hon. Member for Taunton (Mr. du Cann), who made a thoughtful and effective speech, may or may not be enjoying his new-found freedom or enhanced independence. This evening, he set the tone for the rest of the debate on the subject.

We are all anxious about the future of the merchant marine. Mr. Anthony Watts of the Maritime League has said:

"Unless the Government makes a definite move soon, we will no longer have a merchant navy to develop—and what will happen then to all those plans to charter merchant shipping for the transport of reinforcement supplies across the North Atlantic?"

The Government's response to the widespread anxiety, which I could spend a great deal of time discussing, is that there will be an in-depth study. We all know that an in-depth study is about the next worst thing to a Royal Commission. We know that the Minister who initiates it may have made such a success or failure of his responsibilities that he will have moved on by the time the report comes out, and will have forgotten about it. Whoever comes along will not want to do anything about it. There may be a delay in the Minister actually seeing it, as the officials may decide that it is something to be put at the bottom of the tray.

If this is the Government's attitude at a time of crisis in our Merchant Navy, it is not good enough. This evening, we shall not divide the House. We did so two nights ago when we debated shipbuilding, and the two subjects are not unrelated. Some of the speeches made then by my hon. Friends, and certainly the speech made by my hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon) when he wound up the debate, made clear the close relationship between the Merchant Navy and the needs of the shipbuilding communities.

It is not surprising that in this campaign we find some strange allies. My hon. Friend the Member for Attercliffe referred to the statements made by Mr. Ken Gill of the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers and by Mr. Jim Slater of the National Union of Seamen. The close similarity between the statements made by these two men, advocating the policies of the two trade unions, and the policy advocated by Admiral Sir Anthony Griffin in his Blackadder lecture "A Maritime Strategy for Britain" is interesting.

These three men from different backgrounds came to certain conclusions. They were: promotion of the recognition of Britain's dependence on the sea; the re-creation of an orderly international market based on enlightened self-interest and possibly the adoption of voluntary quota systems; the encouragement of joint shipping ventures with the developing world; the fostering of industrial relations through more effective involvement; the encouragement of a closer dialogue between shipowners and shipbuilders; the encouragement of shipowners through improved fiscal policies and reduced regulations; the encouragement of fishing, surveying, marine business, offshore and all other related elements of Britain's maritime interests; the reappraisal of Britain's contribution to the NATO strategy; and making sure that military threats to maritime interests are deterred.

In the interests of brevity, I have had to paraphrase one or two of the objectives, but the point is clear. All parts of the maritime community are committed to the need for a clear policy that will serve to foster the Merchant Navy and provide employment for those who construct ships, for those who sail them and for the communities and the activities that support them. That is of the highest priority.

It is not good enough for the Government to say that an in-depth survey will take place. The Minister having invested his authority in it, one imagines that it will take place as quickly as possible. I assure him that over the next few months, every month at Defence Questions there will be a question asking for a statement on the in-depth report. It should not take the study long to gather the information together.

The General Council of British Shipping and a variety of other organisations have put their views on record already. We hope that, at the very earliest, the report will be ready by Easter. Perhaps the Minister can tell us whether that will be so. That is a reasonable time to give him. Certainly it is not unreasonable, given the plight of the industry. We want action, and we want it quickly. Our communities need this reassurance at a time when in virtually every area of maritime policy and defence policy there is terrible uncertainty.

Virtually every right hon. and hon. Member has expressed anxiety about the cost of Trident — from Government supporters who do not know how much it costs to Opposition Members who have a fair idea of how much it costs, do not like it and do not want it.

We also want to know the impact of the increasing cost on the budget. In response to a question from the right hon. Member for Devonport, the Minister admitted that the other parts of the defence budget would have to carry the load for any increase in the cost of the Trident project. In our view, if that happened and our contribution in a conventional sense and especially in a naval sense to the NATO Alliance suffered, it would only serve to weaken the Alliance, to alienate our friends and partners in the Alliance and to make our country a far less safe and healthy place in which to live.

9.36 pm

The Minister of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. Adam Butler): I have the feeling that naval debates have a touch of freemasonry about them. I thank all those right hon. and hon. Members who have taken part in this one, and I thank especially my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Colchester, North (Sir A. Buck) for his welcome to me. I cannot but be impressed by the quality of the speeches to which I have listened, but I shall be commenting on their content. The Chamber seemed to be scattered with former Navy Ministers, junior Defence Ministers, a former Foreign Secretary and—it was very nice to see—a former Prime Minister, who was here for at least half of the debate. I think that I am right in saying that the hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill), like me, has just made his first appearance at the Dispatch Box as a spokesman on naval matters, and I congratulate him on his speech.

[Mr. Adam Butler]

Before dealing with the main matters which have occupied the attention of right hon. and hon. Members, let me try to pick up a few of the specific topics upon which they touched. A handful of right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House urged the Government to sign the law of the sea convention. I am afraid that I have to disappoint those who expected me to comment on it—although they may know better and not expect me to do so.

For the benefit of those who do not know, I ought to explain that the convention is open for signature until 9 December. The Government are finalising their attitude to signing it. But it is long and complex. It covers a wide range of interests embracing navigation. But when the decision time comes, one finds that these matters are even more complex that they were 10 years ago.

In the area of mineral exploration, scientific research, navigation and pollution some provisions are acceptable, and some are not. So all that I can say is that we shall arrive at our decision, I hope, in the near future—I might even say before too long or, I hope, shortly.

Mr. du Cann: I understand my right hon. Friend's problems and difficulties, and no one expects him necessarily to give a specific answer now, but this is a serious subject. The matter has been on the table for 10 years. It is a matter in which British officials and British Governments have taken a leading part in international negotiations. To suggest that it is possible that at some unqualified time in the future we shall come to a conclusion is, with the greatest respect to my right hon. Friend, simply not good enough. Will he not say in all seriousness that the conclusion will be announced to the House within the next few days, in time for signature?

Mr. Butler: My right hon. Friend quite rightly takes me to task. I was not treating the subject flippantly. I was involved in some of the discussions within Government on this matter some four years ago, so I know something about it. Perhaps the fact that we are taking so long to decide shows the deep importance and complexity of the matter. My right hon. Friend knows perfectly well that if it was a simple matter we could have decided one way or the other. The fact is that it is not a simple matter. I should have liked to be able to say that we would announce the decision before 9 December. It may be possible, but I cannot commit the Government to making a statement before then. However, I very much hope that that will be the case.

My right hon. Friend gave me notice that he would raise the question of hydrographic services. It is a fact that only about one third of the waters around the United Kingdom have been surveyed to modern standards. There is a steady flow of new work and priorities must be selected. That work will continue. My right hon. Friend knows many of the people involved, and he paid tribute to the staff in Taunton. I echo his praise for their work. He also said that, while he welcomed the use of private contractors and chartered vessels to supplement the resources of the survey flotilla, he thought that the reduction in numbers had gone too far. I entirely agree that there is work that should be carried out by Royal Navy vessels and, therefore, by naval staff.

My right hon. Friend made a strong, if narrow, criticism of the time taken to produce annual reports. I agree that the report should come out on time. I will check on the past position and try to ensure that they come out on time in future. The report now due has been completed, is being printed and should be available shortly.

Mr. Michael Marshall (Arundel): Does my right hon. Friend accept that many of us are concerned that this is one of the most effective ways in which the Royal Navy's future can be assured?

Will my right hon. Friend address himself to communication in the wider sense? I am sure that he is aware that one of the lessons from the Falklands was the lack of satellite communication. Will he say something about Skynet, the satellite communication system that will be of the greatest importance, but is still awaited?

Mr. Butler: My hon. Friend gave me notice that he would raise that point. In view of the time and the number of other matters with which I must deal, I shall say nothing other than that he is right. There have been problems of delay with Skynet, but there is no doubt about the importance of satellites for communication in the defence and maritime areas. I hope that we can reinforce what is currently available.

Merchant shipping occupied a number of the speeches. There should be no doubt that the figures quoted about the undoubted reduction in the merchant shipping fleet give cause for concern. At present, the overall size of the merchant fleet is adequate to meet current and foreseeable defence needs. It is because of the history of the past few years, when the run down occurred, that the Government have commissioned the joint study to which my right hon. Friend the Minister referred in his opening speech. It will not be ready as early as Easter, as was requested, but it should be available by the middle of the next year. The study is important and should not be left on the shelf unread. We shall see what it says and decide how to proceed.

Mr. Douglas: Will the report be published, in view of the restrictions imposed by its confidentiality?

Mr. Butler: Initially, the report is for Ministers. Much of the information in it might be classified and it would be impossible to publish it. My right hon. Friend and the Department of Transport will consider whether an expurgated version should be made available. Normally such reports are advisory and one would not expect them to be made public.

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull, North): We will read about it in *The Observer*.

Mr. Butler: The hon. Members for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas) and for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) mentioned Challenger. It is common knowledge that difficulties have arisen in the saturation diving system. Since it was impossible to rectify the failures in situ it was decided to redesign and simplify the system. The value of the pipework removed was under £1 million. A replacement programme has been put to competitive tender and I cannot tell what the replacement costs will be. The failure was not the consequence of MOD procurement arrangements. At the time of the original order no commercial equipment wholly met the MOD requirement. The hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas) asked if any blame attached to Scott Lithgow. There is no

disagreement between the MOD and Scott Lithgow and no complaints have been made against Scott Lithgow about the saturation diving system.

I apologise to the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) for not having been here to listen to his strong criticisms of the torpedo programme. I cannot comment in detail. Tigerfish has caused problems but I am glad to say that Sting Ray's development has been successfully completed in time and within costs. It entered service with Sea Kings and Nimrods last year.

Mr. Ashdown: Is it true that even now, as Sting Ray enters service, there is a requirement for a propulsion enhancement programme to increase its speed so that it can do the job for which it was originally designed?

Mr. Butler: I shall have to check that.

The main subject of today's debate was defence expenditure, within that, naval expenditure, and the impact which the cost of Trident might have on that expenditure. My right hon. Friend the Minister referred to the considerable increase in real terms in expenditure over the past five years under Conservative Administrations. I resent the Opposition castigating us for what we might or might not be doing in relation to the defence programme or the naval programme. In real terms defence expenditure has increased by about one fifth in the last five years and naval expenditure has benefited in the same way from increased resources.

There is no reasonable basis for suggesting that the Navy has fared other than well under this Government. In meeting our commitment to NATO, we are fully achieving the targets in Cmnd. 8758. We at any rate have met the NATO force goals. The hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Duffy) asked that question three times, and I began to wonder whether it would be the only subject in his speech. I suggest that when he next sees Admiral McDonald, he should ask him to whom he was referring. However, the hon. Gentleman was nicely taken up by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Colchester, North (Sir A. Buck), who pointed out that most of the time serving officers claim that they do not have a sufficient amount of the equipment they need.

We have ordered 41 new ships since May 1979, and in real terms we are spending about £2 billion more than would have been the case had the performance of 1978-79 been maintained. In this year alone, excluding any special provision for the Falkland Islands, we are spending £500 million more in real terms.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Is the Minister able to say anything definite about the two type 22s which have been delayed? In particular, can he say that both will be committed to Swan Hunter?

Mr. Butler: The answer is no. The hon. Gentleman will recall that the tenders expired and the orders again had to be put out to tender. These are being examined, and I hope that we shall be able to announce them before the end of the year. With only two ships involved, it is clear that one or two yards will be disappointed. The decisions have many implications for naval capacity and jobs in different yards. I am aware of the hon. Gentleman's concern, but at present I cannot say which way the orders are likely to go.

The debate on Trident took a fairly predictable form because it is not the first time that this matter has been considered. I shall not discuss in depth whether or not we need Trident. Some hon. Members will not be persuaded of that. Our very firm view is that an independent nuclear deterrent must form part of our defence strategy. If we are to have a nuclear deterrent, it must be at the front of the state of the art—in other words, as up to date as it can be.

In that respect, the views of the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen) are futile. As my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Drake (Miss Fookes) pointed out—[HON. MEMBERS: "Where is the right hon. Gentleman?"] He apologised for not being present, but he made his speech and rushed out. It was an interesting speech. The right hon. Gentleman tried to suggest that in some way we could maintain credibility by having a second or third rate deterrent and that in some way we could have a second or third-rate nuclear missile. He did not go as far as to suggest that sea-launched cruise missiles were what he had in mind, but he seemed to think that in some way one could add a small contribution to the NATO deterrent, thereby making it more effective. He seemed to suggest that we should build Spitfires or Hurricanes because they were much less costly than Tornados or Jaguars and that in some way they could supplement the forces of the 1980s and 1990s. I wholly reject that suggestion.

It is important to put the cost of Trident into context. The position has been rehearsed many times. There has been a movement in the cost based on the rates of exchange which obtained at the time the costings were carried out. It is correct that any costing based on today's rate of exchange would show an increased dollar cost and, therefore, an increase in the total cost of Trident. But that would be in respect of the exchange rate today. The actual commitment on Trident at this moment is as little as £600 million and actual expenditure as low as £200 million. It is a fraction of the total. What we have to worry about is the rate of exchange when the bulk of the expenditure occurs.

I gave up forecasting the dollar-sterling exchange rate some time ago because I always got it wrong, but the majority of commentators say that the probability is that the dollar will weaken against sterling. Therefore, even when a revised estimate using current exchange rates is put before the House fairly shortly it must be borne in mind that that is not likely to be the exchange rate when the bulk of the expenditure takes place.

Mr. Douglas: The rate of the pound against the dollar has been held up by our ability to produce North sea oil. That has been a vital factor. When the peak years of Trident expenditure come in the 1990s, our North sea oil will be declining, so it is highly likely that the exchange rate will be much more adverse to us. The point made by the right hon. Member for Devonport will then be even more valid.

Mr. Butler: Perhaps I may debate the exchange rate with the hon. Gentleman on another occasion. I wish to deal with one further main point—the cost of naval ships and related equipment. Whether the naval budget grows or shrinks and whatever happens to the defence budget as a whole, we must make the best use of the resources available.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, East (Mr. Sayeed), who has apologised for having to leave, put

[Mr. Butler]

forward some interesting ideas about making the men sleep on bare boards and reducing the quality of accommodation available to them. He felt that in that respect some of our ships were gold-plated. The hon. Member for Attercliffe used the term "gold-plated" in relation to ships in general and their current degree of sophistication.

It is easy to say that we need more and cheaper ships, but those ships have a job to do. One cannot sent a bare hulk to the Falklands or to any other combat area. A balance must be achieved between cost and capability. We set out to design a frigate in the shape of the type 23 which would show a significant reduction in cost compared with what had gone before. I was asked to provide figures. In the debate last year it was announced that the cost of the type 23 would be about 75 per cent. of that of the type 22. The gap may have widened a little due to the need to enhance capability, but the cost that we now expect is lower than was originally supposed. I believe that our competition policy will ensure that if the price is not reduced still further it is kept down in a way that might not have happened before.

In the procurement executive I am trying to get the best value for money in a number of ways, including competition. A number of examples already show that the cost of ships and equipment has been reduced through competitive tendering. It is certainly true that naval orders are less easy to put out to competitive tender than other forms of equipment, but we need to have arrangements whereby subcontract work is done as competitively as possible. About 76 per cent. of the subcontracts and supplies for the type 23 will be subject to competitive tender. That is why I am able to say in confidence that, compared with previous experience, I would expect the costs of the type 23 to be better maintained. *[Interruption.]* I thank my hon. Friend who reminds me about dockyards. I was going to consider them. I was not, however, allowed as much time as I would have liked. We are nearing a decision on dockyards. I realise the uncertainty and, in some cases, reduction in morale that can occur from a lack of decision, but, once we have announced how we propose to go forward, consultations will take place with the unions in the normal way.

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Mineral Workings Bill [Money] (No. 2)

Queen's Recommendation having been signified—

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Mineral Workings Bill, it is expedient to authorise any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable out of money provided by Parliament under any other enactment. — *[Mr. Garel Jones.]*

Summer Time

10.1 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Mellor): I beg to move,

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 8175/84, Proposal for a Third Council Directive on Summer Time Arrangements, and, while recognising the reasons for the proposal, urges Her Majesty's Government to press for the retention of the existing arrangements.

The proposals contained in the Council document referred to are briefly these: that, for the next three years, the Community should retain its common starting date for summer time of the last Sunday in March, except where that day coincides with Easter Sunday, when it should be on the previous Sunday, and also that all member states should end summer time on a common date of the second Sunday in October.

Hon. Members will recall that it was agreed in 1979 under the first summer time directive that continental member states would advance their starting date by one week, and that we and the Republic of Ireland would delay ours by one week, in order to achieve a common date throughout the Community. That arrangement was thought by the Government to be a reasonable one, and it appears to have worked well in practice. In these circumstances, there would not appear to be any reason why the general principle of starting summer time on the last Sunday in March should not again be agreed. I hope that I take the House with me on that point.

The question of bringing the starting date forward by one week to avoid Easter Day is slightly more difficult. Frankly, none of our European partners seems to find any difficulty in keeping the starting date permanently on the last Sunday in March even where it coincides with Easter, and, indeed, on the continent it appears to have been regarded as more important not to move away from a starting date which is common, not only to the Community but to practically all continental European states, both east and west. This argument particularly applies to the principal Community transit countries, Austria, Switzerland and Yugoslavia, since unlike the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland they share common land borders with the continental member states, and dislocation through not having a common changeover date would be significant.

We do not see any particular difficulty in agreeing to start summer time on Easter Day in 1986, given that the changeover will be widely publicised in advance, and those principally concerned—such as churchgoers—will be fully aware of when the clocks go forward. However, as we have no recent experience in this country of the start of summer time coinciding with Easter Day, and as the third directive is only intended to cover the next three years, we shall have ample time for seeking amendment after 1988, should this prove necessary.

The Commission has suggested a compromise with a common ending date on the second Sunday in October, approximately mid-way between the continental ending date of the last Sunday in September and our own at the end of October.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels (Leicester, East): Too early.

Mr. Mellor: I am glad to hear my perceptive colleague say that that is too early, because that is precisely the point I want to endorse.

Putting to one side for a moment the implications of this proposal for the United Kingdom, I have to report that continental member states have indicated that they are reluctant to move away from the present ending date which is aligned with that of adjoining non-member states with which they have common land frontiers.

I come now to our own interests, which are foremost in my mind. We have relied upon a number of factors in reaching our decision. We appreciate that a common ending date would have a number of advantages for some international travel, business and commercial interests, but, and we think in the end these carry more weight, we are aware that strong feelings are held in some quarters, notably in agriculture, construction and domestic tourism, as well as by members of the public who value light evenings in October for recreational and leisure purposes and who are against any substantial shortening of our present summer time period.

Whilst, therefore, the Government would have been prepared to consider the Commission's compromise proposals if other member states had been prepared to do so, in the absence of such willingness we do not feel that it would represent a balanced view of opinion in this country to move our summer time ending date to the end of September, which is the only alternative means by which harmonisation of the ending date could readily be achieved at present.

The consensus in the relevant Council working group has been that the Commission's proposal of the second Sunday in October is unacceptable, and as a result an alternative suggestion is now expected to be made to the Council of Ministers on 11 or 12 December, under which member States would retain their existing dates for the next three years. No future commitment would be implied by agreeing to this proposal which, in the circumstances, would seem to the Government to be sensible and appropriate.

I hope that I take the House with me, when I invite both sides to agree that in the circumstances our existing dates should be maintained for the next three years at least.

10.5 pm

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): The last time that I was at the Dispatch Box at this time of night, we were discussing the withdrawal of Greenland from the European Community. Notwithstanding the fact that it is excluded from the directive, looking at it, I must say that Greenland would appear to have got out just in time. It is with some reassurance that I see that the dependent territories of member States are excluded from the directive, because it would cause some confusion in Guadalupe to have its ending of summer time brought in line with the north of Scotland.

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): The hon. Gentleman probably has not been in Europe as long as I have. If he had, he would know that Guadalupe is part of metropolitan France. It is not a dependent territory.

Mr. Foulkes: I am sure that the hon. Member has been in Europe longer than anyone, in fact, too long. I accept his correction, but I am sure that it is equally glad to be excluded. The motion is supported by the Opposition not just in relation to the starting time but the finishing time as well. We would have gone further with the wording if we had intended to table an amendment.

The arguments in favour of what the directive puts forward are slight. We are told that business men throughout Europe will find contact between each other easier—there would be a longer coincidence of office hours. However, in the United States and Canada, where there are four or five time zones, they do not find it difficult to communicate with each other from one side of the continent to the other.

We are told that timetables for the jet setters would be easier if our clocks changed at the same time, but there are relatively few of those jet setters, as the hon. Member knows, being one of them, and they are expert timetable readers and can take account of any adjustments that occur at the beginning and end of October.

All those matters could be dealt with, if harmonisation has to come about, if it came at the end of October based on the United Kingdom date. That would be advantageous everyone because it would give more summer time for all. The arguments against are overwhelming. I shall not dwell on the argument put forward in the European Parliament by our former colleague Mr. Les Huckfield, who considers that the European proposal is a charter for rapists. It is not an argument that we would advance as being the most significant.

As the Home Office report states, there would be an effect on the construction industry. Every hour worked at that time of the year is important in terms of jobs and construction in general. We are also concerned about the effect on farmers.

Mr. Eric Forth (Mid-Worcestershire): When the hon. Gentleman talks about the construction industry, is he thinking about building a greater Europe?

Mr. Foulkes: No, I spoke in the context of building a greater Britain and of building more in Britain during periods of daylight.

We are also concerned about the tourist industry. Mr. Holmes of the Scottish Tourist Board writes to me as follows:

> "I have checked with the British Tourist Authority who say that their view and that of the UK national tourist boards is that British Summertime should remain unchanged since at present it contributes to an extension of the tourist season."

I have also called Mr. Ian Melrose of the Scottish National Farmers' Union. The Scottish NFU is strongly opposed to the proposal. As the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food will appreciate, much work is done on the farm during October in relation to winter sowings, work with the cattle and other preparations for winter.

Those are strong arguments. When all that has been said, the House may wonder why the Opposition were anxious to discuss the proposal—albeit briefly. First, we were concerned about a report in *The Times* on 24 October to the effect that the Government would abide by a decision of the European Parliament on the issue. I hope that the Minister will confirm that that is not the case. I see him nodding, but I hope that he will put his view on the record.

Secondly, the change is being proposed under article 100 which—as experts on Europe will know—requires a unanimous vote of Council before it can be implemented. It is ironic that a unanimous vote is required, and that therefore there should be a veto on summer time but not on subjects such as the budgetary discipline of Europe which are—although I would not belittle the importance of summer time—infinitely more important.

[Mr. Foulkes]

As unanimity is required, we require an assurance from the Government that they will not give in to pressure in any way, or relinquish their authority in the European Parliament. We need an assurance now—as an Order in Council is required to implement this proposal in the United Kingdom and there is no further opportunity for parliamentary scrutiny—that the Government will stand firm not just for the next three years but into the foreseeable future. The farmers, the tourist industry and the construction industry—on all of which many jobs depend—seek such an assurance.

10.13 pm

Mr. David Maclean (Penrith and the Border): I am pleased that the House is so poorly attended for this debate, because that must mean that Her Majesty's Government have made the correct decision. If my hon. Friend had come to the Dispatch Box and said that we were to go along with the proposal, the House would have been packed and the debate would have lasted for the full one and a half hours.

It is true that there are problems for international travellers, but it is my experience that most airline personnel are capable of working by the 24 hour clock and of working by half a dozen different systems at the same time—Greenwich mean time, Alpha time, Zulu time or whatever it may be. There is no great hardship for such people in continuing with the present arrangements.

I do not want to waste time in a debate about time. However, there is one group of people whom I should like briefly to mention. I am thinking of the farmers. I echo the comments the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) that it is vitally important for the agricultural interests that the present arrangements should be continued not just for three years but for all time — or at least until some awful climatic alteration changes the hours of darkness naturally. I should not like my hon. Friend to say that the present arrangements will continue for the next three years but that after that we shall fall into line. It is vital for agriculture that the present system continues indefinitely.

10.14 pm

Mr. Peter Bruinvels (Leicester, East): Like my hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and the Border (Mr. Maclean), I came here just to hear the announcement. My fear was aroused by the magazine Europe '82 of October 1984 which implied that we might have to conform with the rest of Europe. We are a separate country, and there is no need for us to conform. The proposed alteration is far too early. We must maintain our individuality. I am assured by what my hon. Friend the Minister has said. The word "harmonisation" always fills me with fear in regard to the European Community. I urge my hon. Friend to ensure that it does not occur in this case. I am pleased to hear that the Government will keep the present arrangements in force.

10.16 pm

Mr. Jerry Wiggin (Weston-super-Mare): I might have a faulty memory, but I recall that perhaps 12 years ago, when the House discussed summer time after an experiment you, Mr. Speaker, were extremely brave and voted with a small minority against the practicalities of it. In your present neutrality you will be listening to the debate in a quite different way. My view has altered. We are wet and weak in our attitude to summer time. We should maximise our hours of daylight. If we turn our backs on Europe saying that we disagree for a special national reason on this issue, I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will speak to his colleagues in the Department of Education and Science about corporal punishment as we are now adopting double standards. We are agreeing on one because it suits us and disagreeing on another.

10.17 pm

Mr. Mellor: With the leave of the House, I should like to respond to the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes). It is not every week that he comes down from Carrick, Cumnock, not to mention the Doon valley, ready to heap praise on the Government——

Mr. Foulkes: That is true.

Mr. Mellor: —for our wisdom. I am glad that on this occasion, if on no other, he is at his most perceptive. I thought that he made a good speech. I am sorry that his reputation as an orator with his colleagues went ahead of him so that not many of them were here to hear him. His speech was good and deserves an answer. We regretted press reports in October—they were utterly misleading. We never intended to agree with the proposal. We examined it on its merits, just as the Government did in 1979 and just as we shall do again in 1988. The case for doing what we recommend is clear. I dare say that it will seem equally clear cut in 1988. I cannot anticipate precisely what the circumstances will be then, but I should have thought that there would have to be a convincing change in the material factors to make us change our minds. I hope that that is the assurance which the hon. Gentleman seeks. I appreciate how important the issue is in Scotland where the consequences of change would be much graver than further south.

Mr. Foulkes: I thank the Minister for that. Let me give him the reassurance of my right hon. Friend the Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock) that we shall take the same attitude in 1988 in Government.

Mr. Mellor: I shall be interested to know what happens in 1988. Even on a subject such as British summer time, the British people do not deserve to have that decision taken either by the hon. Gentleman or his right hon. Friend the Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock).

Mr. Forth: Does my hon. Friend agree that the reasons for the matter before the House this evening are not, as my hon. Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mare (Mr. Wiggin) suggested, nationalist, but they can be seen in an entirely pragmatic and reasonable light? We are here making a decision which is based on common sense, pragmatism and reason. It has nothing to do with any sort of nationalist approach or divergence from the other countries of Europe, merely that we are doing what seems to us to be sensible and natural. There is nothing to be ashamed of in that.

10.22 pm

Mr. Mellor: I stand here at the Dispatch Box, as ever, as the embodiment of pragmatism and reasonableness. On that welcome note, which I see is greeted with assent on both sides, I shall quit while I am ahead.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 8175/84, Proposal for a Third Council Directive on Summer Time Arrangements, and, while recognising the reasons for the proposal, urges Her Majesty's Government to press for the retention of the existing arrangements.

Meat and Poultrymeat (Health Controls)

10.20 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mrs. Peggy Fenner): I beg to move,

That this House takes note of European Community Documents Nos. 7685/84, 7686/84 and 7948/84; and in respect of 7685/84 and 7686/84 supports the Government's approach in pressing for charging provisions which reduce distortions to trade; and in respect of 7948/84, supports the Government's intention to seek to ensure that the provisions of any new directive should be based on a scientific assessment of the available information as to safety in use and should take full account of the interests of consumers, livestock producers, the meat trade and the pharmaceutical industry.

I shall deal first with the two documents concerning the harmonisation of charges for inspection of meat, that is 7685/84 and 7686/84.

The background to this subject lies in the strenuous criticisms which were initially made by the poultry processing industry in this country some years ago. It argued that the Community requirements for inspecting poultrymeat were not being properly enforced elsewhere in the Community and it was therefore subject to unfair competition. The Government argued on behalf of our industry in Brussels and in 1981 the Commission brought forward proposals intended to remedy the problems. One of its proposals to reduce the distortions of competition was designed to harmonise the charges which were paid by the poultry processing industries of the member states to meet the cost of the inspection work.

The proposal was amended this year by the Commission, which also produced a parallel proposal to cover red meat inspection costs. The Commission proposed that a flat rate charge be made on the industry, with responsibility for any extra costs which were incurred being met by the authorities responsible for the inspection work. In Great Britain meat inspection is the responsibility of local authorities, which have the power to charge the costs of the work to the slaughterhouse operator. The effect of the proposals would therefore have been to place on local authorities a new financial cost. It was because a potential new cost would be placed on local authorities that the Select Committee on European Legislation originally recommended these proposals for debate.

During study of the Commission's proposals in the Council of Ministers an agreement has emerged that the form of the legislation should be further adjusted. The concept of a flat rate charge is being replaced by a minimum charge, enabling member states to charge more than the standard rate, up to the level of their actual costs of inspection. This will enable local authorities to continue to obtain reimbursement from slaughterhouse operators for their full costs; and this, of course, resolves the problem identified by the Select Committee.

I should add that the proposals, which are now being discussed as a single joint text covering both red meat and poultrymeat, also make provision to implement a long-standing decision at the Council of Ministers to set a charge on imports from non-Community countries, to cover the cost of inspecting meat at the ports.

In its present form the proposal leaves open the level at which the standard, or minimum, rate of charge would be set. The level and the detailed arrangements would be set in further legislation by the middle of next year. The rules would then become effective from 1 January 1986. There has been discussion in the Council whether the minimum charge should be set in the proposals before us today. Progress in considering the levels has so far however been rather slow and it is not at all clear that the Council will be in a position to take decisions on this aspect when it next meets.

I am well aware that these proposals are the subject of criticism by the slaughtering industry. My right hon. Friend the Minister has carefully considered the arguments put to him and has explained his views to the industry. We understand fully that the industry disagrees with the principle that the costs of meat inspection should be met by the industry. Nevertheless, I can offer no hope that the Government will change their policy on this issue; a policy which has been maintained over a substantial period of time by successive Governments.

I have sympathy with the argument put forward that standards of inspection for poultrymeat should be harmonised before inspection charges can be harmonised. There would clearly have been advantages in proceeding in such a logical manner. We have pressed for the harmonisation of the standards of inspection of poultrymeat, and will continue to do so. My hon. Friend the Minister of State stressed the urgent need for action on this matter at the last Agriculture Council. So we are to a considerable extent in agreement with the industry on this point. However, I do not consider that it is necessarily unjustifiable to make progress on both fronts at the same time; and since the proposals on charging are before us we are prepared to consider them in order to help to remove distortions in competition between the industries of Community member states.

Mr. Nicholas Baker (Dorset, North): If my hon. Friend can answer my question, she may go a long way towards allaying the fears of the poultry industry, which have been forcefully expressed to me, and no doubt to many of my colleagues. There is concern that if Ministers go ahead and agree a standard charge for poultrymeat there will be distortions. It is more important to concentrate on the standard and quality of poultrymeat inspection. Will my hon. Friend give an assurance that she will not go ahead with agreeing a standard charge before the quality of inspection point has been settled?

Mrs. Fenner: My hon. Friend will see that my hon. Friend the Minister of State is on the Front Bench. He is seized of the importance of getting the standards of inspection harmonised, but there does not seem to be a reason for not seeking to avoid what would be a distortion if there was not harmonisation of minimum cost. I assure my hon. Friend that we are fully seized of the industry's view that that is important in preventing distortions.

It is also argued that these proposals will not achieve complete harmonisation of charging practice, and this is true. However, there is also a provision for a review of the system. If the legislation were approved, we would have recognition in Community law of the principle of harmonisation and a minimum rate. These would provide a basis on which to build further in the future.

Finally, I should explain that an agreement on this issue at the Council of Ministers would have further implications of benefit to the meat industry. A range of other proposed measures is currently blocked in the

Council and is to be brought into force only when the harmonisation of charges is settled. These other measures include import arrangements related to control of foot and mouth disease, brucellosis testing, and some adjustment of the rules for control of classical swine fever. They also include two provisions of importance to the poultrymeat industry itself, namely, the extension of the authority to produce New York dressed poultry and to chill poultry by immersion without subsequently freezing it. The Government will take account of the interest of the industry in those other issues in assessing their position when the proposal comes before the Council again.

I come now to the proposal in document 7984/84, which would amend the existing controls over the use of hormone growth promoters.

Mr. Robin Maxwell-Hyslop (Tiverton): Before my hon. Friend leaves the first order, I should be grateful if she would clarify one matter. She said that the cost of inspection that is not borne by the processor should fall on the rates. On whom does the cost fall for inspecting poultry and meat products imported from the European Economic Community to ensure that they are correctly graded? Does it fall on local ratepayers, or on United Kingdom taxpayers generally, since the benefit or disbenefit of inspection or lack of inspection is not concentrated in the area of the port, but is spread throughout the United Kingdom?

Mrs. Fenner: If I am to give my hon. Friend an accurate answer, I shall get a response that I can send to him in a note. I take his point and will answer it later.

As the House will recall, the preparations which are currently allowed consist of a solid pellet implanted in the ear of a beef animal. The implant slowly releases a hormone which improves the feed conversion of the treated animal. These hormone implants represent important tools of management to livestock farmers which reduce costs and are of benefit both to him and the consumer.

A number of these implants have been licensed in the United Kingdom for some years under the stringent controls of the Medicines Act 1968, under which Agriculture and Health Ministers have to be satisfied as to the safety—that includes the consumer's safety—quality and efficacy of a product before it is allowed on the market.

Some years ago there was a scare in Italy over baby food that was discovered to be contaminated with a forbidden hormone growth promoter. The baby food had been made from carcases originating in France. The result, predictably, was a call for panic legislation at European level. After much discussion, the controls currently in force were agreed. They made little difference to the United Kingdom because, by contrast with some member states, we already had good regulatory machinery in operation.

A feature of the existing European controls is that member states are allowed to avail themselves of five active ingredients for these implants. Three are found naturally, namely, testosterone, progesterone and oestradiol 17 beta. Two are derived from sources outside the animal body, namely, trenbolone and zeranol. Preparations based on the last two are widely used in the United Kingdom beef industry—and elsewhere in the world. However, the European Commission has been required to produce a scientific assessment of those five active ingredients with special respect to their safety. The outcome of its deliberations has been that the three natural substances have been declared safe, while judgment has been suspended on the two synthetics pending the provision of further scientific information.

In passing, I may say that the information shortfall on trenbolone was made up almost immediately, while that on zeranol is being prepared.

The document before the House translates the scientific findings into new controls and advances other aspects of the controls over the preparations. First, it is proposed that member states should allow the use of preparations based on the three "natural" active ingredients. There would be a Community system, of authorising preparations based on them. Secondly, it is proposed to ban preparations based on the two synthetic active ingredients. Then there are proposals imposing much stricter controls over the use of all of those preparations, such as the random sampling of live animals on farms and in abattoirs and the sampling of carcases and meat at all stages of manufacture and transport from abattoir to consumer. Meat products are, of course, included.

The United Kingdom can obviously agree with the proposal that products based on the three natural active ingredients should be authorised for use, but some member states cannot apparently do so. That raises two important issues. First, their attitude means that the advice of the Commission's scientific working group is being disregarded. Secondly, if some member states use the preparations and others disallow them, the latter may try to block the imports of meat from the former. Trade upsets within the EC could be significant. The same problem would arise for third country supplies. We believe that scientific advice should be followed here and that there can be no justification for disregarding it.

The proposed ban on trenbolone and zeranol would have repercussions on our beef producers, as they would have to switch to alternative products, but we believe that the information submitted will clear trenbolone, and it is a matter for regret that the Commission has been so slow to examine it. Zeranol is used in many countries and has been cleared by many regulatory authorities, including our own. The trade consequences of a ban on zeranol must be serious for the EC, and it is to be hoped that this proposal will be reconsidered on the basis of scientific knowledge.

It has been the United Kingdom's policy all along, and will remain so, that the controls to be applied to the use of hormone growth promoters should be based on a strict scientific assessment of the facts.

There can be no quarrel with the idea that proper controls must be exercised over the use of hormone growth promoters, and there can be no objection in principle to the extension of detailed controls proposed in the draft directive, but we must take every care that we endorse only practical propositions. For example, it is unrealistic to propose that every implant must be done by a vet. I do not believe that it would be operated in practice in any member state. Similarly, although checks on live animals, meat and meat products may be desirable, we must recall that the work and tests involved are costly. We need to test at no higher level than statistics show will reveal whether there is abuse of the preparations. We must approach with caution the proposition that tests must automatically be carried out where there is no suspicion that an offence has

[Mrs. Fenner]

been committed. Although random testing is accepted elsewhere in British law, we must be careful that it goes no further than is justified in protecting consumer safety.

I hope that I have explained the documents, and I shall listen with care to the views of hon. Members.

10.39 pm

Mr. Mark Hughes (City of Durham): I shall deal first with the poultrymeat regulations. The motion shows that the Government's aim is to reduce distortions in trade. That section does not have the support of the British Poultry Federation, which objects to it. I quote from a letter dated today and sent to me by hand, which says:

"The motion under discussion, so far as it relates to poultrymeat hygiene inspection, seeks support for the Government's approach in pressing for charging provisions which reduce distortions in trade. It is tabled in the teeth of the opposition of the poultrymeat industry, not only in the United Kingdom but also throughout the EEC.

Charges are the symptom, but not the root cause of distortions of competition arising from poultrymeat hygiene inspection. The basic problem is a widely differing interpretation of the same European legislation as to what staffing levels and hygiene procedures are appropriate to ensure that birds are fit for human consumption."

At the root of the objections of the British Poultry Federation and other bodies to the proposed regulations is their belief, with which I agree, that what is being asked for is approval for a set of regulations made without deciding what are the predeterminates on which one should regulate. If one wants regulations, one should know what one is going to regulate. So far, the EEC has not determined that.

The letter continues:

"In the United Kingdom our standards of inspection are acknowledged to be more onerous than in other countries; consequently the number of birds that can be sold at top quality prices is less, and the costs of staffing and administration are greater, than for our competitors.

The motion will do nothing to eliminate distortions of competition as to the grading of birds".

Without equality of grading of birds, there can be no effective control over how one discriminates and how one works the regulations. There is no EEC-wide agreement on the grade or quality that the poultry industry has to meet. As long as that is missing, there will be distortion of trade both internationally and nationally.

It is no good saying that this order will lead to harmonisation if we do not know what a grade one poultry bird is from one country to another, or one part of this country to another. The Opposition may want a common, harmonised procedure to inhibit distortion of trade, but I cannot believe that these proposals aid that. In fact, I fear the reverse.

There is also the problem of costs. As the Minister knows, there are three proposals. There is that of the European Parliament, Assembly — call it what one wishes—which suggests that all costs should be borne by the Community. There is that from the Commission, that all costs should be borne equally across all countries, between producer and member Government.

Then we have these proposals, to which Her Majesty's Government appear to agree. The cost of the inspection will be borne wholly, solely and completely by the producer, who will have to pass it on to the consumer. I must advise the Minister that that introduces distortion. If French, Belgian or Dutch poultry producers have inspection costs carried by their Governments whereas ours have to be borne by our producers, our producers will carry a distorted penalty into the market place which they cannot reasonably be expected to bear.

However much I would like competition on poultry meat hygiene inspection to be uniform and fair throughout the Community, I do not accept that the proposals before us achieve that end.

I turn to the difficult problem of trenbolone, zeranol and other such products. There is clearly a major difficulty, because we cannot ascertain whether they are in the carcase. That is true of a number of these products. The naturally occurring ones are excluded because it cannot be ascertained from examining the carcase whether they have been used. However, they palpably aid growth and they are growth promoters. I ask the Minister to tell us the procedure that will be adopted to enable trenbolone to come back into use. Will there have to be a unanimous verdict or will there be a qualified majority in the Council of Ministers? Is the House to have the power in future —it has always had it in the past—to permit the use of hormone additives? I have a suspicion that the proposals imply that a majority decision in the Council of Ministers would allow that which we have hitherto prohibited to be available in Britain as a growth promoter. I would be unhappy at that.

We have major objections to the poultrymeat proposals, but we accept that there are detailed difficulties on the use of hormome additives, future adaptation, scientific advance and the introduction to the market of new products. Will it be in the power of the House to inhibit their use in Britain for the safeguarding of our consumers, or will that issue be transferred to a majority decision of the Council of Ministers? I should be extremely unhappy if consideration of new products of the trenbolone type, or whatever they might be, are transferred away from the House and the scrutiny of the Chamber to another body.

10.48 pm

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): I am grateful for the opportunity to say a few words about the poultry industry. I do not intend to detain the House for long. To a certain extent, I welcome the paper that has been put before us by the European Community for the equalisation of payments for the examination of poultry costs. However, there is a major factor, which has been touched upon by the hon. Member for City of Durham (Mr. Hughes), that causes our poultry farmers dissatisfaction. There is such a dichotomy in the payment of veterinary costs for the examination of poultry throughout the EEC that much depends on the country from which the system is operated as to the cost of the meat when it is sold. In some respects, it can be regarded as a hidden surplus, especially in turkeymeat. In speaking on behalf of the turkey farmers of Lancashire, I can say with firmness and sincerity that they are greatly worried about the pricing between France and Britain. One turkey farmer informed me that he was paying 9p per turkey in veterinary examination charges. That amounted to £22,000 per year, which is a great overhead in the production of turkeys.

The producers are greatly concerned that there is no unity of standard for examination of poultry within the Community. Higher standards exist in Britain than anywhere else in the Community. As a consequence, Britain rejects or downgrades birds that other parts of the Community allow through the examination net as grade A

birds. They then command a higher price and are imported into Britain on that basis. Those birds, if tested in Britain, would not meet our high standards.

Before we consider any further step towards the equalisation of payments, we must put before all else the equalisation of standards. That is looked for by the poultry producers as a major step towards protecting their markets from unfair competition from the Community. It will also ensure that we can compete economically in the export of turkey and poultrymeat of various sorts.

I welcome the comment from my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary that we are fighting hard as a Government to ensure that equal standards will be adopted in the Community in the near future. I wish the Government all power to their elbow. Before they sign any agreement binding Britain to an equalisation of cost policy, I urge them to keep in the back of their mind and in the forefront of any negotiations the equalisation of examination standards.

10.52 pm

Mr. Andrew Hunter (Basingstoke): The hour is late, and brevity would be commendable, not least because several of my hon. Friends hope to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I want briefly to consider certain features of the draft instruments pertaining to health aspects of red meat and poultrymeat and the draft instrument on the implantation of hormones in animals.

I have three brief observations to make on the draft instruments on red meat and poultrymeat, following the cue given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary of taking them together. The objective and the goal must be the seeking of harmonisation of health inspection between member states. I do not think that there is any need to stress or to detail the arguments for that, other than to say that, unless harmonisation prevails, certain individual member states will be disadvantaged. I therefore welcome the principle of seeking to obtain greater harmonisation embraced by the two draft instruments.

But, secondly, having made that point, I give warning that I am unhappy about certain aspects of the draft instruments, because I do not think that they will necessarily achieve their objective in this very respect. I understand why some people find it attractive for the cost of health inspection to be borne by the public authorities but reimbursed by a minimum charge to the slaughterer or importer. However, that will not do much to iron out the current discrepancies, differences and variations. Indeed, it might increase them. It could create fresh scope for national protection.

Different member states have different slaughter procedures and different administrative systems for inspection. They have different abattoir overheads and different standards of inspection. Much else also differs. This creates obstacles to harmonisation both in the degree and cost of inspection. Moreover, whatever formula the Council determines, it will surely be open to various interpretations, according to the sympathies of each member state.

I do not believe that harmonisation in health inspection can be achieved significantly or satisfactorily unless the cost of that inspection is funded by the taxpayer. There are one, two or possibly more routes by which the money can go from the taxpayer to cover the cost of health inspection, but the underlying principle is the same. Inspection takes place for the benefit of the taxpayer or consumer, so it is right that the cost of it should fall on the taxpayer's shoulders. More importantly, this is the only way that we can get round the potential and real disadvantages of continuing the lack of harmonisation. It is better to achieve harmonisation in effect, by removing all costs of inspection from the producer or slaughterer, rather than to fail to achieve it despite direct intentions so to do, as in the regulations. So much for the first two regulations.

I shall deal with more brevity with the third draft instrument, dealing with hormone implants for cattle and the recommendations found in article 5. I welcome the authorisation of the natural hormone substances oestradial, progesterone and testosterone. There is no room for debate on that. These substances and their derivitives have been appraised on a scientific basis. Their use in farm animals does not present a hazard, either to animal or consumer. However, that is not the only point to be made.

If such substances are authorised by the EC, they must be authorised by and in each member state. For that which is authorised in the directive to be banned in certain member states is unacceptable. In its own small way that would undermine the concept of a common market. It would be a thinly disguised ploy by some member states to protect their domestic producers. I urge my hon. Friend to bear that in mind.

Article 5.2 causes me anxiety. I am somewhat reassured by what the Minister said tonight. It states

"the aforementioned substances"——

—the natural hormones to which I referred—are to be

"administered by a veterinarian."

As the Minister said, this must not be. There is no earthly reason why a farmer should not administer such substances. Farmers are skilled to do that. If a person is not so skilled, he should not be a farmer. It makes no sense to deny farmers the authority to administer the substances. Then there is the cost argument.

Such a measure would significantly increase the producer's costs.

I have been told that an experienced team of administrators can take up to four hours to implant 200 steers in ideal conditions. The thought of the cost of that operation expressed in vet bills is alarming.

Nor should we overlook the possibility that such a measure might lead less scrupulous producers either to administer products illegally or to administer cheaper, proscribed products.

Mr. Mark Hughes: I may have misunderstood the hon. Gentleman, but did he say proscribed products?

Mr. Hunter: Yes, I did.

The last observation which I wish to make concerns article 5.5. With regard to the synthetic compounds zeranol and trenbolone, I was somewhat reassured by the Minister's remarks. I understand that technical and scientific studies called for by the EEC Commission are still uncompleted, despite the fact that manufacturers' evidence of safety was submitted some months ago. Until these reports are available, we can only reserve judgment on the products. It therefore follows that it is quite absurd for these draft regulations to propose to ban these substances after 1 July. That is premature and unfounded. The decision should be made only in the light of scientific evidence and when that scientific evidence is available.

[Mr. Hunter]

I want to avoid the sin of repeating my arguments, but I confess that there is cause for concern in these draft regulations, laudable though their overall objective undoubtedly is.

11.2 pm

Mr. Robin Maxwell-Hyslop (Tiverton): Not much has been said—indeed, nothing at all—about the categories in this country which will benefit or suffer from the proposed regulations. First, there is the consumer. She would be buying a class A bird if it were inspected in Britain, but if she buys an imported one she might well be cheated, simply because the enforcement standards, quite apart from the classifications, are not common throughout the whole of the EEC.

For example, the regulations about the amount of water permitted in a frozen bird are simply not adhered to in France, and those who buy poultry imported from France could find that they are buying a load of French water and, consequently, are paying more per lb than they thought.

That is why I ask: who bears the cost of the inspection at the ports? If this falls on the local ratepayers, there is an incentive to let the produce through uninspected. On the other hand, it is not the local ratepayers primarily who will suffer if substandard poultry products are imported through their port. In addition, there will be a greater incentive for EEC exporters to channel their exports through those ports where it is known that the inspection is most lax. Therefore, the consumer is the first person put at risk by failure to have common standards, commonly enforced.

In this context, it is interesting to note that during this debate not a single Liberal or SDP Member has been present, so little is their interest in the consumer.

The interests of the producers does not mean just those who rear poultry, but the many thousands of people whose livelihood lies in processing poultry. It is all very well for my hon. Friend the Minister to say that the local authority and not central Government can bear part of the cost above the minimum charge, but the ratepayer is already tortured and severely constrained by the increasing proportion of expenditure that falls on the rates rather than on central Government. In many cases, the amount that local authorities can spend is up against the limits imposed by central Government, so it is no real reply to say that they can bear part of the burden instead of placing it all on the processors. It is beyond dispute that the standards to which we religiously adhere but which our continental competitors do not even pretend to observe mean that the cost of inspection in this country can make our product apparently uncompetitive, although it would not be uncompetitive if the same standards were applied on the continent.

What is to be done about this? My hon. Friend the Minister will be relieved to hear that I did not argue on the order relating to summer time that the solution was for the Commission to ensure that the sun rose and set at the same time in all EEC countries, because that would not have been a practical solution to the problem, although it would have been a reasonable ground for harmonising summer time. In this context, however, there is no such fatuous situation. It lies within the power of those who control the destinies of the EEC to ensure common standards of meat and poultry inspection throughout the Community: and as an incentive, to make the free movement of such products contingent on the establishment of common standards of inspection and enforcement. The whole concept of the EEC depends inherently on that, even if it is not explicitly stated. It is the lack of common standards that causes the distortions that we are considering today.

Therefore, I exhort my hon. Friend the Minister to put the horse before the cart and to tell the EEC, which wants common charges, that we will not agree to those common charges, which we also want, until common standards are established. Until both those objectives are achieved we should pursue the course very sensibly prescribed by the European Assembly — so often misdescribed as the European Parliament — that the differential cost of enforcing differential standards should fall on the central Governments concerned and not on the producers, who are not themselves responsible for those differential standards and who have no means of remedying the situation except through their national Parliaments and Governments.

It is for that redress that producers in the United Kingdom look to my hon. Friend the Minister today, and so do I.

11.9 pm

Mr. David Maclean (Penrith and The Border): I have only a few quick, brief points to make, because I know that other hon. Members wish to contribute to the debate. I shall be much more brief than document 7948/84 which has been circulated to hon. Members. I hope that I shall be slightly more intelligible than that document.

When I tried to read Mr. Giolitti's letter to Mr. Claude Cheysson, I was glad that it was translated from Italian. I wish, however, that the translation had gone much further.

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: And been legible.

Mr. Maclean: And been legible. I had to give up when I reached page nine, when I read:

"Genotoxicity was examined by mutagenicity tests and by the capacity for DNA binding, Neither beta-Trenbolone nor alpha-Trenbolone showed any mutagenic activity in prokaryotic systems nor in any *in vivo* test for bone marrow and germ cell cytogenetics."

However, the House will be pleased to hear that,

"Clastogenic activity *in vitro* against human lumphocytes in culture were negative".

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. I hope that all those words are in order.

Mr. Maclean: I do not think that those words are in order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I can reconcile myself to the fact that I might not know much about chemistry, but I have never before come across "lumphocytes". I presume that the document refers to lymphocytes, unless in the past few days some EEC boffin has discovered a new substance called "lumphocytes". Ignoring this document would be the best thing to do. Common sense should prevail.

These documents have gone a little overboard when dealing with trenbolone and zeranol. I do not believe that we should make them subject to full Council agreement when all other products can be approved by the Standing Committee. As my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) said, it is premature to go for a ban on those products when we have no positive evidence that they can be harmful. Zeranol is used in 40 other countries, and it is used extensively in the United States. We all know how rigorously the United States enforces medicine safety. I believe that we are being a

little excessive in going for a ban on trenbolone and zeranol, because we have no firm evidence that they can be harmful.

I am pleased that Oestradiol 17 beta, Testosterone and Progesterone have been given a clean bill of health. The only question that remains is whether they should be prescribed by veterinary surgeons or whether it should be left to the farmers to administer them. I do not think that a case has been made for the administration of those drugs to be the exclusive province of veterinary surgeons. The vast majority of farmers can do the job properly and well. However, if in future years we detect that there have been cases of abuse, where farmers have not followed the recommended guidelines and have injected the products shortly before the animals were sent for slaughter, we should look at this matter again. There would then be a case——

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: And prosecutions.

Mr. Maclean: In addition to the prosecution of those concerned. Of course, there would then be a case for looking at these drugs and perhaps giving veterinary surgeons the power to administer them. That case has not been made, and that action would be premature.

Unless farmers administer these products carefully there will be increasing consumer resistence. One of the greatest threats faced by agriculture in daily farming comes not so much from quotas or anything that the EEC may do but from the fact that consumers are worried about the amount of fat in milk and butter. There is some resistance to buying those products. Similarly, there is a certain amount of concern that too much of the meat arriving on our shelves may have too many hormones in it. Certainly there is a demand for healthier and hormone-free food. The Ministry should make it clear to farmers that this trend exists and that they must watch what the consumers want.

I do not believe that at present we need to ban these products, but we should give a clear warning to farmers that in future years product sales will be affected not by a ban but by consumer resistance—the housewife will not buy. Time is needed, and I appeal to my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary to give our farmers time to switch over in future years to using fewer hormones in beef production, because that is what the consumer wants.

11.13 pm

Mr. David Ashby (Leicestershire, North-West): The motion provides that

"any new directive should be based on a scientific assessment of the available information as to safety in use and should take full account of the interests of consumers, livestock producers, the meat trade and the pharmaceutical industry."

I regard that with a great deal of trepidation, because I believe that we should consider only the interests of the consumers. Livestock producers and the meat trade will go on producing meat and the pharmaceutical industry will go on producing pharmaceuticals. The consumers have to eat the products, and it is up to us to see that those products are as safe as they can be.

We are discussing scientific assessments. I have the gravest fears about the present results of scientific assessments. Additives to meats and other foods should be studied with the greatest care. I am not complacent about the way we handle foods and the additives we use in foods and meats.

I spent about an hour and a half last Monday with someone who is eminent in this sphere. He explained to me at great lengths the time bomb we are storing by allowing hormones to be used as growth additives. The effects of hormones in our foods will not be fully known for 20 or 30 years. It sometimes takes three generations before their full effects become known and it takes three more generations to get rid of the effects.

It may not be known to many hon. Members that in Brazil, for example, there are children of seven who are conceiving. They have been eating chickens which have had growth promoters added. They have had grave effects on the children who have had all the signs of physical maturity without emotional maturity. Doctors are finding that the age of puberty is becoming lower and lower.

A long-term study is needed. Some people are blind to the problem because they want to be blind, but many of the wiser counsels and scientists attribute that early puberty to the use of growth promoters in meat and food.

I consider this directive with the greatest trepidation. I am not complacent. Synthetic hormone growth promoters are undoubtedly bad and should not be used in any foods.

I have the gravest doubts also about natural growth promoters. We are talking about a time bomb which will explode in about 20 or 30 years.

11.19 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Mid-Worcestershre): The good news about the debate is that the House is showing a characteristically lively interest in EC matters. That is right and proper, and long may it be so.

I have enjoyed the privilege of serving in the European Parliament—I use the word "Parliament" in spite of the reservations of my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton (Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop) about that term—and I have become well aware of the meaninglessness of the wording of much of that emanates from the EC.

Will the Parliamentary Secretary interpret the words in the motion for me? They are obscure, to say the least. European Community experts often seek to seduce us down the path of wording that tries to mean all things to all men, but ends up meaning nothing. The motion invites us to

"take full account of the interest of consumers, livestock producers, the meat trade and the pharmaceutical industry."

One could almost add "Uncle Tom Cobleigh and all".

How can we take account of all those interests? In the good old days when the common agricultural policy was first revised, we were given a similar form of words which invited us to support the CAP because it would simultaneously serve the interests of the consumer and the producer, give fair prices and adequate supplies and do nearly everything else. Regrettably, the CAP has not fulfilled all those objectives; it cannot.

In the same way, it would be extremely diffiult, if not impossible, simultaneously to serve the interests of consumers and producers and the interests of the meat trade and the pharmaceutical industry. We are constantly invited to subscribe to such formulae from the EC. At best, they are meaningless and, at worst, they are positively dangerous.

It is time that the Government stopped adhering to such formulae and started asking what we really mean. I should be happier if we came clean and said that we will serve the interests of either the consumers or the producers. It is rare that we can serve both at the same time.

[Mr. Eric Forth]

My hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton mentioned implementation and policing. There is a danger that we shall be invited to implement a series of recommendation throughout the EC, but that they will eventually be implemented by only a few of the member states. We shall certainly implement them, the Dutch will almost certainly implement them, we can expect the Germans to implement them and the Danes will probably implement them. After that, one would have to draw a veil over most of the other member states. Yet again, we are putting ourselves at a disadvantage. As ever, we shall adhere to the strictest standards of control, inspection, quality and hygiene, but our competitors in the EC will probably not do the same.

Will the Parliamentary Secretary give the House a guarantee that we shall not subscribe to the suggested new standards and regulations unless we are certain that the mechanisms exist to ensure that all other member states will simultaneously apply the standards at all times? If we can be given that assurance, we can support the motion. Otherwise, we should not support it.

11.23 pm

Mr. Neil Hamilton (Tatton): As usual, my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Forth) has hit the nail on the head. It is well known that I have not been a starry-eyed admirer of the way in which the Community has developed over the past 10 years, but almost everybody, however starry-eyed he might have been at the beginning, is seeing the Community in a different light.

The sort of standards that we have voluntarily accepted aver the years are not always accepted in other parts of the Community, especially when they impose a cost on the producer. We have seen hidden subsidies and state aids for producers in agriculture and horticulture. Milk quotas are not adhered to in France, and Italy has done almost nothing towards introducing a system of control. Similarly in poultry production, we shall continue to have high standards but will not be able to do much to extend them through out the Community. As my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton (Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop) said in a cogent speech, we are putting our producers at a significant disadvantage. This is an opportunity to use our voice in the Council to assist our producers or at least to prevent them from being disadvantaged by unfair competion in the Community.

I should like to consider charging for health inspectors in the poultry industry. Under Community law, member states are not allowed to make a profit out of the levying of charges for health inspections. If that is so, the minimum and maximum charges must be according to the lowest common denominator. If that is so, as Britain has more expensive health checks, we must incur greater costs. If thore costs fall on producers they will inevitably be put at a disadvantage. I cannot see why we should sanction that disparity for the indefinite future. Athough it would be open to the Council to decide rates of charge, which might vary, the history of the Community shows that, once an arrangement is institutionalised, it is the devil's own job to change it. If we now accept that there is to be a disparity of costs between this and other countries, it will be difficult to change that.

We must get the matter right at the beginning. If we cannot get it right now, we cannot depend on the good will of other Community members, which might not be as fussy as us about health standards. I implore the Government not to harmonise for the sake of harmonisation without getting it right at the start. As will have been seen from the interest in this debate, especially in Conservative Benches, there is grave disquiet among hon. Members whose constituents include poultry producers. They are looking to the Government to stand up for the British poultry producer and not to harmonise for the sake of it.

11.27 pm

Mrs. Fenner: The House has shown that it intends to give the Government its views on these matters before we make decisions on the package of proposals.

The hon. Member for City of Durham (Mr. Hughes) referred to pay in Belgium and other countries and the differences between payments in various countries. That is the whole point of the directive—it does not do all of the things that we want it to, but at least it does something to ensure that a minimum charge is made throughout the Community.

The hon. Gentleman also mentioned trenbolone and zeranol. The draft directive provides for approval of new active ingredients and products based on them. Approval of active ingredients will depend upon a qualified majority in the Council, but the United Kingdom will play a full part in the discussions leading up to such a decision and this is our opportunity to safeguard the interests of consumers and farmers.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton (Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop) is concerned that the present costs of inspection of imported meat are met by the port health authorities, which find the cost from rates raised by local authorities. I promised my hon. Friend an authoritative answer. The proposal is to set a charge to meet the costs which will be paid by the meat importer. I reiterate that we are fighting for common standards, commonly enforced, and common pricing of a minimum charge is only the first step. But it is a first step. That covers the point made by the hon. Member for City of Durham about the problem of different systems within countries.

I think that my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton misunderstood me. Originally it was proposed that local authorities would have to cover any extra cost, but when the matter was rediscussed a proposal emerged which ensures that the local authorities can continue to obtain reimbursement for their costs as they do now. The Scrutiny Committee was very worried about that problem.

The hon. Member for City of Durham and my hon. Friends have properly pointed out the concern of the British Poultry Federation in this matter and we understand it well. As I said in a letter to the federation:

> "When the subject was discussed at the Council this month, John MacGregor spoke strongly on both points, and we have maintained our reservation that standards should be harmonised before charges. As a result of our efforts, there is to be a discussion in the Standing Veterinary Committee later this month on the merits of the Commission's ideas on modified poultrymeat inspection."

I hope that that will reassure my hon. Friends.

We are taking steps in the right direction. I am sorry that my hon. Friend the Member for Lancashire, West (Mr. Hind) has had to go, but I am sure that he will read my answer to his comment in *Hansard*. I fully understand the views of the British Poultry Federation. It believes that to resist the proposal now would provide a lever for

obtaining harmonised inspection standards. We sympathise with that aim, and we are pressing for action in Brussels on that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) said that he did not believe that charges should be made, but local authorities have had powers to charge for meat inspection in Britain for 20 years, under both Conservative and Labour Governments. Nothing is different.

I agree that we should obtain the best scientific evidence on hormone growth promoters and not disregard it. My hon. Friend the Member for Leicestershire, North-West (Mr. Ashby) is anxious about the effects of hormone growth promoters. The motion puts consumers first. All additives to foods should be scrutinised with the greatest care, and hormones are a potential threat for two or three generations if they are abused. The United Kingdom Government make them available and avail themselves of the best scientific opinion before allowing the use of growth promoters. Moreover, the conditions of use are carefully limited by means of product licence conditions. I am unaware of any scientific evidence that ascribes the earlier age of adolescence to the use of growth promoters.

Like me, my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Forth) has had the privilege of serving in the European Assembly or Parliament—call it what my hon. Friends will. I went to the European Assembly specifically in order to serve consumers' interests, and as a nominated member to a producer-oriented system. Thus, I am well aware of the terms of the treaty of Rome, which mentions consumers. As a Minister at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, I cannot possibly accept my hon. Friend's assertion that the interests of consumers, producers, the meat trade and the pharmaceutical industry are in some way incompatible. Every day I ensure compatibility of fairness as between traders, consumers and all the interests represented in my very diverse Ministry. I assure him that I do not find those interests incompatible, and I cannot agree with him about that.

I can reassure my hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton) that since 1981 we have been trying to secure just that prevention of distortion about which he spoke so forcefully. The level of the minimum charge is not in any way disadvantageous to us, because countries which have a lower level will not be paying the same. The point is that they will have to pay the same minimum charge. Community lawyers do not agree with my hon. Friend that there is no way in which this can be done because member states are not allowed to make a profit. They will have to comply with that minimum charge and our producers will not be placed at a disadvantage.

I do not know that I have succeeded, but I have tried to cover all the points that were made. The debate has certainly commanded great interest. The Government will carefully consider the arguments put today when the proposal comes before the Council. However, as I said when opening the debate, the setting of a minimum charge applicable throughout the Community might reasonably be seen as a positive first step towards promoting fairer competition between member states of the Community. I have emphasised that the Government support the argument that effective action must be taken to harmonise the standards of enforcement of the poultrymeat directive, and are pressing for urgent action by the Commission.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House takes note of European Community Documents Nos. 7685/84, 7686/84 and 7948/84; and in respect of 7685/84 and 7686/84 supports the Government's approach in pressing for charging provisions which reduce distortions to trade; and in respect of 7948/84, supports the Government's intention to seek to ensure that the provisions of any new directive should be based on a scientific assessment of the available information as to safety in use and should take full account of the interests of consumers, livestock producers, the meat trade and the pharmaceutical industry.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Monday 3rd December, the Local Government Bill may be proceeded with, though opposed, until Twelve o'clock.—*[Mr. Peter Lloyd.]*

PETITION

Human Embryos

11.37 pm

Mr. David Amess (Basildon): I beg to ask leave to present a petition that has been signed by a considerable number of my constituents, who have expressed concern over the contents of the Warnock report, and I share their concern. It states:

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that the House of Commons will take immediate steps to enact legislation which forbids any procedure which involves purchase or sale of human embryos, their use as sources of transplant tissue or as subjects for research or experiment (unless done solely for the benefit of the embryos concerned).

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will every pray you so do.

To lie upon the Table.

Social Security (Reviews)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—[*Mr. Peter Lloyd.*]

11.38 pm

Mr. Gordon Brown (Dunfermline, East): I wish to raise the important matter of the Government social security reviews into pensions, supplementary benefits, children's and young persons' benefits, housing benefits and the social services. Most of them were established by the Secretary of State for Social Services earlier this year to report to him by the end of the year to lead to recommendations by the beginning of next year and, presumably, to legislation in the next session.

Yet although the Secretary of State for Social Services has said that the reviews were the most important and far-reaching reviews of the social security system since Beveridge, a number of important questions pointed out that about them remained unanswered, unexamined and undebated by the House.

When at least 7 million people depend on means-tested benefits, more than 16 million people are on low incomes, when we have poverty that no one dared imagine 20, 10 or even five years ago, poverty on a national scale that is a national disgrace, poverty that sends children to school ill clad and hungry, forces pensioners to choose between eating and heating, affects millions, yet has left British industry worse off than ever before, no one can doubt the need for wide-ranging improvements in our social security system to secure opportunity in youth, sufficiency in family life and dignity and comfort in old age.

The Secretary of State for Social Services has been prepared to call his reviews independent, objective, impartial and comprehensive. However, performance has not yet matched that ambitious claim. Although we cannot expect this evening to hear the final recommendations of the reviews, we can expect answers to some questions about the remits, the membership, the precise objectives and detailed activities of what we were told were open reviews.

The Minister who will reply must be aware of many of the widespread criticisms of the reviews. Although they were to be comprehensive, only 12 weeks were allowed for evidence to be submitted by interested parties and only the chosen few were asked to give oral evidence. Far from being independent, the entire membership of, for example, the children and young persons' review team consists of Mr. Rogers, who had to declare an interest when the Institute of Directors advocated the abolition of child benefit, and Mrs. Barbara Shenfield, whose chairmanship of the WRVS sounds promising but who just happens to be co-author of an Adam Smith Institute pamphlet, which advocates the abolition not merely of child benefit but of the welfare state. Other review members include building society managers, a biscuit manufacturer who happens to be a leading Conservative, a college lecturer who is also a former Conservative councillor and our statutory Lady Bountiful. To the public, the independent members of the independent reviews must seem as independent as the Prime Minister would like her Bishops and Archbishops to be.

While a study of the transcripts and evidence demonstrates a consensus on the need to protect and raise benefits among Labour party and trade union opinion, where they have submitted evidence, and voluntary and

charitable organisations not normally associated with the Left-of-centre parties in the United Kingdom, it is a measure of the distance between the Committee, the review teams and the reality of life in Britain in 1984 that many witnesses appearing before the Committees are frequently asked by review team members whether there is a role for the welfare state in modern Britain.

We know that the reviews will report to the Minister by December, that a paper will probably be published in the new year, that there is a central review unit co-ordinating the work of the individual review teams, and that other Government Departments are contributing to the reviews.

I have a number of specific questions which I hope that the Minister can answer this evening. Will there be further consultations on the conclusions of the review team before any decisions are finally taken by his Department? Will there, therefore, be a Green Paper instead of a White Paper published by the Department of Health and Social Security? Will the full reports of the individual review teams be made public so that those who have submitted evidence and everyone else can see the conclusions?

When we talk about Government Departments, what is the role of the Treasury in the review? Is Mr. Peter Riddell of the *Financial Times* right when he states that the Treasury now have rights of representation on the review teams and that this is the price that the Secretary of State for Social Services has paid for agreement to the reviews in the first place?

The Chancellor of the Exchequer, who told us five years ago that the rich must get richer to ensure true prosperity for all, now believes that it is necessary that the poor must become poorer, whether they are in work or not, for his policies truly to succeed. Can the Secretary of State for Social Services really compare himself with Beveridge and yet accept direct control by a Chancellor who wishes to make his political reputation on destroying the legacy of Beveridge in the same way as he has destroyed the heritage of Keynes?

When a pensioner on supplementary pension has an income of little more than £5 a week, after paying his rent, and when members of a family whose breadwinner is unemployed have even less, it is regrettable that the terms of reference for the supplementary benefits review state clearly that one reason why so many people claim supplementary benefit is that the benefit levels are so generous. It is even more regrettable that the reviews have conducted no research into the adequacy of benefits, nor have they surveyed or studied public opinion among benefit claimants about the adequacy of the rates. What is more fundamentally wrong about the social security review, and about which the House deserves precise answers this evening, is what is called in Treasury jargon the "nil cost basis" of the reviews—the fact that no more public money will be available whatever the outcome of the review teams' investigations.

We are being told that, if pensioners are to benefit, the unemployed will be worse off; if single parents are to do better, the disabled will do worse; if families are to improve their position, teenagers will experience more hardship.

The Secretary of State for Social Services has gone further than that. In reply to a question he stated clearly that savings found from the benefits system could be used for reductions in taxation. That is not a nil cost basis but apparently a lower cost basis for the reviews.

Only this week the *Financial Times* stated that, in return for a standstill budget in real terms this year, the Secretary of State had promised real cuts in his budget for next year.

The House deserves a fuller answer than we have been given by the Secretary of State until now, and I expect some detailed answers from the Minister to several detailed questions. Has the Secretary of State agreed to a public spending ceiling for the social security budget? Must the review teams, individually as well as collectively, recommend lower spending, or is it the case that the review teams, which have received excellent evidence from organisations such as the policy study units on the inadequacy of benefit rates, are not in a position to recommend the precise level of benefits that should be paid, and that that will be left to negotiations between the Treasury and the DHSS?

If a public spending ceiling has been agreed, if public spending cuts can be considered but public spending increases cannot—if the review is comprehensive, but the only way the budget can go is down—is it not a complete distortion for the Secretary of State to have compared his review with that of Beveridge?

Although the review teams can consider spending cuts, they cannot consider tax-related issues. One has the right to ask in those circumstances why, under the social security reviews, pensioners stand accused, having to justify their meagre heating additions, teenagers are under scrutiny, having to defend this pitiful supplementary benefits, and mothers and children are as though on trial, having been told that £6·85 for child benefit is too generous, when unexamined, uninvestigated and undebated are the tax concessions, the fringe benefits and the gilt-edged black economy of the very rich, who have benefited by £13 billion in taxation changes since 1979? Some of them now earn more in a day than most manual workers earn in a year, at a time when inequalities are increasing faster than ever before. The text that governs the Government's conduct is not, as the Prime Minister would have us believe, that God helps those who help themselves, but that God helps those whom he has already helped.

We are anxious about the review on child benefit, which is the right of 7 million mothers and which the Prime Minister called evidence of the Government's commitment to the family. The Foreign Secretary called it the most effective means of relieving family poverty. This benefit, which averts poverty for several million families and mitigates it for millions of others without the humiliation of a means test, is now at risk.

When the Secretary of State was asked whether he was now considering the means-testing of child benefit, his reply was: that the Government were considering all options in child benefit and supplementary benefit, and that that was what a review is all about. Last May, the Prime Minister assured the country:

"there are no plans to make any changes to the basis on which the benefit is paid or calculated."

Last July, the Secretary of State gave us what he called: "a categorical guarantee" about child benefit. He said that the Government did not intend, and had never intended, to change the basis of that benefit, and that that was just another scare during the election. The House needs to know now whether, under cover of this review, the Government are secretly overturning promises made to the

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House and the country, and whether, without the consideration of the House, the assurances of 1983 are to become the betrayals of 1984.

The Minister must give me a precise answer to these questions. Are the detailed plans for changing the present structure of child benefit part of the work of these review teams? Are the Government now considering means-testing the child benefit—a measure that would achieve substantial savings less by eliminating the claims of the rich than by deterring the claims of the poor? As *The Times* suggested last week, are the Government considering a two-tier system of child benefit, with a flat rate as low as £3 a week, with the remainder means-tested?

The House cannot expect to know this evening what the precise recommendations of the review are likely to be, but the Minister has a duty to tell us whether the Conservative promises of the last election are to be honoured or are to be abandoned during the examination of these reviews. We are told that other changes are being discussed by the social security reviews.

There is also the problem of the long-term rate of supplementary benefit payments, the price protection of which was guaranteed by the Government in their election manifesto. There are fears that the means that the Government will choose to abandon price protection of the long-term rate of supplementary pension is to abandon the long-term rate altogether. That matter has apparently frequently been raised by members of the supplementary benefit review teams when interviewing witnesses. Again, we need a promise from the Government that they will hold to the pledge that they made to pensioners and others on long-term benefits when they faced the people last June.

Many people believe that that pledge also included the protection of the weekly additions and the single payments that pensioners and other groups receive. Some 2·5 million people—I suspect more after this week—receive heating additions, 75,000 people recieve clothing allowance and the latest figure is that 1·33 million exceptional needs payments are made every year.

My reading of the transcripts of evidence and of the questions put by the review teams is that it is likely that these allowances and additions will be severed. Thousands of people will be floated off supplementary benefit or pensions as a result. The Minister has a duty to tell us whether the pledge that has been made to long-term supplementary benefit claimants is to be abandoned because of the work of these review teams.

My final query is about our teenagers, who have suffered under this Government. Many have lost benefits in the first few months of their unemployment, many more are worse off because of the deduction of housing addition for those who are not householders. Statements made in the other place by Lord Young suggest that the intention is to remove the right of these teenagers to supplementary benefit altogether. The Government must know that the majority of teenagers on supplementary benefit already live in poor income households. When the Government treat youth unemployment as if it were a problem of youth, and not a problem of unemployment, what do the promises that have been made to the generation on which our future depends mean?

We are entitled to specific answers as to whether the Government's promises at the last election are being taken away by the work of these reviews. In March, the Prime Minister told the House:

"We shall protect the poor and those in most need of help, honourng our pledges on benefits". — [*Official Report*, 8 March 1984; Vol. 55, c. 665.]

Are these pledges to be honoured, or are they to be abandoned by the nature of the work of these reviews?

The Secretary of State for Social Services compared his work with that of Beveridge. I doubt whether Beveridge would have seen the similarities. The comparison is as fundamentally misplaced as the Prime Minister making common cause with Keynes and the 1944 employment White Paper. Beveridge talked of

"grand and magnanimous aims removing the giant evils caused by poverty and unemployment"

and

"achieving security against want without a means test."

The Fowler reviews refers only to

"making the best use of available resources."

In his time Beveridge represented a huge and altruistic attempt to relieve poverty and hardship in a comprehensive and unified manner. The Fowler review appears to be divisive, penny pinching and an attempt to apply the principles of the Victorian era to Britain as it approaches the 21st century. This is possible only because the Minister has forgotten and ignored the problems which Beveridge had to tackle.

This year is the 150th anniversary of the Victorian poor law commission. That commission suffered also from inadequate terms of reference, a loaded membership and political preconceptions that affected its conclusions. The Government have already shown by the activities of the review committee that their work is different from that of Beveridge in 1942. They have yet to prove that the methods, recommendations and outcome of the review will be different from those of 1834.

11.57 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security (Mr. Ray Whitney): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) for giving me the opportunity to discuss the important reviews of social security which have been initiated by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. I am disappointed that the hon. Gentleman, who has established a reputation for his interest in social security matters, should choose to use this opportunity to read out some phantasma of paranoia which are unrelated to the realities of today. In his final burst of fantasy, he took us back to 1834.

My opportunity is therefore even more welcome than it would otherwise be to reject the premises on which the hon. Member's speech was based, not least his references to poverty on a scale that no one dared imagine five or 10 years ago and to policies which have left industry worse off than ever before. As most hon. Members and most of those outside the House realise, the objective of the Government's policies is to take the burdens off industry. We wish to ensure that our economic policies strike a balance between relieving industry of its burdens and enabling it to create employment while fulfilling the obligations, which we sincerely accept, to those who are in need.

The hon. Member referred to the promises made by the Conservative party, and I am glad to explain to the House,

especially to the hon. Gentleman, how those promises have already been honoured by the Government. I tell him that he should not be led astray by whatever he reads in the organs of the press, be they distinguished or not. He should not be misled either by, in his own words, his readings of the transcript of the evidence put before the social security reviews.

Given the hon. Gentleman's assault, I shall remind the House of some of the Government's achievements on social security. Only this week we have increased benefits yet again, covering all benefits fully against inflation. Retirement pensions are 84 per cent. higher than they were when we came to office. That increase is substantially greater than the 76 per cent. increase in prices over the same period.

Supplementary benefit rates are about 5 per cent. higher in real terms than when we came to office. Child benefit has just been increased to £6·85 per child and is now at its highest ever real value. Mobility allowance has been increased to £20 per week, double what it was when we came to office, and worth about 14 per cent. more in real terms.

Expenditure on social security has increased substantially. During the last year of the Labour Government in 1978-79, the social security budget was just over £16 billion. In 1984-85 it will be about £40 billion. That is an increase of 27 per cent. in real terms. Much of that increase is due to increased numbers of pensioners, of unemployed, of one-parent families, and of the long-term sick and disabled. Nevertheless, improvements in benefit rates have added about £2·75 billion to the total budget.

The same is true of the National Health Service, but I shall not go into the details now. The major point to set against the distortions to which the hon. Gentleman has treated the House is that we have continued to honour our determination to protect the weakest in our society and we have continued to find the resources to meet those commitments. Therefore, it is nonsense for the hon. Gentleman to suggest that there is any attack on the welfare state, and he knows that full well.

Four major reviews of social security are now under way, covering pensions, benefits for children and young people, supplementary benefit and housing benefit. Taken together, they cover some four fifths of the total expenditure on benefits, and represent the most substantial re-examination of the system since the Beveridge report was published some 40 years ago. It is important to realise that the system today is not the same as the one that Beveridge envisaged. The hon. Gentleman had a lot to say about Beveridge.

Beveridge proposed flat-rate contributions paid into a proper insurance fund to finance flat-rate benefits. We have earnings-related contributions, some earnings-related benefits, and a fund that is operated on the pay-as-you-go system. We have a wider range of non-contributory benefits than Beveridge envisaged. The scope of supplementary benefit is enormously greater than the residual role envisaged by Beveridge for national assistance. Furthermore, that is against the background that the real value of the main benefits has more than doubled between 1948 and now; and that spending is now five times what it was then in real terms.

We have therefore every reason to believe that we have a record of which we can be proud. We have now embarked upon a wide-ranging consideration of the whole social security system. It is of great importance, which is why we have sought to involve the public from the outset in an unprecedented manner.

I was sorry that the hon. Gentleman was not prepared to give the credit that is most certainly due to my right hon. Friend for the way that this has been achieved. People have been brought in from outside Government and the Civil Service to assist and advise Ministers. They were appointed for their personal qualities and for the different perspective that they could bring to bear. The individuals concerned have, between them, experience in business, local authority administration, housing and voluntary and advisory work. I am glad to take this opportunity to thank them for the substantial amount of time they have given to their task so far and for the contribution that they are making.

I am especially sorry that the hon. Gentleman sought yet again to raise any question mark about two members of one review team—Mrs. Shenfield of the WRVS and Mr. Parry Rogers. It was explained clearly to the hon. Gentleman, in a letter that he received from my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister dated 3 October, that his assertion that Mrs. Shenfield was the author of a pamphlet from the Adam Smith Institute was incorrect. She was one of those who offered advice and information. As a matter of courtesy, the authors acknowledged those who gave such information.

Mr. Parry Rogers has been a member of the Institute of Directors for many years, as he has of many other organisations associated with business and commerce. There is no question of anyone being obliged to declare an interest. That has been clear from the outset. He took no part in the discussion when the IOD gave oral evidence at a public session. The reasons were given openly at the public hearing.

The hon. Gentleman complains about only 12 weeks being allowed for giving evidence. Surely three months is a long time, considering the importance of the problem and considering that those invited to give evidence were specialists and had a day-by-day professional interest. I do not accept that three months was too short a time in which to present their evidence.

The hon. Gentleman was dissatisfied that only a chosen few were selected to give oral evidence. The list of those chosen was representative. I wish that the hon. Gentleman would give credit for the fact that the hearings were held in public, and not only in London, but in Scotland and Belfast. The public were invited to participate. The fullest consultation took place.

I do not have time to answer all the hon. Gentleman's specific questions, so I shall write to him. We are not yet in a position to give any idea about the conclusions of the reviews because the 4,500 pieces of evidence are being absorbed and studied by the review teams. The hon. Gentleman is clear about the timetable. When the time comes, a document will be issued and there will be a further chance for public comment.

There is participation by other Government Departments, organised by the DHSS, but final conclusions are for the Government as a whole. We are talking about an exercise which involves about 30 per cent. of public spending, which reaches——

Mr. Gordon Brown: Can the Minister answer three questions by saying yes or no? Will there be a Green

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Paper, is the Treasury represented on the review teams, and has the Secretary of State for Social Services agreed to cuts in the budget?

Mr. Whitney: If the hon. Gentleman reads my remarks, he will see that I have answered those questions. This is a fundamental exercise which will give fundamental answers within the timetable which we have already announced.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at eight minutes past Twelve o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 30 November 1984

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Licensing Laws

9.34 am

Mr. Rob Hayward (Kingswood): I beg to move,

That this House believes that liquor licensing laws in England and Wales should be revised.

I believe that the liquor licensing laws should be revised because much of our legislation is based on the assumption that ordinary individuals do not have the right to make a choice and that it is right for the state to decide what people should do. We therefore set down laws that prescribe their actions, including laws relating to shop hours and licensing hours, smoking regulations on the tube and many set pieces of safety regulation. We should set out to educate people about different matters rather than try to prescribe what they may or may not do.

I have not chosen to raise this subject because I have specific experience or direct interest in any particular aspect of the licensing trade. Some of my colleagues have experience and are intending to try to catch your eye, Mr. Speaker. My experience, as with so much of the nation's experience, is purely as a customer of clubs, restaurants, hotels and pubs. I therefore suffer the vagaries of the licensing laws from one part of the country to another.

I also have experience of the problems of alcohol abuse, in that before I was elected to Parliament as the Member for Kingswood I dealt with the problems of alcohol rehabilitation. I have seen the tragedies that are caused by excessive consumption of alcohol — marriages break down, people lose their jobs and some lose their lives as a result of a progressive breakdown in health. I well understand the views expressed by those who are concerned that a revision of licensing laws might result in some form of increased alcohol consumption and, as a result, increased alcoholism. However, we should tackle the problem of alcohol abuse in whatever form it may arise by educating people from when they are very young. I do not think that it is the intention of the National Union of Licensed Victuallers, the Brewers Society, the Hotels, Restaurants and Caterers Association or of any other associations that have been arguing for change for many years to drive people to ill health. They are trying to rationalise the circumstances that they currently face.

What are the circumstances they face? Most people say that the current laws in England and Wales stem from measures in the Defence of the Realm Consolidation Act 1915, which were encompassed in 1921 by the Licensing Act. That was changed further by the licensing Acts in 1961 and 1964. There is a whole range of other pieces of legislation, many of which stem back to the 19th century, which also affect the granting of licences, such as the Sunday Observance Act 1871 and other legislation from that period.

Therefore, we are confronted by a general mess in our legislation. Without a shadow of doubt, whatever we choose to do, there is a need for change, for bringing the laws up to date. How can we accept that the laws that were adopted and the standards that applied in the middle of the 19th century or the early 20th century should be regarded as acceptable for the 1980s, the 1990s and the 21st century? In fact, it is an absolute hotchpotch of legislation.

When one examines this subject, one starts with the pub licensing laws and then goes on to the hotels and restaurants, then to clubs, then to shops and supermarkets. All those groups have been affected by change at one stage or another over the past few years. The most substantial change, which probably has had the greatest impact on alcohol consumption, is the availability of alcohol through shops and supermarkets. Following the 1961 Act, about 13,000 further outlets had been licensed by early 1970. The figures for the next decade are not readily available, but it is reasonable to assume that there has been a progressive increase since then. That is where young people, married women and other groups who would not previously have gone regularly to pubs are able to buy large quantities of alcohol and to consume it in private.

As anyone with experience of the problem knows, alcoholics do not fit into the standard public image of them as pure down and outs. Experience leads one to conclude that such people buy most of their alcohol in supermarkets and consume it away from pubs. Indeed, there is a strong argument to the effect that the social circumstances of pubs provide a base for sensible, social drinking compared with the outhouses, underground arches and side streets where alcoholics can be found. Alcoholics are readily visible in this part of London at 8 am, although no pubs are open except around Covent Garden.

It is a source of constant amazement to the public at large and especially to foreigners that our licensing laws are such a series of contradictions. There may be some foreigners in the Gallery today who, if they have the endurance——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ernest Armstrong): Order. Hon. Members should not refer to the Gallery in their speeches.

Mr. Hayward: I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Tourists who go into hotels or restaurants at 2.30 pm do not understand why they are allowed such a short time to consume alcohol. Indeed, they fail to understand it to such an extent that British Telecom has made it a subject for jokes in its advertisements on the underground, suggesting that

"Wenn Sie etwas amusantes gesehen haben"—

having seen something amusing—such as the operation of our licensing laws, they should ring their friends in Germany and tell them about it. The same slogan is used in French.

Sir Bernard Braine (Castle Point): Visitors to London may regard our licensing laws as a joke, but my hon. Friend has already stated that considerable harm results from excessive consumption of alcohol. Can he say whether there is greater harm or lesser harm in France and Germany?

Mr. Hayward: Figures for cirrhosis of the liver are higher in France than in this country, but the conclusion drawn by my hon. Friend the Member for Canvey island——

Sir Bernard Braine: Castle Point, please.

Mr. Hayward: I am sorry. My hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Sir B. Braine) would conclude from those figures that our licensing laws should not be changed. I cannot agree. Research suggests that much of the problem in France is due to the ready access to alcohol and encouragement to drink from a very early age. It is not sensible, social drinking but ill education associated with access to large quantities of alcohol in supermarkets at all hours of the day and night. That is entirely different from the proposal before us today.

In recent years, various attempts have been made to change the licensing laws. My right hon. and learned Friend the Minister for Health made such an attempt in 1975 and the then hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East introduced a ten-minute Bill on the subject in 1976. There was a further attempt in 1979. On each occasion, the proposed legislation fell due to diligent opposition from certain people and the argument that we did not have enough information. Since then, more and more information has come forward suggesting that the licensing laws in England and Wales should be changed.

In the short period since I chose this private Member's motion, I have discussed the matter with a considerable number of people, including police forces, people living next door to pubs and clubs in my constituency, local social and political clubs and school children too young to drink. I have also discussed it with people affected by the specific licensing provisions relating to rugby clubs such as those at Bristol, Kingswood and Whitehall rugby clubs, all of which are in or near my constituency. There is no consensus about the change that should be made but there is a consensus that so long as people living immediately next door to licensed premises are protected a change of some kind should be made. Most people regard it as utterly anachronistic that Scottish people and tourists in Scotland are allowed to drink in a much broader range of hours than those in England and Wales.

People living very close to licensed premises are naturally worried, and I well understand their feelings. Any licensing authority would have a responsibility to take those people's views fully into consideration. A number of hostelries in my constituency cause difficulties. Like the local police, I should want the difficulties caused or perceived to be caused to residents by those hostelries to be taken into consideration in the licensing process.

I have referred to my experience in alcoholic rehabilitation and I recognise that in addition to the opposition from people living close to hostelries there are many people—my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point is one — who are genuinely worried by the dramatic increase in alcoholism and drink abuse generally. I share that concern, but I believe that those problems should be tackled through education. The fact that a proportion of the population cannot cope with drink does not mean that others should be unnecessarily and severely restricted. Current levels of alcoholism are frightening. The level is rising five times as rapidly among women and young people as among adult males. That suggests that the people who are used to drinking socially and sensibly in public houses and clubs—the adult males, among whom the increase is much slower—have social facilities that women and young people tend not to have and that the problem does not relate to existing licensed establishments.

The large number of proponents of change includes many Members of Parliament who are unfortunately unable to be here today. Support has been expressed, for example, by my hon. Friends the Members for Cheltenham (Mr. Irving), for Cornwall, South-East (Mr. Hicks) and for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin). We must recognise that a substantial body of opinion supports change and we should not oppose it on the basis of a different problem which needs to be dealt with through education.

What changes should be made? The Clayson report in the early 1970s dealt with the position in Scotland. In England and Wales, there was the Erroll report. Immensely detailed studies were made of what should and should not be done. The committees carrying out those studies were not packed with people committed to change. They included teetotallers such as the late Graham Hill.

The Erroll report made 87 recommendations and the Clayson report 90 recommendations. Many of the recommendations were considered far too radical for society and Parliament. The request for change has been scaled down and organisations demanding change have coalesced around one set of changes. It is incredible that so many years after the Erroll report England and Wales should still not have made any change. I shall quote just two of the report's recommendations:

"35. We RECOMMEND, subject to our other proposals, that a personal licensee be permitted to sell intoxicating liquor by retail for on-consumption at any time between 10 am and 12 midnight (paragraphs 11.38-11.40).

36. Circumstances could arise, late at night or during the day, in which it would be in the public interest if licensing justices were empowered to impose a limited restriction on permitted hours of opening (paragraphs 11.41-11.43)".

Recommendation 35 represents a substantial change. The report also covered proposals for allowing children into pubs, for lowering the licensing age from 18 and a host of other subjects and yet, 13 years later, there has been no change. That is shameful.

The Clayson report affecting Scotland came out at much the same time and followed similar directions, although Scotland had much more restrictive licensing laws. Its recommendations included opening hours being fixed in the evening at 11 o'clock and pubs opening on Sundays. It also took the first steps towards providing facilities for adults and children to be served together in premises with refreshment licences and family rooms. It still stipulated that there should be a closing period in the mid-afternoon but licensing authorities, using their more liberal guidelines, have seen fit to allow a much more open operation.

Mr. James Hill (Southampton, Test): During the tall ships race—an international event that attracts hundreds of thousands of tourists — the licensing authorities in Southampton would not allow a local licence for the day to serve wine between 3 pm and 5 pm. That is deplorable. That is why my hon. Friend is right—there must be a complete review and more flexibility.

Mr. Hayward: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I shall give him another example which occurred just across the water from him at Cowes during the international regatta there. More flexible hours were granted in the first year for which they were applied and the local police authority opposed the extension. A year later, when similar applications were made, the police authority did not

oppose the extension because drink-related offences had declined the previous year. More sensible and liberal licensing laws can therefore be beneficial.

On 19 December 1983, my hon. Friend the Minister replied to my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman). Comparing the Scottish and English laws, he said:

"The essential difference between the English and the Scottish provisions lies, as I have already indicated, in the discretion given to the licensing authorities in Scotland to vary the general permitted hours of opening. No one would suggest that it should be compulsory for premises to open at a particular time."—[*Official Report*, 19 December 1983; Vol. 51, c. 229.]

That is a crucial point which my hon. Friend the Member for Southamptin, Test (Mr. Hill) has just made.

I recomend that we move towards the Scottish system. It has laid down requirements and guidelines to the effect that licensing authorities should be flexible and that there should be discussion with all vested interests. It was interesting to hear the chairman of the Glasgow licensing authority commenting on television this morning that the change has been beneficial in Scotland and that people generally feel that the changes have been useful to all parties, although there are still some difficulties with some hostelries and the residential areas that they serve.

Sir John Page (Harrow, West): I might have missed something at the beginning of my hon. Friend's speech, but will he tell us about the attitude of licensees towards a more flexible approach and whether he agrees that it is possible for licensed premises to open at different hours although they are in the same area?

Mr. Hayward: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I shall come to that subject a little later. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham will deal with that as he is an experienced licensee.

While considering the problems relating to pubs, we must consider those which relate to hotels and restaurants. There has been a growth in the provision of liquor in shops and supermarkets and an immense growth in drinking clubs or working men's clubs. Many licensees think that competition unfair as such premises do not suffer the same restrictions. Children are allowed into licensed clubs with their parents, who might be drinking. The same is true for hotels and restaurants. Under-age children can quite legally be given a drink in such premises but that is not so in a pub. That is anachronistic, and legislation relating to hotels, restaurants and clubs should be brought into line with that affecting pubs.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Sir J. Page) mentioned the attitude of licensees. I said earlier that there is no consensus. I am asking for flexibility so that licensees can choose what hours to operate. There is a clear difference between a pub that serves the City of London, another that serves suburban Harrow, another that serves rural Cambridgeshire and another in the tourist west end. Licensing authorities in Scotland seem to have recognised that and allow substantial flexibility.

I am worried about the appalling delay in action on the Erroll and Clayson reports and should like to quote some of the things that have been said about those reports in the Chamber.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Buchanan-Smith) said during the debates on the Licensing (Scotland) Bill on 27 July 1976:

"None of us, with the best will in the world, whichever side we take on the argument, can be certain what the results will be. I hope that the Government will carry through the monitoring that Dr. Clayson recommended because that would help us evaluate properly and precisely what the effect of the Bill will be."—[*Official Report, First Scottish Standing Committee*, 27 July 1976; c. 581.]

I intend to refer to comments by Ministers in a moment.

I know that we shall be told yet again that the Home Office is awaiting a report from the Scottish Office. That must be time-wasting. The Government have had ample opportunity to consider what has happened in Scotland. Eight years have elapsed since the Licensing (Scotland) Act was passed. We must be running into the longest experiment of all time. When will the review be completed, I wonder? It may be some time next year. In reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham on 19 December 1983, the Under-Secretary said:

"I do not want to suggest, because it would not be the case, that we have closed the door on the possibility of some relaxations. In 1981 the Government issued a comprehensive document on alcohol misuse entitled 'Drinking Sensibly' to stimulate discussion and create a background of informed public opinion in the light of which Government strategies could be formulated."—[*Official Report*, 19 December 1983; Vol. 51, c. 229-30.]

That was three years ago, some five years after the Licensing (Scotland) Act was passed. It is amazing that so many years have gone by without a Government of any persuasion being able to make any recommendations.

We believe that there may be a report by the middle of next year. We are not certain, because of an answer given in the other place on 24 October of this year. The Minister said:

"As regards the law on liquor licensing, there is no immediate prospect of legislation . . . My Lords, it is still a matter for a Private Member's Bill, and not a Government one."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 24 October 1984; Vol. 456, c. 195-96.]

I am not sure whether the Minister was referring to Sunday observance or to the licensing laws, but I hope that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary will make it clear that we shall not have to wait for a report from the Scottish Office.

We do not know when the report will be made. When it is made, we shall have a series of statistics which will or will not prove the case, depending on which side of the argument one stands. Television's football commentators have enough difficulty in interpreting a 1-1 England draw. With thousands of vested interests, there will be thousands of different interpretations of the statistics that are put before the Minister.

What interest do the Scots have in pushing forward with their report? They have got their changes. As the *Daily Express* has it this morning, people can happily cross from Northumberland to Scotland when Northumberland landlords are forced to call, "Time, gentlemen, please," and choose to drink in another pub a few hundred yards up the road. The Scottish Office has no interest in rushing its report. Therefore, it is for the Home Office to take its courage into its hands and make some recommendation to the House.

I said earlier that there was no consensus, but, having had eight years to consider the subject, the Home Office must have at least some idea of an appropriate consensus around which those who favour change will be able to coalesce.

Referring to this anachronism, whereby there are differences in the licensing laws, my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Fletcher), who is now a Minister at the Department of Trade and Industry,

[Mr. Hayward]

pointed out during the Licensing (Scotland) Bill debates in 1976 that Scotland was worse off than England. He said:

"Does the Secretary of State agree that it is a terrible indictment of the Scottish character that for some reason behaviour on the Scottish side of the border seems to be drastically different from that in the north of England? Has the right hon. Gentleman been able to discover why people in the north of England can drink on Sundays and the rest of the week and behave reasonably, whereas, according to what he has said, that cannot be the case north of the border?" — [*Official Report, First Scottish Standing Committee*, 27 July 1976; c. 410.]

Surely the equivalent argument now applies in reverse.

The Scottish case is the one to which I have directed my comments. In addressing myself specifically to that, I draw attention to statistics that were printed in an answer in the other place on 2 July 1984, in which drunkenness offences were cited for the years 1979-82 both for England and Wales and for Scotland. I shall not bore the House with too much detail, but the statistics show that, in those three years, drunkenness-related offences went down in Scotland by some 28 per cent., whereas drunkenness-related offences in England went down by 9 per cent. Surely that confirms the view of the police and licensing authorities in Scotland and the general perceptions of people who have visited Scotland, both before and since the changes in legislation, that there is a difference in the atmosphere of licensed premises in Scotland.

Mr. Ivan Lawrence (Burton): Will my hon. Friend tell us the source of his information, because my information is that drunkenness-related offences in Scotland have fallen by 41 per cent., not 28 per cent.?

Mr. Hayward: My hon. and learned Friend's intervention highlights my earlier comment that there are any number of statistics which people can consider. I am sure that my hon. and learned Friend will quote his statistics later. My source is an answer given in the other place on 2 July 1984. I am aware that there are other sets of statistics which show more dramatic changes. I chose this set because they were at neither extreme. The problem with any statistics is that anything can be proved with them. I tried, in fairness to the House, to find figures falling in the mid-range of the statistics with which I was confronted and which, in my view, the Home Office should have been able to analyse a number of years ago.

I referred just now to the public perception of the changes in Scotland, and there has been a recent survey of public attitudes to the changes. It shows that public attitudes are that, in general, since the changes some 55 per cent. of the Scottish population are satisfied or fairly satisfied with them and that only 10 per cent. are fairly dissatisfied or very dissatisfied.

We have an obligation to protect that 10 per cent., but I do not believe that, because of that responsibility, we should disregard the views of the 55 per cent. who are satisfied in some form with the changes or the views of the 34 per cent. who passed no comment. We ought to recognise that everyone has the right to pass comment, and we ought on occasions in this Chamber to respect the views of the majority.

Another question asked in the survey was:

"Do you approve or disapprove of the change in the licensing laws that allows pubs to extend their opening hours?"

A majority, some 56 per cent., actually said that they approved. Only 23 per cent. disapproved. Again, 21 per cent. did not express an opinion, despite the fact that there is an assumption that every licensed house in Scotland has extended its opening hours. That is not the case. What has happened in Scotland is that some 65 per cent. of all the pubs have changed their hours of operation, and this demonstrates that some publicans believe that the hours that they observed previously are acceptable to them because they suit their communities. But the 65 per cent. which have changed have done so because they seek to provide a service which includes increased sales of alcohol, food, soft drinks and, in many places, coffee. I found drinking in Scotland recently quite a civilised experience. My previous experiences of pubs in Scotland were far from happy because people felt obliged and under pressure to consume alcohol at an unbelievable rate.

Today is St. Andrew's day. I propose that we should move quickly towards the change that was made in Scotland eight years ago and was more than substantially recommended for England and Wales 13 years ago. As was said in "Macbeth", if we are to change,

"'twere well
It were done quickly".

10.10 am

Sir Bernard Braine (Castle Point): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Hayward) on his success in the ballot and on making it possible for the House to have an opportunity to discuss the vexed question of licensing law. He argued the case for liberalising the law with moderation and personal insight into the problems involved, I take this opportunity to pay tribute to his voluntary work in dealing with alcohol abuse before he came to the House. We are much in his debt for his having raised the matter this morning.

If we are to consider the subject objectively and responsibly we must start by asking ourselves a simple question: why is it that no Government have so far felt able to implement the recommendations of the Erroll committee and to do what my hon. Friend asks us to agree to today? Unlike my hon. Friend, I have been a Member for many years—that is a matter of age. I hope that he will be with us for many years to come and will contribute frequently to the sum total of wisdom here. During the many Parliaments in which I have sat the question was debated, but I cannot recollect an occasion when there was a majority, or even a substantial minority, in favour of tampering with the licensing laws, although some reforms or minor adjustments may have been favoured.

Three years ago my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services warned the House that the misuse of alcohol was causing health and social problems of epidemic proportions. The purpose of my hon. Friend's speech this morning, however, was to persuade us to weaken the control over the drug alcohol, which would inevitably encourage greater consumption, not less. The reason why brewers and distillers are such enthusiastic supporters of his proposed reform should be self-evident. Their profits, already substantial, are not likely to increase unless they can sell more and their customers drink more.

Five years ago saw the publication of the report of the Royal College of Psychiatrists. It was an unusual document in that it was published in paperback form because of the weight of its content, the force of its argument, the wide favourable reviews it attracted and

because, for the first time, it set out for the public in an understandable form the dangers into which we were moving. On page 3, referring to the incidence of alcohol harm, the report states:

"At a conservative estimate there are at least 300,000 people in this country with drinking problems of such severity as to merit the conventional label of 'alcoholism', and this may well be a gross underestimate. Each of these people is probably affecting the health, happiness, or safety of several family members, friends, and workmates. People with serious drinking problems have an expectation of dying which is between two and three times greater than that of members of the general population of the same age and sex. A recent study in a general hospital in Scotland showed that 25 per cent. of acute male admissions to a medical ward were directly or indirectly due to alcohol."

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham) *rose——*

Sir Bernard Braine: I shall give way when I have finished the quotation. I would remind my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood that we have not even in Scotland reached the level of health harm reached in France, where the figure is about 40 per cent., Germany or the Soviet Union. How long we remain in that position depends on how far the House is prepared to weaken present controls.

The report continues:

"Annual National Health Service admissions to psychiatric hospitals for treatment of alcoholism have increased twenty-five-fold over the past twenty years and are now 13,500 per year in England and Wales: the cost of this hospital care alone must now be upwards of £4,000,000 per annum."

The report concludes:

"Society has in many ways tried to have its pleasure, deny its responsibilities, and hand the problem over to the courts or the caring agencies. We believe that an undoubted message for the future is that prevention has to be strengthened, and that this will inevitably mean all of us drinking somewhat less. We cannot pretend to be concerned while complaining that any diminution of our pleasures or profits is too great a price."

Mr. Couchman: My hon. Friend quoted statistics from Scotland and said that the report was five years old. Were the statistics gathered before or after the introduction of the Clayson reforms in Scotland?

Sir Bernard Braine: My hon. Friend must not try to score debating points. I shall deal with the Scottish position in detail later. I shall not allow some of the things that were said on the subject to go unnoticed and uncommented on. I am quoting the figures from the report. Those figures were obtained when the report was published in 1979. I take it that my hon. Friend has studied these matters carefully and has a copy of the report, which he has read and mastered.

Mr. Couchman *indicated dissent.*

Sir Bernard Braine: In that case it is about time that he had because it is a key document.

Since the report was published the case for restraint has grown, not diminished.

Mr. Robert B. Jones (Hertfordshire, West): If the problem of alcoholism has increased, which I accept, as the consumption of alcohol in Scotland has remained broadly stable, does my hon. Friend think that it is because of the change in licensing laws, which would seem strange under those circumstances, or because it is a natural trend in Western society?

Sir Bernard Braine: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. One must not forget that the north in particular and Scotland have experienced for some years now the effects of economic depression and unemployment. Those of us who study such matters know that there is some relationship between that situation and levels of consumption.

In fairness to the case so skilfully deployed by my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood, we must look at Scotland and England at the same time, and that I propose to do. Let me give the House some broad statistics to put the matter into some sort of perspective. For eight years I was chairman of the National Council on Alcoholism, and I am currently president of the Greater London alcohol advisory service, which covers about 22 agencies in Greater London. Therefore, it is likely that the information fed to me is fairly sound.

As a broad generalisation, we could say that in recent years alcohol misuse has accounted for the loss of 8 million working days a year; more than 500,000 male admissions to general hospitals or one fifth of all male admissions; 80 per cent. of deaths from fire; 40 per cent. of road accidents involving pedestrians; a third of all domestic accidents; and 10 per cent. of all deaths of young people under the age of 25. The Royal College of Psychiatrists was referring to 300,000 people with serious alcohol problems. The agencies in the field—people who have had experience of the problem at the grass roots—believe that the figure is probably nearer 1 million, and that does not reflect the social distress and strain caused to families.

The total economic cost to the nation is difficult to assess but I believe that the figure is as high as £1 billion a year. What is more, excessive drinking is the common thread—there are one or two learned members of the legal profession in the House who will bear this out—running through the commission of crime, violence, marital break-ups, non-accidental injury to children, and death and injury on the roads. It has been the subject of certain reports from Select Committees of the House.

Mr. John Ryman (Blyth Valley): I rise really as a result of an irresistible desire to stretch my legs. All that is very interesting and, although somewhat speculative, may be true, but is not the crux of the matter why law-abiding people who drink in moderation and for social pleasure should not be entitled to drink without being inhibited by the serious problems that have been mentioned in respect of a minute proportion of the population?

Sir Bernard Braine: The hon. Gentleman rose to his feet as elegantly as he put his point. Of course, that is the dilemma. I agree. That is where we must keep a balance. Alcohol is a unique substance. It is one of the most pleasant adjuncts to living. I am not a teetotaller and know that it gives pleasure to many people. At the same time it is a potent drug, which taken in excess is capable of causing ill health and premature death. Somehow or other, one must try to strike a balance. Before 1914 Britain had the most appalling drunkenness problem, and that is why, since then, we have had not only licensing controls which increased sobriety but controls which, by and large, those concerned with alcoholism all over the world have tended to admire. What I am advocating, far from interfering with the pleasure of the hon. Gentleman and millions of others, will protect his and their best interests.

As I said, excessive drinking is the common thread which runs through the terrible and increasing disorders in our society. Worse still is the changing pattern of harm.

[Sir Bernard Braine]

There is more under-age drinking than ever before in our history. Moreover, whereas until 10 or 15 years ago women were hardly affected by alcohol abuse, today of all those coming to the agencies to seek help, one in three is a woman.

Mr. Hill: Is it not a fact that giving supermarkets the ability to sell enormous quantities of drink which can be concealed in shopping bags has brought that problem to the fore? Does that not defeat my hon. Friend's argument? Would it not be more beneficial if ladies accompanied their gentlemen to public houses during extended licensing hours?

Sir Bernard Braine: The lady who is drinking secretly in that fashion is perhaps doing so because she cannot, for one reason or another, accompany her husband to the public house or club. Indeed, that is an illustration of the strain under which many people are living. But my hon. Friend has put his finger on an extremely important point that I shall develop later. *[Interruption.]* My hon. Friend is a little worried that I might take too much time. I have never seen such a poorly attended House on a Friday in this Parliament or in previous Parliaments. It is a poor example of the fierce campaigning spirit of hon. Members. Therefore, I shall not sit down before I have put my argument.

Who wants more flexible and liberal licensing hours? The brewers and the distillers certainly do. Is there a demand from the magistracy and the police? As the House knows, I must declare an interest. I have advised senior police officers in Britain for about 19 years. My impression is that the police service has no desire to see more people coming on the roads after periods of drinking, especially at peak hours.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman knows that he should address the whole House and not just the hon. Member who intervened.

Sir Bernard Braine: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I agree. I was tempted away by those who legitimately interrupted me from behind.

Are teachers telling us that pupils would benefit from being allowed more freely in pubs and that they see no danger from an increase in under-age drinking? Of course not. They are only too well aware of what is happening.

Are licensees demanding that the law should be changed so that more drinking can take place? The truth is that they are divided on the matter. Many managers dislike the idea intensely. However, I concede that the public house, generally speaking, is the one place where some control is exercised over drinking behaviour. The licensee is almost invariably a responsible and law-abiding person whose interest and inclination is to see that drinking on his premises is conducted sensibly. But I would have thought that the best way to help licensees, who have been asking for this for a long time, is to stop the proliferation of outlets where no proper restraint can be exercised.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Sir Bernard Braine: Well, I will give way, but it will only prolong my speech.

Mr. Jones: I do not think that any hon. Member is doing other then enjoying my hon. Friend's speech. He appears to favour control over outlets where alcohol is readily available, such as supermarkets, but will he also pay some attention to the enormous growth in home brewing and the making of home-made wine? That is almost uncontrollable, so does not his argument fall down on that point?

Sir Bernard Braine: No, because the argument has not yet been fully heard. I accept the drift of my hon. Friend's remarks, but if he had been in the House during previous Parliaments he would have known — as some hon. Members know perfectly well—that I have argued for a long time against the proliferation of selling outlets and in favour of the public house. I have always agreed with Dr. Samuel Johnson about that, and believe that it is one of the glories of our land, a pride and joy. I am in favour of public houses but against the proliferation of selling outlets and the placing of liquor on the impulse-buying shelves of supermarkets.

Mr. Ryman: Surely that is a thoroughly bad point, because it follows that the hon. Gentleman is against the present controls whereby local justices who know their areas will have a complete discretion as to whether to allow off-licences, whether or not the application is opposed. On reflection, the hon. Gentleman will appreciate that he has just made a thoroughly bad point.

Sir Bernard Braine: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will give us the delight of making his own bad points in due course. I did not make a bad point. The hon. Gentleman simply has not grasped the fact, which my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood understands, that alcohol is not, like butter or beans, to be traded over a grocery counter, but a potent drug. As such, it has always been sold under controlled conditions in this country. If hon. Members want to encourage more responsible drinking habits and to help licensees at the same time, the answer is not to force licensees, often against their better judgment, to apply for more flexible hours for fear of losing business to others in their vicinity, thereby driving up their costs and perhaps making survival impossible for the smaller public houses, but to stop proliferation.

That was the case made by managers when the subject was previously debated in the House. It should be said over and over again that alcohol is a potent drug that gives pleasure to many people, but can also inflict great harm on others. It cannot be treated like any other commodity. The freedom of the market place does not and should not apply in this instance. The answer is to check the proliferation of selling outlets and to outlaw the sale of alcohol save in properly constituted off-licence premises.

Those of us who work in a voluntary or professional capacity in the area of alcohol abuse know that there is an established correlation between increased alcohol consumption and increased alcohol-related harm. One cannot get away from that fact. Therefore, any step that we take to increase the consumption of alcohol will inevitably be accompanied by more harm—not to the hon. Member for Blyth Valley (Mr. Ryman), who knows how to hold his liquor, but to very many other people. My hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood paid little attention to that, and completely ignored that fact that the availability of alcohol is the key to appalling health problems in Britain. Today, people are drinking double what they drank 30 years ago.

Price is a factor, along with the length of opening hours and the contribution made by supermarkets. Today, alcohol is cheaper in terms of disposable income than it

was 30 years ago. It is not all that surprising that, as a result, consumption has leapt up and so has health harm. In 1979 two devastating reports on the subject were published: one by the Royal College of Psychiatrists, and the other by the Government's Think Tank, which set out the facts but was supressed. The first report was ignored and the second was suppressed. I know about the second report because it was leaked and published in Sweden. My hon. Friend the Member for Watford (Mr. Garel-Jones) will testify to that—[*Laughter.*] Hon. Members need not laugh, because my hon. Friend was an ally of mine in a series of debates, he knows about these things, and it would be impossible to find a more doughty and faithful warrior.

That leak was as strong an argument for a freedom of information Act as I have ever come across. But against this the brewing and distilling interests have pushed the argument that the greater flexibility of licensing laws in Scotland has not been followed by greater harm. Admittedly, much of the evidence is ambiguous For example, it would seem that in 1977, immediately following the introduction of the extra permitted hour in Scotland, there was a small reduction in the number of drunkenness offences. But the number of such offences was already falling prior to the change. Equally, the figures for driving offences involving alcohol above the limit in Strathclyde, which covers half the population in Scotland, fell immediately after the change but have since increased to a higher level than in 1977. It is likely that any temporary improvement is due more to the economic recession than to any change in hours. Certainly, during the same period similar improvements also occured in England and Wales. Hon. Members should bear in mind that we are not comparing like with like. Scotland has only one ninth of the population of England and Wales.

What is particularly significant is that extended hours of opening in Scotland appear to have encouraged those already drinking heavily to increase their consumption. That is exactly what one would have expected. That is the sort of statistic to take into account when reaching a conclusion. Some people in Scotland are now drinking more than ever before.

Mr. Hill: My hon. Friend has missed a new aspect that has crept into the licensing trade. There are now many brands of non-alcoholic drinks. My local football manager, Laurie McMenemy, has often been seen on television promoting a non-alcoholic beer. There is a trend in that direction. Indeed, last night, I believe, I saw the "Food and Drink Programme" on the BBC, which showed a whole range of non-alcoholic drinks that could be served during licensing hours, just as alcoholic drinks can be.

Sir Bernard Braine: We might all wish that trend to continue, but the fans who attend football matches do not seem to have yet discovered this delectable non-alcoholic liquor. We must deal with the situation as it is and not as it may be in some distant future, when all the things that I am complaining about have been understood by the population as a whole. Indeed, a start should be made by hon. Members themselves to understand the situation.

The conclusions drawn from the Clayson experiment are based on a careful analysis of the trends in both countries. Their first conclusion is that the sharp fall in drink offences in Scotland in the first year of the Clayson liberalisation merely continued a slightly sharper fall that had taken place in the previous year, and that there was also a fall in the number of offences, although not so spectacular, during both years in England and Wales. Secondly, during the next three years, the number of offences increased in both countries although in Scotland liberalisation was now advancing. Thirdly, in England and Wales, there was a decline in the number of drink offences in 1981 which was somewhat more marked in Scotland than in England. Fourthly, the statistics show either minimal evidence, or none, of a lasting marked improvement in Scotland due to liberalisation. That is the conclusion reached by those who have studied the figures in depth.

My own conclusion is that there is no evidence that leads us to suppose that the introduction of more flexible drinking hours in England and Wales will reduce the massive human and economic costs of alcoholic abuse. On the contrary, it is likely that those costs will increase. The most that can be said in favour of liberalisation is that it will remove a minor inconvenience to the drinking public, including foreign tourists, and that the brewers will gain larger profits.

In my philosophy, there is nothing wrong with convenience or profit. However, I warn that no responsible Government are likely to give either convenience or profit priority over the health of the nation.

10.40 am

Mr. John Ryman (Blyth Valley): I have listened with interest to hon. Members' speeches, which have been so ably made. I regret that I was not present at the beginning of the debate and missed the first quarter of an hour of the speech of the hon. Member for Kingswood (Mr. Hayward). I gather from the tenor of the speeches that the motion calls for a move towards the liberalisation of licensing laws, modelled on the Scottish example.

I wish to deal with one or two of the appallingly misleading points made by the hon. Member for Castle Point (Sir B. Braine). He is a well respected and experienced Member of the House, and his moral crusading in many areas is well known and respected. However, he has depicted an appallingly misleading picture. In effect, he said that, because, tragically, a relatively small number of people are affected by alcohol abuse, millions of decent, law-abiding people should be deprived of drinking in moderation during civilised hours.

I am all in favour of helping any conceivable minority group, but it is an appalling form of moral blackmail to say to the House that because 300,000 people — the figure from the Royal College of Psychiatrists — suffer from some form of serious alcohol abuse, millions of people should be penalised.

I rather resented the slur on north country people. I represent a constituency in Northumberland. It was implied that, because the Government are so incompetent that they have greatly increased unemployment, there is excessive drinking in the north-east. There most certainly is not. The north-east has always drunk well and can hold its drink. There is far less drunkenness in the north-east than in any other part of the country. Therefore, the hon. Gentleman's slur on the north-east, both expressly and by implication, was without foundation.

People with experience of existing licensing laws will agree that the crux of the matter is that the licensing justices, who know their areas, have within the framework of the existing licensing laws already greatly liberalised

[Mr. John Ryman]

licensing hours. A few years ago at brewster sessions, contested licensing applications were the order of the day. Now it rarely happens that renewed applications for licences are opposed, provided that the applications are sensible and well prepared in advance.

The hon. Member for Castle Point deplored the display of drinks in supermarkets. He will remember that a few years ago applications for off-licences by supermarkets were always strenuously opposed. It is a relatively new idea that supermarkets should have off-licences. Now there is hardly ever a case where the local branch of the National Union of Licensed Victuallers or individual licensees oppose such applications. It is no exaggeration to say that, provided an application is sensible and well prepared, it goes through almost on the nod if it comes before an experienced licensing bench.

A great liberalisation has taken place within the present framework of the law. Conservative Members have cited examples of licensing justices apparently taking a contrary view. The remedy is to appeal to the Crown court if there

I am in the dilemma that I do not want a free-for-all, but the discretion of licensing justices, wide though it is, does not permit them to obtain the object of the exercise, which is to liberalise licensing laws so that members of the public who can be trusted may have freer and wider access not only to public houses but to off-licences——

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury) *rose——*

Mr. Ryman: I shall give way in a moment, but I wish to make my point, which I think is a jolly good one.

Off-licences have hardly been mentioned during the debate, yet the increase in the number of off-licences is an important factor in the poor performance of some public houses—some of which have had to close because of home drinking.

Mr. Key: I want to help the hon. Gentleman in his dilemma. Does he agree that part of the remedy lies in education? That was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Hayward). We are seeking to sell an increasing amount of alcohol without any instructions on the bottles. The role of education in schools on alcohol and other abuses is largely missed.

Mr. Ryman: Of course education is very important, but statistics have been used in this debate rather as a drunk uses a lamp post — for support rather than for illumination. It goes without saying that education is important.

I visited Norway a few weeks ago and was appalled to find that teetotalism had been taken to an absurd degree. One cannot buy any alcoholic beverage in any supermarket other than a few in some of the largest principal towns. One has the greatest difficulty in obtaining a bottle of wine on board a ship or at an airport, and if one does obtain it it is excessivley expensive and most mediocre plonk—even worse than that served by British Rail. I would hate to see that in Britain.

We must be sensible about this matter. We must cater for the reasonable drinking needs of the population, but at the same time try to help those who cannot help themselves. The moral argument put by the hon. Member for Castle Point, with his vast experience, is as absurd as were the moral arguments against betting. Perhaps he was one of those who opposed the Betting, Gaming and Lotteries Act 1960 and 1963. At that time people said that to open cash betting shops would be the death of the working classes who would be encourged to bet. If someone wants to bet, he will bet; if he wants to drink, he will drink. It is no business of Parliament to prevent people from enjoying reasonable pleasures because a small minority seek to abuse them. That point cannot be made too often, and having made it I shall not repeat it.

It has been implied that the Government have been too slow in implementing the report of the Erroll committee and other reports that have been produced over the years. I suspect that the reason for that is the vast power of the brewers, who form one of the largest contributors to the funds of the Tory party. They have had enormous influence in the Tory party for years and years and years. The north-east has some of the largest brewers in the country, and they help the Tories day in and day out. They sometimes treat their employees appallingly. They have had bad industrial relations. I strongly suspect that there is a link between the brewers' lobby and the Tory party, which influences the Government.

People may ask me why the Labour Government did not do something about the matter. I can only say that Labour Governments, especially the last Labour Government, have been deficient in many ways.

I support a sensible move for reform of the licensing laws that is based on common sense and judgment. I deplore the emotional and hysterical appeals of those who are obsessed with teetotalism and spoiling the fun of others. I deplore the attacks that have been made on the north-east and I urge the Minister to assist us when he replies and sets out the Government's reaction to the views which have been expressed in the debate.

Does the Minister agree that it is a terrible waste of police manpower to enforce the existing licensing laws in their restrictive form? A great deal of police manpower must be spent, and rightly so as the law stands, in enforcing conditions of licenses and ensuring that the licensing laws are observed.

Statistics have been hurled around the Chamber about offences involving drunkenness. Are not these statistics misleading? Offences of drunkenness have been used by hon. Members to support their cases but there are cases of domestic violence in which drink is a contributory factor. There are many drink-related offences to be considered before we reach the issue of drunkenness offences. That is a somewhat misleading topic. Can the Minister give the House the Home Office statistics on drunk and disorderly offences, motor car offences and offences connected with violence and dishonesty where it has been shown that drink was a strong contributory factor.

It is the easiest thing in the world for a man who has been caught redhanded committing a serious offence to say, by way of mitigation, "I was affected by drink." That is a lot of nonsense and is no mitigation. However, there are some serious cases in which drink has played a significant part. I do not know whether the Minister can help us by producing Home Office statistics of that nature. They may not be available and they would certainly be difficult to collate.

Is a pattern emerging from licensing justices in different areas using their discretion to allow greater flexibility in licensing hours? It is possible only to state one's constituency experience or knowledge of an area with which one has contact, but does the Home Office have an

overall picture of licensing justices' decisions on the flexibility of licensing hours throughout the country? I do not know whether the Home Office keeps such statistics. It would be interesting to know also how many of these decisions have been varied on appeal to the Crown court by circuit judges hearing licensing appeals. It is my impression that there are fewer and fewer contested licensing cases and fewer and fewer licensing cases going to appeal either to the Crown court or the Divisional court. I do not know whether the Minister can help us on that.

This has been a good debate so far and a good deal of emotion has already been injected into it. I suggest respectfully that if we take a cool, sensible and reasonable view of the problem, we shall see that the cry for reform of the licensing laws is strong and the evidence in support of it overwhelming.

10.55 am

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Hayward) for raising the important issue of licensing laws. I regret that there are not more hon. Members present. An important subject is before us and it is one which is increasingly engaging the time of hon. Members as various representations are put before them.

Before advancing my main argument, I must take issue with my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Sir B. Braine). As the hon. Member for Blyth Valley (Mr. Ryman) said, my hon. Friend threw statistics around like confetti. He was short on giving us the source of his statistics, with the exception of the Royal College of Psychiatrists. He quoted from a report of the Royal College which was published five years ago. He referred to Scottish figures which I suspect are the same ones as I heard for 1975, two years before Clayson was implemented.

Ten days ago, after some unseemly behaviour in the Chamber by certain hon. Members, Mr. Speaker had to announce in a firm tone "This House is now adjourned." There is probably only one more evocative way of bringing proceedings to a close, and that is the universal cry of licensees throughout the country twice daily of "Time gentlemen, please."

It has been my duty for about 15 years to enforce that twice daily adjournment in the public house of which I have been the licensee and of which I still am licensee. I shall make my position clear to the House at the risk of boring my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State, who already knows of my interest in this matter. I am the managing director of my family's licensed trade company. The company operates seven public houses in the London area and is a multiple tenant of various brewers. I am in this role a joint licensee with the managers of the seven public houses. I ran a large and busy pub as manager for four years. My interest in today's debate is thus both expert, or at least experienced, and vested. I make no apology for that, because I believe that I bring a rare if not unique background to the House. It is appropriate that I should share my experience with colleagues.

I have called time to my customers on countless occasions, and I still do from time to time. I have called time, not because I judged that there was no further commercial advantage in staying open, nor yet because my customers had had a sufficiency of my hospitality. I have terminated the proceedings because the law demanded it and because my licence from the justices stipulated the hours during which I could open the pub. Broadly, the licences stipulate almost the same permitted hours throughout the country, although not, as we have heard, throughout Scotland. Unless a special hours certificate is in force—that usually means that there is a food and/or music operation — the same opening hours apply irrespective of whether the pub is situated in an urban non-residential area, a residential suburb, a village, a commuter dormitory, a commercial centre such as the City of London where almost no one lives, or a highly seasonal resort on the coast. There is a half-hour variation between some metropolitan areas and the country surrounding them. However, that is almost irrelevant.

The permitted hours owe nothing to trading conditions in the immediate environment of a pub and they make no concession to appropriateness. They owe everything to a law which dates from the desperate days of the first world war, when munition workers were inclined to lift their right arm rather too enthusiastically, to the detriment of their shell-filling duties. With minor amendment in 1961 and 1964, we still suffer the penance which was inflicted on our grandparents in the Defence of the Realm Consolidation Act 1915. Seventy years on we endure some of the most rigorous controls on drinking anywhere outside Moslem countries. Our permitted drinking hours are inappropriate to trading conditions and they are anachronistic in the fourth quarter of the century.

A further concern is that the law on permitted hours is falling into some disrepute due to this anachronism and lack of local sensitivity. A minority of licensees, but not an insignificant one, feel themselves threatened by a lack of competitiveness with other retail outlets and extend their permitted hours on what might be called an unofficial basis. The police have more pressing duties to perform, and some licensees get away with a malpractice which is dictated by economic circumstances and the desires of their customers, but a malpractice which devalues the law as it stands.

Recession has hit the licensed trade hard during the past few years. While colleagues may view publicans pleading poverty with some cynicism, it is true that there is an increasing and worrying number of bankruptcies in the licensed trade. In the light of that trend, and recognising the inappropriateness of the law in the matter of permitted hours, the major trade interests represented by the National Union of Licensed Victuallers, the National Association of Licensed House Managers, the British Hotels, Restaurants and Caterers Association and the Restaurateurs Association of Great Britain, together with other trade-related associations, consumer interests, the tourist boards and many other people interested in the matter, have come together to form a new national committee called FLAG—the Flexi-Law Action Group. It has a simple and modest aspiration — to urge and encourage reform of the law on permitted hours to allow a degree of flexibility so that licensees, in conjunction with their licensing bench, may choose opening hours appropriate to an individual pub from a wider span of available hours.

I have been pleased to be associated with that new national committee, because I share its aspirations. At present, individual participants in FLAG are considering their preferred options for reform. It is not true to say, as my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point suggested, that all licensed house managers are against reform. They are a party to this campaign, and they want to be

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represented in any solution that is presented to my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State and to my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary. We hope that they will be able to put forward a sensible and long-overdue reform in Government time. The irony is that we seek to obtain no more than our Scottish trade counterparts already enjoy, for the reforms that followed the report of Dr. Clayson offer a sensible pattern for English law reform to follow.

The English equivalent of Clayson — the Erroll committee — reported almost a dozen years ago. It suggested a comprehensive reform embracing a wide and contentious range of issues, including the issues of children in public houses and the reduction of the drinking age. Those issues are not put forward at the moment. The Erroll report must, by now, be covered with a mountain of dust, and I for one am not seeking to blow that dust away. I hope for a simple and modest change in permitted hours. It will no longer do for the Home Office to sit on the fence, weighing the competing enthusiasm of the tourist lobby against the lack of enthusiasm of the alcohol abuse/temperance lobby.

It was astonishing to me to note that, earlier this year at a major meeting initiated by the British Institute of Innkeeping—it was a learned meeting, during which six speakers talked on the subject of reform—the champion of the temperance movement, the Rev. Bernard Kinman, cited statistics which were pre-Clayson as though they represented the present position in Scotland. That will not do. It was interesting to note also that at that same meeting two chief constables, including the chief constable from the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point, were not against reform on a sensible basis. They suggested that a wider span of closing times would do away with that awful period at 11 o'clock each evening when the evening's entertainment of so many people comes to an end and a bulge on the roads occurs inevitably leading to more accidents. We have seen a considerable thrust from the tourist interests. I pay tribute to Michael Montague, who was the chairman of the English Tourist Board, for his unceasing work to bring about change.

It is now almost a year since my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State and I enjoyed a debate in this Chamber at about 7 am to discuss licensing hours. We both decided that we did not want to go to the pubs around Smithfield market to enjoy an early morning libation. My hon. Friend said at that time that his Department was awaiting a review of the Scottish scheme during 1984. The year 1984 is nearly over, and the licensed trade of which I am proud to be a member anxiously awaits the results of the survey of the Scottish scheme.

We believe that the time for action has arrived. The Home Office must confront the problem of permitted hours and introduce a sensible reform in keeping with our much changed way of life. Many hopes rest on that aspiration, and it is no exaggeration to say that the prospects for the traditional British pub — my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point was quick to praise the British pub as a controlled environment for drinking— would be much enhanced by the realisation of a sensible reform.

11.5 am

Mr. Robert B. Jones (Hertfordshire, West): It is a particular pleasure to address the House on St. Andrew's day, as I am a graduate of the distinguished university of St. Andrews. Having spent seven years in Scotland— five of them at that university — my experience of Scottish licensing laws, both before and immediately after reform, is great.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman) rightly referred to the fact that our licensing laws are based on legislation that is nearly 70 years old —the Defence of the Realm Consolidation Act 1915, which is known to its friends as DORA, and DORA has few friends. It is almost unbelievable in this day and age that one of the favourite pastimes of the British—having a quiet pint in a pub—is controlled by conditions laid down to control the drinking of munitions workers during the first world war. Surely it is time for a change.

When I first went up to university in St. Andrews, I arrived on a Sunday evening. I thought it was extraordinary that I could go into a hotel to have a drink but could not go into a pub. The only difference between a hotel and a pub was that a hotel had to have two bedrooms available for letting. In most cases, they were virtually never let—that was just a way around the law. Nor were those restrictions associated with restraint in the consumption of alcohol or less drink-associated crime. Not unnaturally, the restriction on the number of premises and drinking hours led to heavy consumption in a short time and in crowded conditions — precisely the worst ingredients for bad behaviour.

I was lucky that the bona fide traveller rule had disappeared by the time I went to the university. In the days before then, a person had to travel more than five miles on a Sunday to get a drink. That led to whole towns leaving their homes and going to the next town. St. Andrews is nine miles from Cupar, so the population of St. Andrews went to Cupar and vice versa. Hon. Members can imagine the number of head-on accidents on the road in between.

That was the background to the 1970 Clayson and 1972 Erroll reports on the desirability of change. With uncharacteristic speed of action by Ministers, and probably because of the poor image of Scottish pubs, the Licensing (Scotland) Bill was introduced in 1976. During its passage all the usual arguments were trotted out— that there was no public demand for longer or different drinking hours, that drink in itself was wrong and should not be encouraged, that an afternoon break was essential to prevent continuous drinking, that strict limits were necessary to prevent people from driving while under the influence of alcohol, that family life would suffer, and so on. This is the rub of the statistics cited by my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Sir B. Braine).

It is not that the statistics have proved that there has been an overwhelming improvement in behaviour in Scotland since the change. We must wait and see what the lessons are. We can say, however, that the dire predictions by many of the opponents of change have not been borne out. There has been no drastic worsening of many of those aspects of the Scots' behaviour. Eight years on, we can start to draw firm conclusions about the validity of the arguments and, therefore, about whether the citizens of England and Wales, the licensees who serve them and the

tourists who are not as disposed as the native English to our archaic practices should enjoy the same rights and duties as the Scots.

The Scottish Home and Health Department published the evidence of a survey by Knight and Wilson into behavioural patterns in Scotland. The conclusions are clear. There is no evidence to support any of the arguments that were put forward in 1976. Quite the reverse. My noble Friend Lord Glenarthur, replying to a debate on pub hours on 9 May 1983, said:

"Provisional assessments based on surveys carried out in 1976, 1977 and 1978 would seem to suggest that the consumption of alcohol has not been significantly affected by this extension of hours and that those drinking do so at a more leisurely pace." —[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 9 May 1983; Vol. 442, c. 411.]

Statistical data on drink-related offences show that recent trends are of a decrease in drunkenness offences, and that between 1972 and 1982 there has been little variation in offences of drinking and driving, which was a matter raised by the hon. Member for Blyth Valley (Mr. Ryman). However, the statistics do not separately identify offences occuring during or immediately following permitted or extended hours.

In reply to a question of 30 November 1983 from my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin), the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Ancram), said:

"In Scotland since 1976 the upward trend in alcohol-related diseases has slowed; drunkenness offences have decreased; and drunk driving offences show a slower rate of increase than for motoring offences overall. I cannot, however, say to what extent these changes may result from the provisions of the 1976 Act because of the many variables affecting the relevant statistics." —[*Official Report*, 30 November 1983; Vol. 49, c. *517*.]

Unemployment is one such variable, but there are many others.

The liberalisation of the laws has civilised drinking behaviour, yet in England, despite a history in most parts of the country of fewer problems than in Scotland, we still have DORA. It must be right to extend to our fellow countrymen the rights enjoyed by the Scots. It is important, for several reasons. In March this year the English Tourist Board determined that a change in the law would be beneficial to tourism. To a European tourist at Windsor, perhaps sitting beside the river on a sunny summer day, it seems absurd to have to leave the pub garden at 2.40 pm. The law should be changed. In fairness to pub landlords, they must endure different privileges for the competition with the different arrangements for clubs and the notorious "substantial meal" loophole.

Hon. Members will be aware that hardened drinkers can drink for 24 hours a day, every day, all year, if they live. The present law bites only on those who wish to behave within the law. We must put responsibility back where it should be, with the licensees and with customers. As the Rev. George Thompson Brake, the director of the Christian Economic and Social Foundation, said, we must preserve

"the place of the public house as the most favourable controlled environment for the consumption of alcohol."

The time is long since past for taking action on this. I deplore the tardy response of the Home Office, and I hope that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State will say that action is being speeded and that we can look forward to legislation in due course.

11.13 am

Mr. Clive Soley (Hammersmith): I congratulate the hon. Member for Kingswood (Mr. Hayward) on bringing this matter before the House, but I am sad that he chose to cast the motion in the terms that he did. The motion relates to the narrow issue of licensing hours, but his speech rightly and very well——

Mr. Greg Knight (Derby, North): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. What the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley) has said is not the case. The motion calls attention to the licensing laws, and is not restricted to licensing hours.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: There is a difference between the title of the motion and the opening speech on it, but not one of any significance.

Mr. Soley: It is a minor point. If the hon. Gentleman wishes to interpret it in that way, we need not lose any sleep over the fact.

It is sad that the motion is not wider, because the hon. Member for Kingswood spoke well to the wider issue, which is the recognition that there is an alcohol problem in society. If we do not face that and simply tamper with odd bits of the law here and there without having an alcohol policy, we risk the social, economic and psychological consequences of that behaviour. The alteration of licensing laws and the availability of alcohol is always popular, but dealing with the consequences of alcohol abuse is deeply unpopular. That must be said clearly, and, to his credit, the hon. Member for Kingswood mentioned it.

As the hon. Member for Kingswood said, alcohol is a powerful drug which affects the parts of the central nervous system which control social behaviour. The social behaviour that develops after the intake of alcohol can have a dramatic impact on others. Instead of examining the statistics, one could ask police officers when is their busiest time, and their answer would be "After pub closing time, especially on Fridays and Saturdays." They also suffer the most violent attacks upon them at those times. If one examines Home Office figures to discover the victims of crime, one finds that it is not the little old lady or gentleman being beaten up by thugs in the street who is most at risk. The person most at risk is the single young male who is on the streets late at night at the weekend. He may or may not have been drinking, but he is at risk largely because of alcohol abuse.

The figures are difficult to interpret with certainty, but there is strong evidence that between 50 and 75 per cent. of those who appear before magistrates' courts in inner city areas had been drinking before they committed the offences. What is even more disturbing, and something that we must address in this debate, is that 50 per cent. of people who commit homicide are under the influence of drink, as are 50 per cent. of victims. The figures are hard to quantify, but it appears that in 50 to 75 per cent. of battered baby cases one or both parents were under the influence of drink.

Drunken driving is a recognised problem now, but it was not recognised as a problem before it began to be emphasised that drinking and driving was lethal to others who may or may not have been drinking. When one considers the figures in detail, one discovers that not only drunken drivers but drunken pedestrians are at risk. The

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number of people who attend hospital as a result of drinking and using the roads is dramatically high. Heavy drinking has a serious effect on family life. It also affects the National Health Service. When we talk about alcohol-related problems and the NHS, people usually think of alcoholics being admitted to hospital with cirrhosis of the liver or delerium tremens—something dramatic—but the disorders are often less serious. Recent research at one hospital—I do not draw general conclusions from it—showed that seven out of 10 NHS beds were occupied by people who, although not admitted for problems directly related to alcohol abuse, had worse health because of alcohol abuse. Heavy drinking also affects people's work.

I have considerable sympathy with some of the views of my hon. Friend the Member for Blyth Valley (Mr. Ryman). It is not only the heavy drinkers themselves who suffer. The classic alcoholic or the dosser who drifts round the streets represents only about 5 per cent. of the problem. It is estimated that up to 1 million people are directly affected with health, psychological and work problems. More importantly, the members of their families, their friends and the people who use the roads when they are under the influence of drink are also affected.

I want to put the matter in perspective. The message from the Labour party is that we are not against altering the licensing laws, but we believe that tampering with them, as only one aspect of the wider issue, will invite problems.

It is said that we do not know what the statistics mean, so we should just change the law. The problem is that we would then risk drifting between the two extremes, which is what we have done for most of this century. At the turn of the century, there was a sudden fear about gin palaces and the fact that munitions used in the first world war might not explode because the workers making them were drunk. We rushed in with a law which was probably not debated as much as we would debate it today. That law has been renewed since then, but there is now pressure for liberalisation. If we liberalise the laws, we shall only need a dramatic increase in the drink problem and we shall rush back to the old situation. Nothing could be worse than staggering from one extreme to the other.

There are anomalies in the drink laws. A drunk person can buy drink at a supermarket, but not in a public house. The licensee of a public house has much greater responsibility. If we are talking about changing the laws, we ought to consider that aspect. Licensees have been prosecuted for serving drunken customers. Should we impose a duty on supermarket employees not to sell drink to drunken customers?

People who are under age can sell drinks in supermarkets. That fact has not been mentioned in the debate, and such problems must be considered. The whole issue must be viewed in context.

The hon. Member for Kingswood seemed to base his argument on the view that there should be general availability of drink and that we ought to educate people to ensure the sensible use of alcohol. In an ideal world that would be marvellous, but the guts of the matter is that if we extend that logic we say that all drugs should be available for use and people should be educated about their dangers. For example, I would argue that there is strong evidence that cannabis is less harmful than alcohol or even tobacco. However, that does not lead me to the conclusion that we should therefore encourage the use of cannabis. Less harmful does not mean harmless.

The essential point is that, if we rely only on education when dealing with drugs or anything else which society has always licensed in one form or another—through clear laws or unwritten rules—there will be abuse which will hurt people who do not use those drugs. We must recognise the importance of not tampering with one part of the legislation on alcohol availability.

The brewers have a vested interest in the matter. My hon. Friend the Member for Blyth Valley said that the brewers are one of the main payers of the Tory party. They are, and they always have been, and they put pressure on the Tory party. A previous junior Minister experienced that pressure when he began to interfere too much in alcohol licensing and tobacco advertising.

The brewers and distillers have an interest in selling alcohol. I am not against the use of alcohol, but society must regulate the use of a powerful drug. If we do not, we shall open ourselves up to all sorts of problems.

My message to the hon. Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman) is that I have much sympathy for the NULV and the licensed house managers, but if they spent more time talking about the consequences of alcohol abuse instead of primarily about the hours of opening, they would win many more friends and carry much more weight.

The brewers, the distillers and other organisations have given charitable grants to some of the agencies which are trying to cope with the consequences of alcohol abuse. The brewers say that alcohol abuse is a terrible thing, but their arguments do not sound convincing because they seek to increase the availability of alcohol and increase their sales. They have an interest in doing that. I do not crib about that interest. But when they present the argument in that way it is intensely damaging even to those who want to encourage social and proper drinking.

Mr. Couchman: The hon. Gentleman is equating a call for flexibility in opening hours with a call for longer hours. The call from the trade is for more appropriate hours. It is not a question of expecting to sell more drink. The trade wants to be able to tailor its overheads and ensure that licensed premises are not open for long hours with no customers and then have to turn customers out at the very time when they would like to continue drinking.

Mr. Soley: I understand that, but the hon. Gentleman forgets that he and others who support his view have presented the argument in terms of the problem for licensees and people who want to drink. He has ignored the rest of the problem. That is what I am trying to say to the hon. Gentleman, the brewers, the distillers and the other groups involved.

I know that people who work in public houses do not want to work longer hours. About 20 years ago I worked in a public house as a barman, and I know that the hours are appalling, and the wages are often appalling. Many tenants are not as well off as they are made out to be. Some are well off, but others occupy public houses that are on the margin of profitability and they can find themselves out on the street, with no accommodation, when the pub closes. There are many problems for staff and owners of public houses. I should be happier if the NULV recognised that the interests of the staff—working hours, income,

security of accommodation and so on — are grossly underestimated. If the hon. Member for Gillingham is the tenant of seven pubs, he must recognise that it is difficult to get movement in that area. I have just written to the Brewers Society on the matter, and I hope to get some reaction from the society.

If the brewers are serious when they express their worries, let them join the campaign to get the Think Tank report debated. The report was published in Sweden; one of the daft aspects of our secrecy laws is that we can buy a copy of the report in Sweden, but not here. If brewers want a debate about the opening hours of pubs, let us have one of the documents that discuss the availability of alcohol. Everyone, including the Prime Minister, who wrote to me at the time, recognises that that Think Tank report is an extremely important document. Let us hear the brewers say, "We want the Think Tank report debated so that we can demonstrate the case for different licensing hours." There is a case for changing licensing hours, but I want such action to be part of a wider policy.

The present law was introduced during the first world war. It was reviewed and modified in 1921, 1953 and 1961. The consolidation Act was passed in 1964 and in recent years there have been at least two private Members' Bills on the subject.

A great deal has been made of the Scottish case. I lived in Scotland for many years, and anyone who goes there has a civilising experience. As they were, the drinking hours were bizarre and had all the worst ambiguities. On Sundays one could drink in a hotel if one was travelling between two points which were more than three miles apart. We would all go to the same hotel every week, and the same comments would be written into the entry log in the hotel foyer, such as, "Travelling from Edinburgh to Lauder." The same people were doing the same trip every week. Of course, they were all drinking and driving. It was the worst possible law. The Australian system was the 5 o'clock swill, when people had one hour to drink as much as they could. There are many such anomalies.

The Scottish law particularly needed changing. That is recognised, but the argument about statistics troubles me. The hon. Member for Kingswood said that statistics could prove anything. It may not be realised why the Conservative party gets away with so much appalling advertising about what it has achieved. It is obvious that it does not believe in using statistics properly. I have a great respect for statistics, in both the pure and social sciences. At best they can help to prove a case strongly, and at worst they can be strongly indicative. We would not know about the link between cancer and smoking if it were not for statistics. We would not know about a whole lot of other factors if it were not for statistics, so they are important.

The trouble with the Scottish case is that there has not been a long-term detailed analysis of what is happening there, taking into account other variables and comparisons with other places, such as England. The good old Scottish principle in the common law of Scotland says that the case is not proven. The only thing that one can safely say is that some of the figures have gone up and others have gone down. Cirrhosis of the liver has increased by about 3 per cent. Drunkenness and drink-driving offences seem either to have gone down or gone up more slowly than in the rest of the United Kingdom. The figures do not lead one to a convincing conclusion right now, but that does not mean to say that we cannot get those figures.

The other problem in Scotland is that when people were trying to check on drink-driving and other drink offences the police were operating an overtime ban, there were changes in the prosecuting process for the police and the courts had an industrial dispute, all of which affected the figures. I would not say that this was responsible for turning the figures round, but most important of all were the effects of the depression, and in 1981 there was an increase in the tax on alcohol. That had a dramatic impact. The one statistic from around the world that stands out is that the greater the availability, the more the social problems. That one statistic holds up well in almost any analysis anywhere in the world, regardless of cultural differences.

Mr. Hayward: The hon. Gentleman rightly says that there is a need for a considered assessment of the statistics, particularly given the fact that there are and have been so many variables from 1977 onwards. Does he agree that the results of the analysis of the statistics, given careful consideration of all those variables, will be ready not in 1985 or 1986, but in 1990 or 1991?

Sir Bernard Braine: I am grateful to the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley) for giving way. I am following his speech closely and agree with practically everything that he has said. However, on the subject of the experience in Scotland, the conclusions that I drew were not my personal conclusions, but came from the board of social responsibility of the Church of Scotland. It is true that it is almost impossible to draw a valid conclusion from the figures. That leads me to believe that it is utterly wrong and far too early to base any case for tampering with the licensing laws in England and Wales on that experience. Does the hon. Gentleman agree?

Mr. Soley: I am arguing for a much wider review of the problem of alcohol policy. In fact, I do not think that we need any more reviews. We have probably had enough. We need the evolution and development of a national alcohol policy——

Sir Bernard Braine *indicated assent.*

Mr. Soley: I notice that the hon. Gentleman agrees with me on that.

When I lived in Glasgow, in certain areas pubs were not allowed. If one did a survey in those areas the people said, "We do not want any pubs here. We have enough problems with drunks already." The problem in Glasgow was that men drank, got smashed out of their minds, went to where they lived and smashed up telephone kiosks, their wives or whatever. If one could encourage social drinking, that would be a good thing.

Some other aspects of the Scottish situation have not been taken into account by some hon. Members. One of the things that was supposed to happen in Scotland was an increase in family rooms, but there has been only a small increase. In other words, little has been done to encourage the social drinking that many people talk about when they make comparisons, as the hon. Member for Kingswood did, with France and other countries. The evidence is that there has just been more of the same. That is the problem.

The other encouraging thing in Scotland resulted from the Criminal Justice Act 1982, of which the Minister will

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be aware. It imposed restrictions on the provision of alcohol at football grounds and on transport to football grounds. Therefore, we are not just talking about licensing hours and licensing laws in the limited way that they have been discussed today. To be fair, they have been discussed much more widely, but the motion is narrower, which is what troubles me.

I should like to emphasise this central point about international data. All the evidence is that availability and harm are linked. That is what we need to take into account when we develop an alcohol policy. Since 1961 there has been an almost unfettered growth of alcohol sales. Every day we spend about £30 million on alcohol, which is more than we spend on cars or clothes. In the last 10 years, 27,700 new licences have been issued, most to high street outlets. There has been a doubling of consumption since about 1964. Guinness recently — perhaps rather significantly — purchased 550 newsagents. We must assume that Guinness will use them as an outlet for alcohol sales. I cannot see why else Guinness has suddenly developed a fascination for selling newspapers. It does not fit in with its other activities. Alcohol can be purchased readily at petrol stations. Manufacturers spend £150 million to £180 million per annum on advertising, with about another £5 million towards promotion in sport. All those things need to be taken into account.

At the other end of the scale, one can say, "Let this happen," as the hon. Member for Kingswood said, "Let things take their normal course and we shall do what we can for education." What have we done in education? I was chairman of the Alcohol Education Centre for several years. Four groups were operating in that area. Before that I was a probation officer, working frequently with alcoholics. We were constantly struggling to get funds to deal with the consequences of alcohol abuse.

This year the Health Education Council can spend £250,000 on education, compared with the £150 million to £180 million spent on advertising alone. What sort of sense is that? It has been suggested that instructions be put on bottles. I have never noticed anyone having any difficulty in opening a bottle. Perhaps there are problems. A notice saying, "Harmful drinking can damage your health," would not be what one would call a proper education programme.

Alcohol Concern, which took over from the other bodies, including my own — the Alcohol Education Centre—has been given a grant of £350,000. The total grant for the other organisations from which it took over was £450,000, so there has been a drop of £100,000 a year. If one takes inflation into account, the organisation should now receive £550,000. Therefore, in real terms, it is getting £200,000 less than it should—and we talk about education. What nonsense. We do not have an alcohol policy. The Government do not have an alcohol policy. It is time that we started thinking in those terms.

The aim of any alcohol policy by any Government should be to reduce the scale of alcohol-related problems, which now affect between 750,000 and 1 million people. I hope that the Minister will give his view on that today. According to *The Guardian* yesterday, his hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security, the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Mr. Patten), "told a British Medical Association conference on alcoholism: 'We would like you to tackle the problem urgently because there is no way we can tackle the problem centrally.'"

If the Minister agrees with that and takes that course, there will be still more problems, because we shall continue to drift. There must be some central direction. Although I would not agree with everything that was said at that conference, I entirely support the doctor who said that it was no use preaching at doctors and telling them to do more, when the Government controlled availability.

When I was chairman of the Alcohol Education Centre, our aim was not to educate the general public, which was a job for the health education office, but to educate people working with the problems of alcohol abuse. We provided training for probation officers, doctors, psychiatrists, social workers, and so on. Too little of that education takes place even now and Alcohol Concern, which has taken over that function, will not be able to do all that the Alcohol Education Centre was doing. We were beginning to educate prison officers, who also have to deal with the consequences of alcohol abuse. We were also working with the trade unions, because their link with industry is so important. If they could achieve a common alcohol policy in their companies, a great deal of progress could be made.

The Think Tank reported that the cost of the problem in this country was £1,000 million per annum. Yet only £350,000 is given to the Alcohol Concern. When licensed premises were closed down at the turn of the century, a fund was established to compensate the people involved. The £4 million in that fund was handed over to the Alcohol Education and Research Council a year or two ago. Let us not pursue that course again. Let us not set up new funds and close down outlets again only to reverse the policy in 20 years' time. Let us develop a proper alcohol policy.

We must recognise that any Government, whatever their political complexion, have a vested interest in alcohol. The £4,722 million in tax revenue is not the only factor. Another important aspect is employment. It is often said—and in principle I support the argument—that if a Third world country such as Pakistan is producing more and more opium we should help the farmers who depend on the opium crop to develop alternative crops, but that argument becomes highly dubious if we do not recognise that we do the same in reverse and that the problems of many Third world countries are made even worse by our massive exports of Scotch whisky. Clamping down on that, however, would create unemployment in the glens of Scotland, where the whisky industry is often the only employer. The United Kingdom is not yet a Third world country, although the Government are working on the problem and seem likely to achieve that result if they continue on their present course, but a Third world country in the same position would be seeking aid to provide alternative employment in the drink-producing areas.

That is a serious analogy, because alcohol is a drug. I have worked with both alcohol and heroin addicts and I know that it is as difficult, if not more difficult, to get an alcohol addict off alcohol as to get a heroin addict off heroin. Unless the hon. Member for Gillingham and his associates address themselves to that problem and show in their public statements that they are concerned about it and want to do something about it, his voice will not carry much weight. The people on the receiving end of the problem—friends, relatives and others who are drawn

into the situation, social workers, psychiatrists, and so on —will not be impressed by an argument which ignores those crucial issues.

I do not put that to the hon. Gentleman in an offensive way, but I hope that he will discuss it with his associates. Many bodies, such as the National Union of Licensed Victuallers, recognise that aspect and we need to build on that recognition. No one here is suggesting closing all the pubs and banning all alcohol. That would be offensive to most of us, because we recognise that alcohol is a socially accepted drug and we cannot change that. That being so, however, we must live with the consequences.

The Opposition argue strongly that this country needs, and has needed for some time, a policy on alcohol. There have been a number of reports, but there is still no policy. We must begin to develop that policy, especially at Government level, as a Government lead is clearly necessary. When we have done that, we shall have a proper context in which to consider the anomalies in our licensing laws.

11.45 am

Mr. Ivan Lawrence (Burton): I welcome the thoughtful contribution of the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley) on behalf of the Labour party, although I could not help observing that he was not especially well supported by his party in the Chamber today. But for the arrival of his hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), which increased Opposition representation by at least 100 per cent., many of the hon. Gentleman's words might have been unnecessarily lost. I note that there is no representation at all from any of the other Opposition parties despite the importance of the debate.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Hayward) on his contribution to this subject. He has been hammering away and I am almost certain that in the end he will hammer successfully. I welcome his contribution as a most worthy hammer.

The hon. Member for Hammersmith made an important contribution in making us face squarely the lack of an overall policy on alcoholism. He made a thought-provoking speech. Today, however, we . . . considering not whether society should legislate to control a dangerous drug but how best to do so. In that regard, the hon. Gentleman began by reminding us that the closing hour in public houses was probably the single greatest contributory factor to crime. That focuses our attention on the whole subject of licensing hours and the need for some flexibility.

My interest in licensing, which may be known to the House, is perhaps related to the fact that I have the honour and privilege to represent the brewing centre of England. If the hon. Member for Blyth Valley (Mr. Ryman) were here, I should assure him that the brewers in my constituency pay not the lowest but the highest wages to their employees, and enjoy not the worst but the best industrial relations. I have not noticed any large contribution from the brewers to the funds of the Burton Conservative association, although I do not deny that brewers, like any other group of business men interested in the economic success of the country, make contributions to Conservative party funds.

Although I am by no means the brewers' man and consider that I represent everyone in the town, I have been impressed by the responsibility, described by the hon. Member for Hammersmith as so necessary, shown by the brewing industry — managers, entrepreneurs and industrialists—in my constituency. When I first entered the House in February 1974, we had no experience of what greater flexibility in licensing hours would mean. It was said that it would harm the nation's health and that if we provided an opportunity for people to drink more, there would be more drunkenness. It was said that we would walk the streets of Westminster, especially late at night, and find even more people reeling in the gutter. It was said that there would be enormous pressure on the police and that there would be an increase in disorder and crime. Those of us who favoured more flexible hours must have thought if we were being completely honest with ourselves that, although there were no figures and we had no experience to substantiate such theories, these things were possible.

The argument in 1974 was concentrated on what the social and economic good might be, and on considerations about freedom. Those of us who favoured increased flexibility were pretty mute about the effects of drunkenness and disorder. Before I represented the brewing centre of England, I had some experience at the Bar of licensing practice. Few of us who practised there were unaware of the fact that the rules of licensing were unfair and in some circumstances absurd, and that therefore reform was a lively issue.

Matters are different now. We have more evidence of the economic and social benefits and we have evidence of a substantial reduction in drunkenness and lawlessness in Scotland. The gloomsters, the doomsters, the killjoys and the dead-handers cannot brush off the Scottish experience. It is true that there is a recession in Scotland, but there has been a recession in England and Wales as well. It is also true that there might have been some changes in prosecution policy and that there might have been some hold-up in the courts. One could give other explanations for the reduction. No doubt these matters are being worked over carefully by the Government in their consideration of various reports, but the figures in Scotland are shattering.

We are not considering a marginal reduction of a few per cent. here or there, with margins for error or other explanations. I should like to draw the House's attention to those figures. There has been a reduction of 41 per cent. in drunkenness-linked offences in Scotland, when there has been a 9 per cent. reduction in such offences in England and Wales. Whereas, in 1979, 506 people under 18 in Scotland were charged with drunkenness, in 1983 that number had fallen to 274. The figures were 1,205 in 1979 and 600 in 1983 for those aged 18 and less than 21; 1,635 in 1979 and 1,082 in 1983 for those aged 21 and less than 30; and 8,941 in 1979 and 5,283 in 1983 for those aged between 30 and less than 60. The total of 13,628 has been reduced to 8,080 in Scotland, as opposed to a reduction in England and Wales of 117,813 in 1979 to 107,625 in 1983. Those figures cannot be brushed away by consideration of other factors.

Those who do not want flexibility in any form will say, as they have today, that we must wait and see and not take precipitate action. They say that we must not hurry along the path along which we have been hurrying so desperately for so long. Social responsibility councils are important and I do not wish for a moment to demean or diminish what they report, but they are not in favour of flexibility and we do not expect them to say that, even before the Government are fully satisfied, we should increase

[Mr. Ivan Lawrence]

flexibility. However, we expect the brewers to ask for more flexibility. We expect the British Tourist Authority, the London Tourist Board, the licensees in Scotland, England and Wales who are represented by my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham, (Mr. Couchman), the National Union of Licensed Victuallers and the National Association of Licensed House Managers to want some action.

But the people also want some action and they are not just the people in Scotland who have shown that they are satisfied with the change in the law there. The incidence of criminality and of drunkenness has abated so substantially that, even now, chief constables and senior police officers throughout the country think that the time has come for changes in the licensing law. I should like to refer to just three of them. It has already been said that the chief constable for Essex has shown his inclination by saying that the

"permitted hours certainly want bringing closer to modern times".

The chief constable of Warwickshire has said:

"I think it is a pity that successive governments have not found time to enact some of the very sensible recommendations of the Erroll Commission."

The deputy chief constable of Nottinghamshire has said: "our licensing laws are out of date . . . on the Continent you do not see the local people drunk but you will see a lot of British drunk".

It is clear that, when the police and the responsible leaders of the police say that the time has come for some mitigation of the restrictive laws of licensing, it is time for the Government seriously to examine the matter with some dispatch.

Mr. Hayward: Might I draw my hon. and learned Friend's attention to the fact that, in consultations that I have had in the past few days, I have been told that it could be argued that licensing laws should extend well past midnight for some communities which are known to operate shebeens and that it would be better for them to come within the parameters of licensing laws?

Mr. Lawrence: As my hon. Friend has made a sensible, moderate and restrained speech, it is not surprising that he has made another point which strengthens the argument for reasonable and controlled change and improvement.

I should like to deal with some of the points made by my hon. Friend the Member, for Castle Point (Sir B. Braine). He began by asking for objectivity and reasonableness. Perhaps I might preface what I want to say by observing that I have known my hon. Friend for some time. I have regarded him with the greatest admiration from the moment that I walked into this place. He is probably the pre-eminent campaigner for good causes in the House and an example to everyone. I have been with him through the night as we have debated licensing laws. He says that it is surprising that the Government have not supported change and that there have been no changes in the years that followed. It is not surprising at all. He is the reason for that. Practically single-handed, he has conducted a dedicated campaign against flexibility in our licensing laws.

That fact is reflected in today's debate. Virtually no hon. Member, not even the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley), has supported or will support my hon. Friend in his campaign to stop increased flexibility in our licensing laws. Because he has been such a splendid, dogged and persevering campaigner, he has held up the improvements in licensing flexibility which we have frequently advocated. I pay great tribute to him for that, but he should not be surprised that his wonderful campaigning zeal has met with success.

Sir Bernard Braine: I am grateful to my hon. and learned Friend for his more than generous tribute. I know that it comes straight from the heart, because we are old friends. He misunderstands me if he thinks that I am opposed to any change in licensing law. The consideration that I put to the House today, as I may well have done on previous occasions, is that, as the consumption of alcohol has doubled, so the total amount of health harm has increased. We are nowhere near the level of health harm of countries whose example we have been invited to emulate, such as France or Germany. But we must consider how far we wish to follow the path of health harm. Do we wish to go half way or the whole way to the level of France, or beyond? Should we not consider carefully the impact that any change, however slight, may have on health and efficiency in society?

Mr. Lawrence: I agree with my hon. Friend, but the Erroll committee and the Clayson committee considered these matters before making their recommendations. I am not as interested as he is in France, Germany or any other country, where the English-style public house simply does not exist and where there are different social circumstances and economies. I am interested in what we have experienced on our doorstep since my hon. Friend and I first joined battle about this matter in 1974. That is why I ask for his objectivity in considering what has happened far closer to us than what is happening on the continent.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Does my hon. and learned Friend agree that not one hon. Member today who has argued for changes in the licensing laws has argued for our adopting the French or German system? All hon. Members have argued either for the Scottish system or something short of it.

Mr. Lawrence: I accept that point, because it is precisely what has happened. We are able to look, not at the crystal ball, but at the record on our doorstep. I understand that my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point is not against any form of change or even some flexibility. My criticism is that he seeks to rely on matters which can no longer be relied on. What is happening in France is far less reliable an indicator of what we should do now than what has happened in Scotland.

My hon. Friend also relies on the report from the Royal College of Psychiatrists. Obviously he is very worried about alcohol abuse and its effect on society, but he cannot rely on reports based on statistics which existed before the changes took place in Scotland. We must be careful when we produce evidence, which seems to substantiate this, that or the other, to ensure that it is up-to-date. I am making a different type of speech from that which I made before the Scottish experience, because I can now refer to that experience.

Although I concede that there are limitations and that we must examine the matter objectively, the Scottish experience is extremely valuable. If we are anxious about alcoholism and its bad effects, there is all the more reason

to consider whether there is less alcohol abuse in Scotland, although there may be more drinking, as a result of flexible hours. We should also appreciate, as the hon. Member for Blyth Valley said — this was surprising from the Opposition, although not surprising from the hon. Gentleman, whose independence is well known—that in a free society it is not a totally acceptable argument that moderate, law-abiding and responsible people who form an overwhelming majority should have their freedom restricted because some people abuse freedoms.

That is the important point that has been proven from Scottish statistics. I shall quote more statistics because they are important when one considers crime, criminality, lawlessness and the pressure on the police. In the younger group, those under 21, in which one would expect the worst problems of disorder, there has been a reduction of 49 per cent. in drunkenness-related offences in Scotland compared with a reduction of 12 per cent. in England and Wales. Why is that so, and what has flexibility got to do with it?

There are many possible answers. It may be because the more flexible hours mean that there is not the bunching at 10.30 or 11 pm with people rushing into a pub to drink as much as possible before getting into their cars and going home to meet their wives or Maker. It may be because there is a regime in public houses of less hectic drinking, which is spread over a longer period. The atmosphere in public houses may be more civilised with more women in attendance, and circumstances surrounding drinking may be more civilised and restrained. It may be because public houses serve food so that the effects of alcohol are not so stark on the central nervous system. It may be because the atmosphere is one of mixed social goodwill rather than of aggravation, which sometimes appears in urban pubs, and there is more self-control. Those may be the reasons why flexible hours in Scotland have reduced the number of drinking-related offences. The overwhelming number of Scottish licensees think so, and, as I recall, they were once dubious about the advantages of the proposed change. Scottish people are also overwhelmingly in support of the change.

In addition to the behavioural advantages of flexibility, one third of licensees in Scotland have taken on more staff. There has been an increase of 1,500 people. If that were translated to England, it might mean an increase of 15,000 people in work in public houses. For tourism, if more hoteliers and restaurateurs were able to sell drink on a more flexible basis, the Brewers Society has, modestly, estimated that there would be an increase in employment of about 5,000, and an increase in the number employed for equipment and services. That is not a massive increase in the number of people at work, but it is substantial.

There would also undoubtedly be an improvement of services if public houses could be more economically viable and could spend more time on improving their service to the consumer.

The licensing laws which bind us are old. They are as old as the first world war, since when times have changed. The work patterns of the nation have changed. New industries such as tourism have grown up. There is more emphasis on leisure now, and there will be increasing emphasis on it. The public house is no longer the only leisure outlet. We have brought women more into activity in our society. We have given them equality. We expect them to come drinking with us in a way that was never the pattern in first world war days.

Since there has been such a change in society, let us bring our laws up to date for the 1980s. Let us at least learn from the Scottish lessons not only that greater flexibility of our licensing laws may produce economic and social benefit but, above all, that it may improve the freedom of the nation to choose and to enjoy the kind of life which our people are entitled to enjoy.

12.10 pm

Mr. Greg Knight (Derby, North): When Parliament imposes or has imposed restrictions on the public, those restrictions need justification. I think that we are entitled to ask what is the justification in 1984 for our current licensing laws.

The original restriction on the hours of pub opening was to assist in the country's efforts during the first world war. That justification has long since disappeared, and the only other argument that I have heard today in the House or in the debate outside for retaining our current system of permitted hours is that, if availability is increased and if the licensing hours of public houses are altered, we may be adding to the numbers of those members of the public who suffer with alcohol problems.

It is in that area that we need to examine the argument and see whether it holds water, and I make two points which have not been mentioned so far. The first is that, as I understand it, the advocates of change are not necessarily seeking to obtain an increase in the permitted hours in terms of the number of hours in the day. They are seeking to see that the permitted hours are more appropriate, that a public house is not closed when customers want to be served and that a licensee does not have to open at hours when there is no great demand.

The other important point to make is that with a public house one is dealing with a very controlled environment in which alcohol is consumed. For example, it is not possible for anyone in an advanced state of intoxication to be served alcohol in a pub. Landlords refuse to serve customers who are in that state. It is not possible for anyone who is being troublesome, because he is the worse for drink, to remain in a public house. Invariably he will be ejected and, if necessary, the police will be called.

Those who are concerned about alcohol abuse should turn their attention to the matter touched upon by the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley), who spoke of the other alcohol outlets currently in existence. It is strange to hear it argued that we should retain the current permitted hours because of the fear of alcohol abuse, when all that someone who wishes to drink need do as soon as he is refused drink in a pub, either because the landlord has called time or because he deems that that person should not have any more to drink, is go to the nearest off-licence or supermarket and buy as much alcohol as he wants.

As the hon. Member for Hammersmith said, the problem is that, invariably, in a supermarket no judgment is made by the person serving the alcohol about whether the customer is in a state of intoxication. I have seen supermarkets quickly serve a customer who was obviously drunk to get him out of the place. They have not made the judgment that a licensee would make, decided that the person was not fit to have more to drink and refused him service. Those who are worried about an increase in alcohol problems are directing their concern at the wrong area. Nothing that I have heard today and no argument that I have heard outside has convinced me that there is any great danger in allowing pub landlords greater flexibility.

[Mr. Greg Knight]

Oddly enough, we do not have to look far from these shores, to the Channel Islands, Scotland, Ulster and even the Isle of Wight during Cowes week, where people are allowed to purchase alcohol in public houses at most hours of the day. It has not led to increased problems on the streets and an increase in offences of drunkenness.

But flexible hours are only one issue. My hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Hayward) referred briefly to clubs. I wish to discuss the present law on clubs and the experiences of one cricket club in the midlands.

I have no interest to declare. I do not follow the sport of cricket; it is much too fast-moving for my taste. But the Leicestershire county cricket club has been able for more than 30 years to serve alcohol to its patrons during cricket matches. Over that period of 30 years there has never been any suggestion that the club has broken the law or that it was not running the licensed bar in a proper manner, and it has never been necessary to call the police because of riots outside or inside the ground due to drunkenness, as I am sure the local police will confirm.

After supplying alcohol for 30 years, this year, without warning, the cricket club was refused a licence and it has not been able, following its practice for this long period, to serve alcohol to its patrons during all cricket matches.

That has not happened because of a sudden change in the law. Perhaps there has been some other change. Could it be that in Leicester there is a new clerk to the justices or a different constitution of the licensing committee or a different police inspector with responsibility for licensing matters? Those are the only possibilities which could account for the odd, and some would say perverse, decision by the Leicester bench this year not to grant the cricket club its usual special licences.

This is an area of law which I ask my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary to look at in the not-too-distant future. Quite apart from the need for more flexible hours of opening, there is confusion and worry about what is a special occasion. The High Court has attempted to provide guidelines — in my view, not with a great deal of success. One recent case, Regina *v.* Metropolitan Police Commissioner, ex parte Maynard, made an attempt. In that case, the judge said that for an extension of permitted hours under section 74(4) an applicant must establish that the occasion upon which the application is based is a special occasion; secondly, that it is related to a national or local event; and, thirdly, that those who are to benefit by the extension of hours will be participating in some form or other.

The subject of that case was an application by a cinema owner who wanted to serve alcohol during the showing of a closed-circuit television presentation of the welterweight boxing championship of the world, taking place in America. The judge said that there was no element of participation and it was not a national or local event.

That has not satisfactorily clarified the law. What would happen on a similar occasion when a British athlete was taking part, as for instance on an occasion such as the World Cup? The courts are in some doubt as to what the law is. It cannot be a satisfactory state of affairs to allow that to continue.

Two years ago in Derbyshire, some 14 clubs were obliged to go dry for a time, not because they had broken the licensing law or because they had had problems which necessitated the attention of the police, but merely because those responsible for running the clubs had forgotten to post an application by a certain date. Is that a satisfactory state of affairs?

I understand that the organisation and methods branch of the Home Office is engaged in a survey involving a sample of magistrates courts, mainly with a view to establishing the scale of fees that would recover administrative costs. I understand that it has been suggested that, for new on or off-licences, the fee should rise from £12·50 to £125, and for the issue of a private members club registration certificate the fee should rise from £6·50 to £125. I hope that that review will also look generally at the working of the law. As I understand it, although courts have the power to grant club registration certificates for up to 10 years, since 1982 some decision seems to have been taken, perhaps by the Justices Clerks Association, that those certificates should be restricted to three years. Although Parliament has said that the courts can grant certificates for 10 years, for some reason the magistrates now seem to be creating extra work for themselves. Should licensees and clubs have to bear the cost of that extra work? Without over-egging the pudding, our licensing law is in a mess and many archaic provisions need looking at with some urgency. Twelve years ago, the Erroll report recommended drastic changes which are not necessarily being advocated today. Many of my hon. Friends have said that, by and large, public demand and the views of the trade could be accommodated by a smaller change than is suggested by the Erroll report.

I know that the Government have taken it upon themselves as a major policy task to review unnecessary restrictions, red tape and bureaucracy. Apart from looking at other areas such as the shops legislation, our licensing law needs to be looked at urgently because of the sense of injustice and frustration that is felt not ony by customers but by those who need to operate within the law and to apply to the courts for extensions from time to time. The law is not satisfactory, and I hope that the Government will give some commitment to review it at the earliest possible opportunity.

12.23 pm

Mr. James Hill (Southampton, Test): This has been a most interesting debate so far. I want to recall to the memory of the House the private Member's Bill that I managed, more by luck than judgment, to get through both Houses — the Licensed Premises (Exclusion of Certain Persons) Act 1980. That Bill simply dealt with excessive drunkenness which led to vandalism and which could lead to violence in public houses.

The Bill provided that a man who had been arrested for violence in a public house would be brought before the magistrates and made subject to an exclusion order, banning him from the public house in which he created the damage, or from a series of public houses in that area. If he appeared again in that public house or series of public houses, the landlord could still serve him drinks but, on receipt of a simple telephone call, the police would then be at liberty to enter the public house and take him into custody. He could then be charged the next day and a further exclusion order, a fine of up to £200 or, in the most severe cases, a custodial sentence of up to two months could be imposed.

I want to remind the Home Office of that Act because, in the main, magistrates are not using it in the manner in which it was intended. It is not pertinent for publicans to

have to go before the magistrates before they will serve an exclusion order. It is implicit in the Act that the magistrate has the power to exclude such people and I hope that a guideline will be sent out by the Home Office re-emphasising what I think is an important piece of private Member's legislation.

It has been a theme of the debate that magistrates in many areas—it does depend on the area—are most reluctant to grant exceptional licensing hours for whatever cause. I mentioned in an intervention earlier the horror felt in the city of Southampton which had been chosen to host the international fair of the tall ships. A local club owner wished to set up in a medieval square in the centre of Southampton a continental-style bar with umbrellas outside, where wine could be served between 3 pm and 5 pm. That would seem to all hon. Members to be perfectly reasonable. It was an international event, which attracted nearly 1·5 million people to the city of Southampton. That club owner was trying to create a more holiday like appearance in the city but his application was turned down out of hand. It was said that he could have appealed to the courts but there is never time for that. The magistrates made their decision and there was no time for the club owner to appeal.

I hope that a second guideline will go out to the magistrates from the Lord Chancellor's Department asking them to be flexible in agreeing to special events. I do not doubt that many a Conservative dinner dance breaks the law from time to time by not having a licence to serve drinks. Today's debate provides us with an opportunity to re-emphasise such points. I hope that the Minister will give many of us a satisfactory reply.

12.28 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Mellor): We have had a thoughtful and lively debate. Some people seem to think that a thoughtful debate must be dull, but they would not think so if they had listened to today's debate. It is true that it has not been as well attended as some might have hoped, but the speeches have been of a uniformly high standard, and I am glad to have a chance to make my own contribution.

During my five and a half years in the House I have detected increasing pressure for change. It is therefore right that we should have the opportunity to discuss the issues today, and I am accordingly grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Hayward), who spoke with great eloquence and good sense. He was too modest to tell us, but for the past week or two he has been suffering from a very painful and debilitating eye condition which makes it difficult for him to read. Notwithstanding that handicap, he made an eloquent speech and our appreciation of it must be even greater knowing the difficulties under which it was made.

It is invidious to name names after I have genuinely welcomed the debate and have thoroughly enjoyed listening to all the speeches that have been made, but it would be wrong not to point to my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Sir B. Braine). In a very full public life he has devoted himself to the cause of alcohol and alcohol policy. Even if from time to time we disagreed with some of his points, he spoke in a way that we all respect, because we recognise that that is a view that needs to be heard and considered—and it will be.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman) was right to point to the importance of people with expertise in the trade being available to advise the House. He spoke of his own expertise, which is considerable. Again, I think that we all enjoyed and needed the professionalism that he brought to his contribution. One noticeable thing about this new Parliament is the breadth of experience now represented on the Benches on both sides of the Chamber. I am sure that it adds to our ability to wrestle with some of these difficult issues. They may not be the biggest issues to which the Government have to address themselves, but they are difficult.

No hon. Member made that point more clearly than the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley). However he had spoken today, I was going to say that I very much welcomed him to his new responsibilities. Indeed, this is the first opportunity that I have had to welcome him. I particularly welcome him in the light of his speech, which was of striking eloquence. It was not necessary to agree with every inference that he drew to feel that what he had to say was of the first importance. His speech was plainly based on great experience and thoughtfulness arising from his work as a probation officer and the specialist work that he has done in dealing with the consequences of alcohol abuse and pressing for the need for alcohol education. He made a very important and worthwhile contribution, and I am sure that I was not alone in enjoying it. It gave rise to thoughts that make me unashamed of the fact that I shall be unable to resolve some of the issues raised today.

A considerable area remains for continued debate and thought, but the debate has revolved around the question of flexible opening hours. I do not criticise it for that. At a later stage there may well be a case for a more full-scale debate on overall alcohol policy. Such a debate would not involve me so much as my colleagues at the Department of Health and Social Security, but if someone were minded to stimulate such a debate I am sure that it would be very worth while.

I do not seek to criticise my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood if I say that he chose to fix his gaze on a narrower point, because ultimately very few of us in any area of policy can make a great march forward on all fronts, tackling every problem at a stroke. I know that those who called for that did not intend it to be so, but it is often a good argument for delay to suggest that everything must be tackled at once. Very few subjects are susceptible of that treatment, but provided that the surrounding facts permit it, I can see no objection to moving forward on this one front if the arguments lead in that direction. A piecemeal approach is not to be condemned in what is essentially the practical job of regulating regulations.

Particular attention has been focused on the provisions of the Licensing Act 1964, which governs permitted opening hours of on-licence premises in England and Wales. My hon. Friends the Members for Kingswood and for Gillingham, together with my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence) and others, focused on the licensed trade's view that public houses as we know them will not survive unless licensees can vary opening hours to meet demand. I have considerable sympathy with those views. The Home Office receives many representations from local licensed victuallers' associations, restaurants and hotels, the leisure and entertainment industry and from hon. Members telling us

[Mr. David Mellor]

that the time is now right for change. Indeed, there are more people now saying that than ever before in my experience. I accept, however, that my experience is more limited than that of my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point.

We have also received representations from those who hold the opposite view and fear that any liberalisation of the law will lead to an increase in the already high incidence of alcoholism and alcohol abuse. Both sides of the argument will be heard and debated when we consider whether, and how, our licensing laws should be revised.

In support of the call for longer or more flexible hours reference is constantly made — and has been this morning — to the recommendation of the Erroll committee, which published a report in 1972 suggesting that licensed premises should be allowed to open between 10 am and midnight without an afternoon break.

We have heard that the catering, entertainment and tourist industries believe that our restricted hours seriously interfere with their conduct of business. Many hon. Members have said that the extended opening hours in Scotland, brought about by the Licensing (Scotland) Act 1976, have led, not to increased drunkenness, but to more responsible and leisurely drinking.

The essential difference between the English and Scottish provisions on permitted hours lies in the discretion given in Scotland to the licensing authority to vary the general permitted hours of opening. The prescribed hours of opening in both countries are broadly similar. They allow public houses to open on weekdays between 11 am and 10.30 pm or 11 pm with a break of two and a half hours in the afternoon. The hours on Sundays are shorter, but broadly the same.

As has constantly been said, in England and Wales the power of the licensing justices to grant regular extensions is tightly circumscribed. As a general rule, early morning and afternoon extensions may be granted only in the vicinity of markets, and extensions beyond the evening terminal hour are available only where the sale of drink is ancillary to the provision of food or music and dancing.

Some special arrangements are permitted and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Derby, North (Mr. Knight) rightly says, that gives rise to bitter controversy. An example of that is the regrettable problems that have arisen with the Leicestershire county cricket club. It is a case that illustrates that hard cases make bad law. I hope that the people of Leicester, all of whom surely have an interest in the maintenance of a successful and profitable cricket club, will come together and reach a sensible conclusion. That was certainly the wish that I expressed when, a few months ago, I met a deputation of hon. Members from both sides of the House and representatives of the city of Leicester and of Leicestershire generally.

In contrast to England, the licensing boards in Scotland have, since 1976, had a much wider discretion and can grant extensions for any part of the day in respect of individual premises if they consider that desirable. As we have heard, that power has been widely used to permit Scottish public houses to open during the afternoon break and late at night, especially in the larger towns and cities. I am pleased to accept that the first indications—and this has been borne out by speeches today—of the effects of the 1976 legislation have been encouraging. The forecasts that longer opening hours in Scotland would result in dramatic increases in drunkenness and drink-driving offences have proved to be inaccurate. Instead, the available statistics point to no significant adverse effects.

I must, however, add a note of caution. It would be dangerous to assume that the reduction in drunkenness offences north of the border is attributable directly and specifically to the change in the licensing laws. As the hon. Member for Hammersmith said, other factors may be at work. It is important that we should look at all the available evidence and not simply at selective statistics which, at face value, appear to prove a case one way or another. The balance of the statistics appears to the casual reader to go in the direction that the majority of hon. Members have suggested.

When advocating, as I do, the need for a word of caution, I must point out that convictions for being drunk and disorderly do not necessarily tell the whole story. A factor which I have not heard mentioned this morning is the increasing practice of prosecuting authorities—it is one which the Home Office applauds—to caution rather than to bring those accused of drunkenness before the courts. That factor needs to be borne in mind when we consider any alleged drop in the number of those who are drunk and disorderly in our streets.

It seems that there is no one fact yet known which is conclusive. It is not escapism to say that there is a need to look further. When emotions are raised, as they so plainly are in this debate, we need to bear in mind that not all the facts adduced are necessarily open to only one interpretation.

I think of the famous temperance lecturer, the high point of whose address against the demon drink was to produce at the right moment a glass which she filled with water and then another glass which she filled with gin. From a pocket came a matchbox containing two worms. With a theatrical flourish one worm was dropped in the water and the other in the gin. Both worms wriggled for a while and predictably enough the one in the gin expired rather more quickly than the one in the water. Just as it did so she pointed to the sky and asked, with a dramatic gesture of which even my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point would be proud, "What does this prove?" At that point someone at the back, perhaps more like my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood, said, "If you have worms, drink gin." Statistics can be dangerous and on present evidence I do not think that a case has been made out fully one way or the other.

I have been asked again this morning to consider the Erroll committee's report. One of the main reasons why the committee's recommendation to introduce longer opening hours has not been implemented is the concern of successive Governments that the various indicators of alcohol misuse continue to rise significantly. Concern about this growth has over the years prompted a number of influential bodies to examine the problem in detail and to consider ways of controlling it. I shall give one or two examples. In 1977 the Expenditure Committee, in its report on preventative medicine, and the Advisory Committee on Alcoholism, stressed that extreme caution should be taken over any relaxation of the licensing laws. In 1979 a special committee of the Royal College of Psychiatrists urged that there should be no further relaxation of the broad range of licensing provisions.

The obstacle in the past — my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point and the hon. Member for Hammersmith have made it clear that it still remains—

was the serious problems caused by alcohol misuse. In the very week that the British Medical Association has held a conference on alcoholism, it would be wrong if I were not to say that some disturbing and troubling statistics have been given. Professor Kendell, professor of psychiatry at the Royal Edinburgh hospital, was quoted in the newspapers as saying that there was "abundant evidence" that the ill effects of drink were linked to consumption. Between 1950 and 1976, British annual consumption of pure alcohol per head almost doubled from 5·2 litres to 9·7 litres. Drunkenness convictions doubled, deaths from liver cirrhosis increased by 60 per cent. and hospital admissions for alcoholism increased by some 2,500 per cent. Professor Alan Maynard, professor of health economics at York university, claimed that the social cost of alcohol abuse from sickness absence, unemployment, treatment costs to the NHS, accidents and crime was an absolute minimum of £1·6 billion a year. He said that premature deaths from alcohol-related disease and accidents were between 5,000 and 8,000 a year.

We do not have to accept all those statistics as being wholly accurate, or the last word on the matters to which they relate, to recognise that the problem of alcohol in our society is one to which we must all give careful consideration, not least when we are planning any change in the law.

Sir Bernard Braine: We need not accept that the statistics reflect the position exactly, but will my hon. Friend concede that they show a worsening position over the years?

Mr. Mellor: I am sure that there is no doubt that the problem of alcoholism has been worsening year after year. We must ask ourselves whether changing the licensing laws would make any difference. The hon. Member for Hammersmith identified certain problems that are bound to be caused when a socially acceptable drug is at large in the community.

That takes me back to the point that I made earlier, which I think commanded some support. Provided that one were satisfied that the indicators of alcohol abuse would not be altered by a change in the licensing laws and thereby made worse, there would be no reason why a responsible Government could not make progress or allow progress to be made. We must be careful to ensure that we have the proper indicators to enable that decision to be taken.

I am sorry that the hon. Member for Blyth Valley (Mr. Ryman) is not in the Chamber. As ever, he was provocative in his statements. There was a great deal of sense in his contribution, which was strongly backed up by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton. We must not consider just whether we should look at the effects of alcohol abuse on people's health and the cost thereby caused to the community. I am troubled, as is the hon. Member for Hammersmith—we have looked at the same figures and considered the same cases — at the impact of drink on crime. We are all scarred by our experiences, some of which we would rather not have had, but we have to profit from them. Just as, I suspect, the hon. Member for Hammersmith is scarred and troubled by his consideration of crimes of violence when sitting in court and seeing the disinhibiting effect of alcohol—in many cases it has a gross effect—so I am troubled, after 18 months in the Home Office, by reading a dozen files a week on murderers and life sentence prisoners and noting the impact of alcohol on them.

The hon. Member for Hammersmith gave a cautious estimate that alcohol was involved in 50 per cent. of murder cases. I seldom read a file in which the influence of alcohol is not pointed out as a material factor in the crime. Even allowing for the fact—the hon. Member for Blyth Valley made this point only too clearly — that some people will want to touch up the effect of the impact of alcohol to minimise their criminality in the alleged offences, I am still deeply troubled by the number of crimes of violence actuated by drink. Some argue that if drink had not been consumed people would not have behaved in a particular way. I think that some people are predisposed to violence, come what may. It seems that the ability that some people have to resist violence is reduced by alcohol, and that is a problem.

Equally, one notes the effect of throwing people who have been in pubs out on to the streets. They then go to fast-food restaurants, queue up and become argumentative about their place in the queue. The number of acts of serious violence occurring during the period immediately after the pubs close might show — a number of experienced police officers have said this to me—that a more phased removal of people from places of drink to their homes might reduce, not increase, crime.

That is why I unashamedly say to the House that there are pointers going both ways. No hon. Member can stand up in this debate and say that there are not perfectly valid reasons for standing on either side. This is not one of those black and white issues. If we could be assured that longer opening hours would not lead to an increased incidence of alcoholism and alcohol-related problems, our way ahead would be much clearer. That is why we are taking care to observe the effects of permitted hours in Scotland and why I do not apologise to my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point for the fact that that experience has been available for eight years. Eight years is not that long a period during which to assess the long-term changes.

If, as we hope, the report of the carefully commissioned survey undertaken by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland into the effects of the 1976 legislation is available by next summer, we shall have taken a material step forward. The survey is being conducted by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys. It will follow the line of those undertaken in Scotland between 1976 and 1978, of which some details have been mentioned. It will be possible, building on that earlier careful research, to compare the results and have a better idea of what trends have emerged. Although the trends might be clearer, it is likely that, as with the temperance lecturer who made what she believed was a clear argument, much might be open to another view.

Mr. Lawrence: It would be most helpful, apart from concentrating the mind, if my hon. Friend could say when he believes the Government can introduce recommendations based on those studies.

Mr. Mellor: I cannot predict that. I shall develop the Government's line on this, and if my hon. and learned Friend will bear with me I shall tell him as much as I can today, although I suspect that it may not be as much as he would wish. I have tried to show why it would be difficult for anyone to do that at present.

It would be foolhardy to predict the results of the survey, but it may make the approach clearer and may convince not only the Government but those who, for

[Mr. Mellor]

perfectly reputable reasons, are opposed to flexible hours that it is safe to contemplate the relaxation of our laws. I should be happy if that were the case, but such an important change can be based only on a firm foundation of evidence, not on a wish and a prayer.

There are further complications. Although it is true that the licensed trade in general favours greater flexibility of opening hours, sections of the trade favour different systems of flexibility. Not all support the adoption of the Scottish system, and some view with alarm the prospect of running a pub for 12 or more hours a day without a break. Others favour flexibility within the present maximum of nine or nine and a half opening hours on weekdays, leaving the choice of hours to the licensee. There are some who wish the law to be revised on the lines proposed by Erroll, thus enabling licensees to open at any time of their choice between 10 am and midnight. My hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood conceded that there was no unanimity in the trade.

The licensed traders and associations representing hotels and restaurants are considering how the law should be amended; not just saying that they agree that the law should be amended. I hope — if my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham is involved my hope may become an expectation — that at the end of their deliberations they will reach a unanimous view which they can demonstrate has widespread support. As so often in the past on other issues, the trade has weakened the impact of its proposals because it appears to be hopelessly divided on key issues. To coin a phrase, a public house divided against itself cannot stand — *[Interruption.]* I am glad that the hon. Member for Blaydon (Mr. McWilliam) entered the Chamber to hear that, which will have given him some pleasure.

In deference to the arguments advanced by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton, may I say that the views of others involved in the present arrangements must be carefully considered. Licensing justices have wide responsibilities and great experience of the law, so their views must be taken into account. My hon. and learned Friend was right to mention the police, who have to enforce the law. They have a view which I should like to see more focused. So far we have had helpful, but spasmodic, indications from one or two distinguished policemen. It would be helpful to know the overall view of the police, particularly on sensitive matters such as the impact on crime.

Mr. Soley: I accept many of the points that the Minister has made about the problem of getting agreement among the various groups involved. However, I should be more encouraged if he would agree that that division between the groups shows the need for an alcohol policy. The thrust for such a policy must come from the Government, because it will not be pressed in a coherent way by outside groups.

Mr. Mellor: It would be unfair to say that the Government do not have an alcohol policy. However, we do not have the feeling of omniscience which perhaps comes more readily to others. We do not feel that, by taking the reins in our own hands, we can solve some fairly deep-seated social difficulties that may affect only a small minority, but are deeply troubling.

A shoemaker must stick to his last, and my job is to discuss the licensing laws. I try to set them in context and to take an informed and educated view of the overall alcoholism problem. The sort of debate which the hon. Member for Hammersmith has in mind cannot take place in the absence of Ministers from the DHSS, who have to make provision for the impact on our health system of growing abuse of alcohol. I do not say that there is no answer to the point made by the hon. Gentleman, but perhaps this is not the forum for it. It would be no bad thing if the House broadened the debate and allowed the various views to be canvassed.

To sum up, there is no irremediable obstacle to changing the law on opening hours. The case for change has many sympathisers within the Government, but there are two reasons why we have no immediate plans to introduce legislation to revise the present permitted opening hours. First, we need to be satisfied that longer or more flexible hours will not have harmful consequences. The evidence is not yet available, but I hope that it will be before long. The key is to establish that flexible hours would be at least neutral in relation to alcohol abuse. To move before we are satisfied of that would not be responsible or sensible.

Secondly, there is no obvious agreement on what system of flexibility should be adopted in England and Wales. As I said before, the door to change is not bolted and barred; it stands enticingly ajar.

12.58 pm

Mr. Hayward: By leave of the House, I shall reply to the debate. I thank my hon. Friend the Minister for his comments and particularly for what he said about the problem that I have experienced in the past week and a half. I assure the House that my blurred vision has nothing to do with excessive consumption of alcohol. It is caused by an eye infection. That problem has made preparing for the debate more difficult than it might have been; it has been particularly difficult to read, for example, the counter-arguments that have been put so ably by my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Sir B. Braine).

I know what difficulties arise from excessive alcohol consumption. My hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point and the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley) made clear the difficulties that this country, the western world and eastern Europe face from excessive alcohol consumption.

I was surprised that no reference was made in the debate to the fact that excessive consumption of alcohol may be partly attributable to people's increased affluence. They can now direct parts of their income towards leisure and social activities that they were previously not able to enjoy. In that connection, I referred to shops and supermarkets, and as much as anything else increased affluence is a reason for the increase in alcoholism.

It is important to recognise that at no stage in the debate has any hon. Member — I am not intentionally misinterpreting my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point—said that he is against some form of change in the licensing laws in England and Wales. Many hon. Members said that they wished that more Members had been present for the debate. It is significant that there have been no contributions from Scottish Members of Parliament to say that what the House did in 1976 was wrong. At the end of the debate in 1976, my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor), then

representing Glasgow, Cathcart, said that, while he opposed the measure, he hoped that he would be proved wrong in his experience. Comments have been made for and against in terms of the statistics available, but it is significant that no Scottish Members of Parliament have told us that what the Chamber did in 1976 was wrong.

Mr. John McWilliam (Blaydon): I had not intended to intervene. I am not a Scottish Member of Parliament, but a Scot who is a Member of Parliament. I was a member of the Edinburgh licensing court at that time and have had some interest in the problem. There would be great resistance, particularly from the police, if there were any attempt in Scotland to go back to what is now the situation in England, because the incidence of "drunk and uncatchable", as we used to call it, has dropped significantly since the opening up of the licensing laws in Scotland.

Mr. Hayward: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that contribution, which is particularly important given the experience that he cited. I also referred to the experience of the Glasgow licensing authorities. However, as my hon. Friend the Minister said, the evidence needs to be carefully analysed. I hope that what I have heard today—as with statistics, it is always a matter of interpretation—shows that there would be no reasonable barrier to introducing legislation, even if the statistics proved neutral. I hope that that means that some legislation will be put before the House in the next parliamentary Session of 1985-86.

At the same time, I also hope that at some stage the House will have the opportunity to debate alcohol policy, as the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley) said. A long time before I came to the House, I had the opportunity of listening to the hon. Gentleman talking about alcoholism at St. Andrew's hospital in Northampton. I recognise the authority with which he speaks on this subject, and his many years of involvement.

As the Minister did, we should recognise the growing pressure for change outside the House. We should recognise that the current anomalies need change and that there will always remain statistics about which we can argue. My hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point referred to a series of statistics, many of which I am well aware of—in fact, I have read the book from which he quoted. However, he did not show that, although many of the problems were caused because people consumed alcohol in pubs, many others were caused late at night, probably as a result of alcohol bought and consumed elsewhere. That is an important factor to bear in mind.

In seeking to withdraw my motion, I hope and believe that it would be worthwhile, in everyone's interest in England and Wales, if a Bill were brought forward in the next Session of 1985-86. I say that in the knowledge that, at whatever stage of the debate I had withdrawn the motion, we, unlike the rest of the population, would be able to adjourn for a drink. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion, by leave, withdrawn.

North Devon (Regional Aid)

1.4 pm

Mr. Tony Speller (Devon, North): I beg to move,

That the House accepts the need for regional aid in north Devon.

Having been a Member of the House for six years, I find it a rare privilege to be answered by a Minister who entered the House at the same time and a particular pleasure for me that it is the Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, my hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Mr. Trippier). We have much in common in that we both come from areas devastated by the economic depression, neither of which has been helped by the Government's latest round of cuts in assisted area status. I know, therefore, that I have a sympathetic audience in the Minister even if there are not many other people here.

Of all the unkind cuts made by the Government, perhaps the unkindest of all is the treatment of areas such as north Devon. I do not suggest that north Devon is somehow strange or different from other areas—I find it beautiful and nicer than other parts of the country—but it shares the problem of lack of infrastructure with many areas in the south-west and other areas on the periphery of this country.

First, I must congratulate the Lobby correspondent of the *Western Morning News*, who managed to predict with about 95 per cent. accuracy the contents of the Government's statement a week before it was made. That was useful in that we were forewarned—although we were not, alas, forearmed, as the Government have the arms. Nevertheless, it is a continuing source of aggravation to Back Benchers that our friends and advisers in the press always seem to be able to obtain information that we lack, whether it be a matter of a few hours earlier, which I understand, or a matter of days, which I do not accept.

Interestingly, I have a question on the Order Paper today for a priority written reply in relation to flooding a few days ago in north Devon. Flood works will be deeply affected by the loss of assisted area status because the half of Barnstaple still to be protected will lose the possibility of grant from the EEC. My question was a simple one about flood warnings and I gather that a reply is now hastening to me from the corridors of power across the way to those occupied by this somewhat frustrated Back Bench Member to the effect that my question will be answered "as soon as possible"—presumably, once this debate is over and I have made various points about the problems of areas such as north Devon.

The people of north Devon do not hold out a begging bowl and do not expect their Member of Parliament to do so, but I wish to describe some of the problems that already exist and some of those which will occur as a result of the grievous changes made by the Government.

Until 1979, the whole of my constituency had development area or special development area status. I was happy to be elected in that year. Since then we have lost, first, development area status and now assisted area status. It would be unreasonable to expect my constituents not to see a connection from the fact that there was a change of Government and then a change in status for the area. I join them in that feeling.

In July this year, I received a letter from the Under-Secretary of State for Employment, my hon. Friend the

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Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mr. Clark). With his usual courtesy, bless him, he notified me that the towns of Barnstaple and Ilfracombe were to be merged for the purposes of unmployment figures. Unemployment in Ilfracombe rises to more than 35 per cent. at some times of the year and in the current year has not fallen below 20 per cent. At present, it is a rather sad seaside town, with no railway connection and no decent road connection with the areas from which tourists come. For example, it takes longer to drive from Ilfracombe to Gawick than to fly from Gatwick to Majorca.

There are problems of distance and lack of infrastructure. Nevertheless, development area status has not merely been reduced to intermediate area status—it has been taken away altogether. I mention my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Employment because Plymouth, where unemployment is lower than in north Devon, has retained assisted status. That is good luck for Plymouth. I note from the current unemployment figures, a copy of which I received today, that whereas unemployment increased by two in my hon. Friend's constituency last month, it increased by 258 in mine. Plymouth, an excellent city of which I am extremely fond, has good roads, inter-city rail, an airport and a seaport. With its two additional unemployed, for whom I am truly sorry, it is to retain area status. My part of the world has higher unemployment, no decent roads, a passing railway service, no airport and no seaport and has lost its status. It is not difficult to understand the Government's logic —it is physically impossible.

What employer or what man setting up a factory in my part of the world will say, "I will opt for north Devon because the area is good"—it is good—"because it is beautiful"—it is beautiful—"because it has a good coastline"—it has a beautiful coastline—when roads, rail and infrastructure it has not? "No," he will say—and I do not blame him—"I will go to Plymouth, where I can get some assistance and where the infrastructure can be improved by the use of European development funds." I must tell the Government, through my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, that I have decided on a one-man strike against EEC legislation. If north Devon is no longer to receive EEC funds, the hon. Member for Devon, North will no longer attend the House after midnight as we go through the several litres, metres or kilos of documents. I rather look forward to that because it is the only silver lining that I have seen in a black and bitter week.

I am not singling out Plymouth—I shall pick on other areas. When I look around the United Kingdom I see the destruction of many industrial areas. That destruction is largely self-inflicted. I am sorry for my friends in the midlands and am glad that they now have some recognition, but I must observe that they had a motor cycle industry, a motor car industry and many others. They no longer have them. That is not my fault but, frankly, it may well have been theirs. I am glad that areas such as Merseyside are getting assistance, but they refused the container ships and their problems are largely of their own making.

That is not the case in the west country. We have had our industrial revolution. It was the change from the days of my youth when every parish and village was full of farm people—people who worked on farms and people who worked in firms that supplied farms. A Devonshire village now has no farmers, as farmers live on the farm. It has very few farm labourers, because there are very few farm labourers. It has the second home, which is usually empty and not contributing greatly to the rates, the commuter, who is welcome, and the retired who have come to live among us and create new industry. They are also welcome arrivals.

We did not complain, cry and seek aid because agriculture went through the trauma of losing almost all its labour. Ever now, agriculture, probably the most efficient industry in Britain, has been hit by the imposition of milk quotas. I realise that this is not the time or the place to deal with agricultural matters, but it is fair to mention them when considering development areas. Areas such as Devonshire and parts of Cornwall, Dorset and Hampshire have lost considerably recently because of agricultural problems arising from population and, now, milk quotas. I do not doubt that such areas will lose later because of other quotas. However, we have not hung out the begging bowl. We have got used to things and got on with life.

We can only get on with things, however, when there is something physical to get on with. I have mentioned our industrial revolution and the depopulation of the countryside, but there are many more factors. Our part of the world inevitably has the problem of the Good Lord and water. Three months ago I was joining my constituents in prayers for rain. One week ago I visited some of the 400 homes in Barnstaple, Ilfracombe, Lynton and Instow, where I live, where we had floods. I know that the Government have no control over rain, although successive Ministers have paraded around in that connection. I hope never again to see my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow), the Minister with special responsibility for rain, doing his "Singing in the Rain" act with a damp umbrella on a cracked desert masquerading as a reservoir. If we are to have reservoirs, we have to have cash. If we are to have cash, a quantity of it must come from European funds. If we lose status, we lose access to those funds. I took the trouble recently to talk to the various county and district council authorities.

Water is always a problem with us. I appeal to the Government to remove the restrictions on the external financing limits, at least for the South-West water authority.Our charges for water services may increase by 10 per cent. this year. They will not increase by the expected figure of inflation or less, which the water authority sought, but by 10 per cent. or more because of Government restrictions on new works which the authorities need to do. The South-West water authority must raise the cash for investment in essential new works, such as flood prevention schemes and the Roadford reservoir, directly from charges. In other words, we must finance reservoirs and flood protection schemes on a year-on-year basis. No industrial system finances from current income works which will last 50 or 100 years, yet we must do that.

Not only are many vital new works and improvements required, but there are the requirements of European Community directives and part II of the Control of Pollution Act 1974. Those of us who are strong conservationists are aware of the almost total absence of good control on pollution in rivers and estuaries. The

Government place the responsibility for all such matters on the water authorities, which are then denied the finance for the work.

In the parish of Lappford, I experienced the ultimate humiliation of a Member of Parliament. People told me that the water pressure was not sufficiently high. As an ex-member of the water authority, I was happy to go to my friends there and ask them to increase the pressure. The water authority did so, and the pipes burst. Such are the problems when one applies a palliative or a piece of Elastoplast to a wound that requires surgery.

The Government decide how we shall pay for things. With 400 homes flooded and perhaps £100,000-worth of goods damaged in the Mill road area of Barnstaple, the water authority tells me that it receives no regional aid from Government because public bodies are excluded from the programme, and that only areas designated by the Government as regional aid areas are treated by the EC as appropriate areas for EC regional development fund grants. The following day, my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont) made his statement, which said, "Sorry, you no longer have access to these grants".

Because the Government have decided to reduce the number of areas in the south-west which at present are designated assisted areas, the amount of grant which we can receive from the EC will also be reduced. At present, the amount from the regional development fund allows the South-West water authority to increase the level of its capital investment programme above that which it would otherwise be able to spend—that is, within the level of the external financing limit fixed by the Government. If the EC grants are reduced and there is no corresponding increase from the Government—which is what I am asking for—the authority must reduce the level of its capital programme and my constituents will continue to suffer from floods. Their answer will be that it is the Government's fault. That is indeed the truth. It is time that the Government realised that all the petty faults together build a massive fault which may crack the foundations of the Government, not of the water authority.

North Devon, which is a large rural constituency, has one mile of dual carriageway. It is a nice piece of dual carriageway outside an industrial estate. It was built when we induced manufacturers to come to our area with the promise of roads. I now pay tribute to the Government, perhaps for the only time in the debate, and especially to my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Mrs. Chalker), who hopes to speed up the north Devon link road construction. I am grateful to her. She is a Minister who clearly understands the problems of hon. Members on the periphery. I trust that she will not need EC money to complete the road. If so, we shall then have the marvellous example of 20 miles of motorway going towards South Molton and a few miles from Bideford towards Barnstaple, with a great gap in between.

At present, it is not possible for a bus or a heavy duty lorry to drive from the motorway at Tiverton or Exeter to my constituency at Barnstaple without breaking the law. The vehicle is so big that it must cross the centre line, and the centre line is a solid line. What is the driver to say when the police stop him for crossing the line and his vehicle is wider than half the width of what is laughingly described as an A road? I have A roads—the A361, for example—which anywhere else in the country would be B or even unclassified roads.

We have a rail link from Exeter to Barnstaple, but no longer a link from Barnstaple to Bideford. The bit between Bideford and Barnstaple would have made and would still make a most beautiful extension to the national coastal footpath. Once past the Somerset and north Cornwall coastline there is a gap between the Braunton area and Bideford. Sadly, the railway line is no longer used, but the Countryside Commission, using Devon county council as its agent and using money obtained in this case by means of a grant under the derelict land arrangements, intended to purchase and turn what at present is a disused railway line into an attractive walkway and cycle path for the benefit of the public. We do not know whether we shall get it now. I doubt it, and I suspect that my doubts will be realised.

Earlier in my remarks I made a brief mention of Ilfracombe, that delightful but somewhat downcast town. It has high unemployment. It has two or three good firms and I know that my hon. Friend knows the good ones that we have and that we seek to keep. With the help of a harbour development group of local citizens, North Devon district council and Devon county council, I have been working for two years to try to get a form of development scheme which would improve the harbour and produce a marina. There is no safe harbour along the north Somerset, north Devon and north Cornwall coastline. One is needed, but harbour developments in an area with a low rateable value inevitably need cash from the Government, and that means cash from the EEC.

The district council—a very good council but a poor one in terms of rateable value—has itself provided the cash necessary to employ consultants, and they reported this week. I have not yet seen the final report, but I understand that it recommends various ways in which a town full of good spirit but equally full of unemployment can rise again and become a marina, a port, a small business area and perhaps provide facilities for roll-on/roll-off transport. All these have been given the kybosh by the announcement two days ago of what is to happen to our assisted area status.

North Devon is a tourist area. The Minister of State frequently refers to the tourist "industry", but we get no industrial assistance and no industrial grants. The numbers employed in the tourist industry are good, and growing, but no one in the Government ever seems to consider that the only genuine indigenous job creator is the catering industry. It takes people at all levels of expertise. It is not necessary to employ a senior wrangler to feed a washing-up machine. A senior manager, of course, has to be very good. The catering industry, possibly alone in the country, has not so much ridden the recession as surfed through it, so that here in London and down in my part of the world there are good hotels, excellent restaurants and hard-working people running good boarding houses getting no grants but surviving despite the lack of roads and other infrastructure.

We have just had a debate initiated by my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Hayward) on our licensing laws. I spoke to licensed victuallers in Barnstaple only last week. All of them told me that many people go overseas for their holidays because they do not understand why, at three o'clock on a hot sunny afternoon such as some we had this year, it is impossible to buy a glass of lager. They do not wish to turn the world into a world of drunkenness. They simply point out that our young people do not want to take holidays where these ridiculous and

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petty restrictions apply, with no apparent sign, according to the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, of any increased drive by the Government to help the tourist industry, as they could so easily by taking a good look at the licensing laws as they apply to our seaside resorts.

So Ilfracombe is hit on one side by loss of status and on the other by the lack of any initiative to reform our licensing laws.

It may already have been said that Britain's licensing laws are based on the Defence of the Realm Consolidation Act of 1915. Its purpose was to get munitions girls back to the factories in 1915. Nobody said, "Thou shalt not drink." They merely said, "Thou shalt go back to work." In true British fashion, we still have this lame duck of legislation, which makes sense to no one except perhaps those who framed the Sunday trading laws. That is another example of complete illogicality which hurts our minor enterprises and smaller businesses.

I am pleased to see here my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, knowing the good work that he does for small businesses. He has been to my constituency, as has his predecessor. He always has a good reception and people keen to improve and develop, but they say that if they are not to be given a grant, grants should be taken away everywhere. Let us not have the silly business where one side of the road is given status and the other side is not.

My hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Sir P. Mills) has a speaking engagement but he has asked to be associated with my general points on the economic problems of north Devon. By sheer chance, the reservoir that is to be built at Roadford in north Devon happens to be in a parish which comes under the Tavistock travel-to-work area. Therefore, with any luck, we shall get the reservoir simply because so many hundreds of years ago somebody drew a parish boundary in the right place. Otherwise, we should have had no water. Each time we have a drought, people say that it will be better next time, but it never is. That divine parish draughtsman of several hundred years ago may be our salvation, at least in respect of our reservoir.

My motion simply states that north Devon needs some form of regional aid. Assisted area policy has worked in north Devon because of the grants, despite the lack of infrastructure. We can manage with one or the other, but not without both. Extra jobs have been created. Since the Barnstaple region became a development area, there has been an increase in employment of 139 per cent.—6,154 jobs. That is a large number of employees for a small country area. That may have happened over 15, 16 or 17 years, but none the less these are jobs for local people who can stay with us rather than always having to go away to seek work.

Much of the service industry sector services jobs brought in by our industrial areas. They have increased by 89 per cent.—13,772 jobs. Altogether, 20,000 jobs may have been created as a result of development status in an area with a relatively small population. My constituency has only 63,000 people, which shows how significant that increase is, even when shared, as it must be, with the north Devon coastline area represented by my hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West. All that was achieved with no infrastructure worth looking at.

I must be honest—as, I trust, all hon. Members are—and say that not all the unemployment in my constituency is involuntary. Perhaps in Plymouth, and I do not doubt in Torbay, and perhaps even in Exeter where unemployment is low, there is a certain element which believes that it is nicer to be unemployed in the west country than elsewhere. We understand that. There is always someone who will say that since the allowance is the same throughout the country it is better to take that allowance in nice Ilfracombe than in less nice parts of the country. I do not mean "less nice" in any personal way, but climatically, economically and, perhaps, psychologically.

We locals do not have that feeling in Devonshire. We are strong, resolute and perfectly prepared to fight our corner and to build our jobs. But, at some stage, the Government must lend a hand, even if it be in basic areas such as infrastructure. Infrastructure includes not only roads and railways but electricity. North Devon has high-tech industries that complain to me that power flickers, not terribly, but just enough to throw a computer programme, perhaps for a whole day. It may not matter too much if there are no roads for a small high tech factory, but the power supply is important. We are always told that the power supply is going to be improved. Indeed, the CEGB and the South-West electricity board are excellent authorities. That is our problem—we do not have any complaints against the various statutory undertakings, but they have a complaint against the Government.

In almost every other respect, I am proud and honoured to support the Government. But I am talking about areas that are so far away that those who represent suburban constituencies may realise that they exist only when they visit them for a holiday weekend or week. They may then complain "Oh you can't wash your car. They're short of water. How funny! We're not short of water in London." They may also say, "Oh, there's a problem somewhere, and currently it is the Okehampton bypass. That's funny! We have jams in London but they've hardly got any cars in Devonshire."

Those are fair comments, because although Devonshire has relatively few cars, it sometimes cannot take the summer surge. If that happens, the surge will not come the following summer, because people have better things to do than to toast themselves on the yet-to-be built Okehampton bypass, or at the end of the Tiverton road or further down at Exeter.

Devon county council is another good authority. One cannot blame all these good authorities, and that makes it difficult. I asked the county council what the loss of assisted area status would mean. Its reply was that much major infrastructure work remained to be done in north Devon, such as the north Devon link stage two and the Barnstaple and Bideford bypasses. Those are all Government schemes that would, on the face of it, be eligible for EEC money.

On the county side, the Barnstaple urban relief road and the Roundswell industrial estate are both expensive projects on a county basis. The Bideford to Barnstaple coastal footpath/cycle track comes under derelict land grant. But the county council tells me that loss of assisted area status might lower its priority for that grant.

The rules of the European regional development fund had just been changed so that infrastructure projects outside an assisted area might be eligible for help if doing the work in a non-assisted area helps an assisted area. But

I am afraid that I cannot do anything about that, because the nearest assisted areas to me are probably across the Severn, in Wales. There is no way that helping to ease the floods in north Devon will help an assisted area somewhere else in the country.

So even when we tinker—and how we tinker—with the way such things should be done, we do not do so constructively. When the Government get round once again to looking at development and assisted areas, they should accept that much of the grant has been wrong grant and has gone to purchase machines rather than jobs. If the system had been completely scrapped, and if grant had been based upon job creation, there would have been some logic to it. There are too many factories in which expensive machines are installed at the expense of the taxpayers' money and of jobs in the local area. One packing machine might do the work of six packers. I could accept the Government working as they have done, if the misery had been equal misery, but that is not so. Once again, it is take from X, give to Y and perhaps next year it will be reversed. It is not unlike our 10-year change of constituencies, when all of a sudden and for no apparent reason a Member of Parliament loses an area that he knows and loves — and in which he trusts there is some affection in return—simply because the figures do not quite work out right.

Back Benchers such as me, who totally support the Government in our national and international policies, in our policies on law and order and almost all Government policies, suddenly find themselves going from being total loyalists to being, frankly, virtually insubordinate. Party loyalty towards the Government is based on mutual trust between people who hold relatively the same viewpoint. We come from areas as wide apart as Scotland, Manchester and Devon. But we are like-thinking people and expect to be treated as we would treat others. That is not happening with regard to regional aid.

I come from an area on the periphery, and I am also insubordinate over student travel grants. A student who lives in London and goes to the LSE has no great problem with travel costs. But my goodness, if a student in Instow or Ilfracombe is at college at the other end of England or even in Scotland, he will have huge problems. The excuse is that this evens things out. It does not. It simply means that someone no longer has to do the arithmetic to give parity and fairness across the board. Parity and fairness have gone out of the window. There should be fairness for all.

I must tell the Government that the respect and trust of ordinary Conservative Back Benchers is being hard strained. If such Members as I feel loyalty is strained, there are others—perhaps less steadfast—who could be over-strained.

I asked the North Devon district council for its views. It said that everything depended on some form of aid or on the expedition of infrastructure and utility works. The council may send deputations and impolite letters. I shall happily pass on such letters to the Government, and add my own comments. The council does not understand how one area of one county can be singled out for such ill treatment. We want to catch up with everyone else in basic infrastructure to give our area a chance to prosper under conditions of fair competition. We say this often, but it appears not to be heard either in the House or in our party committees.

I am always lucky in raffles. At a licensed victuallers dinner recently I won a bottle of Long John whisky. The problem was that the gentleman presenting it to me was, I think, the local chairman of Bell's whisky. I do not care in what bottle the aid comes. I do not care whether aid comes from European funds that have been laundered on their way from our pockets into the European pockets and then via heaven knows how many bureaucrats back into a water authority or derelict land pocket, but we do seem to make such a hard job of it.

It is the poor devils at the end of the line who receive the rough treatment. In my father's generation — my regiment is the Devonshire regiment—it was always bad for the foot sloggers at the end of the road. I know that my hon. Friend the Minister has Royal Marines connections; I believe that they have better quality boots now and do not have to walk as far. However, it was always the same —if one is in the trench, one does not understand how the staff work. The lines of communication were not there then and I suspect that they are not there now. I know that my hon. Friend's area is also suffering. There can be no unkinder cut than that given by a Minister to his own patch —as one of my former colleagues in Scotland learned to his cost during the last election. I support the Government in general and, in the past, supported them in toto. If they expect that support to continue, they must give help to those of us who stand in the slit trenches during the long early hours.

I look forward with great interest to what my hon. Friend will say. No doubt it will be an interesting and genuine recital of the good aspects of my constituency. I shall leave it to him to say those good things because he is aware of them and I want him to become more and more aware of them because of what he is seeking to do for small businesses.

If I paint a black picture, it is because the clouds over north Devon are black and I cannot see any silver lining. That is unfair both to the Government and to my constituents. We have many excellent businesses that will continue to survive and prosper, but it is my duty as a constituency Member of Parliament and as a supporter of the free enterprise system to say, "Either free enterprise for all and goodies for all—or goodies for none."

I view with considerable sorrow the general direction in which matters are moving at this time. I am aware, of course, that other Members in other constituencies have similar problems. If my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State cannot help today, I look to him for help tomorrow or the next day. If he or his ministerial colleagues cannot provide that help, he and they should remember that, if the men in the trenches ever turn round, they can do immeasurably more harm to the staff than the staff would wish.

1.40 pm

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): I support my hon. Friend the Member for Devon, North (Mr. Speller). My perspective is similar to his. There are, of course, certain differences. I hesitate to say that I might have as much experience of another Member's constituency as I have of my own but I, too, am a Devonian born and bred. Perhaps I can pay no higher tribute to my hon. Friend's constituency than to say that many of my ancestors chose to be buried in it. There is no greater praise than that. I assure my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State that

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they died a considerable time ago. They were not driven to an early grave by the effect that deprivation of status might have had upon them.

My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary will appreciate that if I had been called when the announcement of deprivation status was made earlier in the week, my remarks to my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry might not have been especially supportive. That is probably fairly obvious and needs no stressing.

I had the opportunity some weeks ago of taking a delegation to meet my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary so that we could put our submissions to him. We presented our case in very much the same way as my hon. Friend the Member for Devon, North has submitted his. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary dealt with the delegation in an exemplary fashion. The delegation and I were left in no doubt that he had a complete grasp of the constituency problems and of the implications if there were to be a deprivation of status. It is bad enough to lose assistance that has previously been enjoyed but there is some consolation in knowing that the person who is charged with having to make that unhappy decision is aware of all the facts and figures and the implications. Cuts are bad enough and they become even worse if they are made by someone who does not know what is going on. The delegation was treated in an exemplary fashion and it will come as some small consolation to its members to know that its submissions were listened to and taken on board. I have no doubt that when the delegation left my hon. Friend's office the issue was considered afresh, even if in the end the provisional view had to be confirmed.

I read a profile of myself recently in a book that is being produced by a journalist, Mr. Roth. To some extent it was like reading one's obituary. One of the benefits of the resurrection means that we can come back and sneak into the back of the church during the funeral to hear what is said about us from the pulpit. I was able to read the profile of myself. I was described as being a liberal when it came to advocating the interests of my profession and as an ultra loyalist in terms of my party. That might make some of my hon. Friends table an early-day motion at once to show an independent cast of mind.

I felt no hardship when I read that I was an ultra loyalist in my party. I know the party for which I stood at the election and I know the reservations that I had about it. It is no hardship to me to say on every occasion that offers itself that I present myself as a Conservative. Indeed, I am proud to do so. Against that background, later remarks in my contribution to the debate will cause me some sadness.

Whose fault is it that we find ourselves in the present situation? My hon. Friend the Member for Devon, North has described himself as a loyalist. He is not, of course, an unthinking loyalist. What is it that has brought us to the Chamber to make speeches that contain criticism of the Government? What is this action which means that even my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State approaches this matter with great sadness?

It would have been tempting when the announcement was made to have laid into the Government and accused them of incompetence and everything else in sight. We have been slightly more cautious than that. We can be acquitted of the charge of currying favour with our supporters. I suspect that one of the propositions that I could advance, which would command universal acceptance on both sides of the House, is that the Government are not especially prone to going around currying favour with their supporters. Whatever else regional aid is in this context, it is certainly not the politics of the pork barrel.

If one were give to cyncism or undue levity, one might point out—bearing in mind what dairy quotas have done for the farmers in my constituency, the effects of the rates restriction and what may yet be done if saner counsel does not prevail in dealing with student grants—that, in the Government's view of what is impartial, this was a bold move. The removal of regional aid from my constituency of Teignbridge and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Devon, North has the benefit of making sure than any other Conservative Member who has not been affected by some of the Government's other actions is at least caught up in this unhappy net. Whatever else the Government are accused of doing, the charge of currying favour with our supporters in this matter cannot be levelled at them. I shall put the matter beyond any doubt and say that it certainly cannot be said in this respect that the Government will curry favour with any of their supporters.

The reason we find ourselves in this unhappy position is rather like the reason given by the Irishman who said, "I would not have started from here anyway". My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State has had to grapple with the task of being obliged to institute a system which, frankly, does not begin to make any sort of sense. The moment one is left to work an unsatisfactory system, one gets into no end of trouble. My hon. Friend the Member for Devon, North referred to the incongruity of the way the system works. He might have used the phrase "passing the parcel". I recall one of the better episodes of "Candid Camera" where a team of officials, dressed up to look like the men from Whitehall so that they could carry some authority, strongly persuaded people on one side of a bridge to haul up buckets of water, walk along from the bridge and pour the water out on the other side. Apparently, the allegation was that the two sides of the river were not balanced and that action would take care of the problem. It was comforting to see something of the British character—when required by officials to perform that task, the people got on and did the job properly.

That aspect lies at the heart of an episode of regional aid. We have inherited a system and, for the time being at least, we have to work it. Instead of trying to work out which industries are viable and how money can be used and — I hope that I can say this without being unnecessarily contentious — ascertaining what labour relations are like, we have a system that is crude almost beyond belief. We look at the unemployment statistics and say, "If unemployment is high enough, you get your grant, and if it is not, you don't." What is the sense in taking the grants from the constituencies of Teignbridge and Devon, North when Merseyside, which in terms of public money is one huge, yawning plug hole, receives the money because of its unemployment levels, irrespective of how that unemployment occurred?

What is so unfair and what concerns me greatly is the fact that what has happened to my constituents and those of my hon. Friend the Member for Devon, North is not their fault. I would be happy, if the rules permitted, to spend the next two or three hours extolling the people of my constituency, their character, their work rate, labour relations and the rest of it. Like my hon. Friends constituents, they are not in the begging-bowl business.

My constituents are not squealing. They do not regard jobs as something from which to strike. There is nothing wrong with the work rate or work ethic of my constituents, but because, lucky things, in some towns in my constituency unemployment is only 15 per cent. they cannot compete with other areas in the misery stakes.

I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Devon, North will agree that we are being forced to take part in a system under which the rewards do not go to the deserving or to those who make the best of things; the fruits of victory go to those who, in the extreme case, will not help themselves. That is not a sensible way of conducting our affairs.

Where is the sense, in terms only of the Exchequer, in the fact that, in the past, the need for grant was identified and the grant, whether for development area status or for intermediate status, was given. Then the rules are changed, the music stops and the money is removed. What is the point of pump-priming if one stops halfway through priming the pump? Were it not for the exemplary work and ingenuity of Teignbridge district council, taxpayers' money would not have produced the benefit that it should. The pump has been primed, but now it is to be cut off entirely. Again, that makes no sense. It is important to remember that my constituents are not in the begging-bowl business. Some schemes in my constituency are not entirely viable, and regional grant makes all the difference to them——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Paul Dean): Order. The hon. Gentleman understandably wishes to talk about his constituency, but in fairness to the motion and to the Minister I should tell him that the motion relates to north Devon. I am sure that he will use his ingenuity to direct his remarks to north Devon.

Mr. Speller: Does my hon. Friend agree that the conditions in Teignbridge and north Devon, which are about 40 miles apart, are almost identical? We in north Devon welcome his association with the constituency, but we regret the fact that, although his ancestors are buried there, none of his living relatives are voting there.

Mr. Nicholls: I am grateful for your help, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and for that of my hon. Friend, who is an experienced Member of the House, and I shall try to keep within the rules of order.

The heart of the problem is that the system that we are being asked to operate does not make sense. My hon. Friend said that one way of proceeding would be to remove grant entirely; that makes perfect sense. Another approach to the problem would be to give grant to everyone, but that would mean a return to the original position, which does not make sense. One must concede — I do so more readily now than I might have done earlier this week— that if the present system must be operated, it should be operated properly, effectively and on the basis of obtaining the maximum value for money. A most unhappy aspect of the way in which the system has evolved is the idea that to solve the problem one should continue to hurl money at it, without analysing its ingredients.

For example, we do not use the synthetic indexes to the extent that we should. My hon. Friend the Member for Devon, North is nodding. He would concede that if the synthetic index for his constituency had been considered more carefully, one factor that could have been given much weight is not only the median levels of unemployment, but the fluctuations that occur in seasonal industries. However, that suggestion would only tamper with a system that is fundamentally wrong.

What can be done? A number of points occur to me. It may be that the Minister will be able to help me with some of them. On the other hand, he may want to answer them by way of correspondence. It concerns me in particular that, once one is deprived of one's status, one is precluded not only from national grants but from European grants, except in the rather arcane way that my hon. Friend described. Before this week, he and I might have conspired together to assist each other or our other regional friends. That cannot happen now. It must be a source of particular grievance that one is left out of the European side as well as the national side.

My hon. Friend may also be able to offer me some guidance about article (9) *(c)* of the Co-operative Development Agency and Industrial Development Act (Commencement) Order 1984. That article sets up certain transitional arrangements under which the old arrangements will continue for a period of four months. A week is said to be a long time in politics. In terms of the way the system operates, four months is a very short time. I can imagine schemes, common both to my hon. Friend and myself, whereby, a degree of flexibility — I am not suggesting two or three years; politics is the art of the possible—in the transitional arrangements would be of great help to us both.

One can make the point, when trying to find the cloud with a silver lining, that if the whole system of regional aid is bad—it certainly is—one can state the obvious by saying that if one does not have a grant, or if it is taken away, one is in a much worse position than an area, region or constituency which has it. One can go further and say that there is now sufficient evidence that, even if one is in receipt of grant, in the long term, as an area, it will do one no good in the end. The one crumb of comfort I can extract from this unhappy state of affairs is that the worst situation of all—it must be the situation in which some of my hon. Friends and Opposition Members will find themselves — is that an adjacent area is receiving aid while one's own area is not. That, in a nutshell, points up the vice of the system. It points up the incongruity in a way which cannot be bettered. What happens when one side of the road receives grant while the other side does not?

Opposition Members will think that, to an extent, it serves me right, but when I was vice-chairman of the property services committee of the East Devon district council, where we were on the eastern side of the river Exe, industrialists asked us why they should move to our constituency. My hon. Friend the Member for Devon, North must have had the same experience. The industrialists could point to the area of Teignbridge, in which I did not live at the time, and say, "Over there we should be in receipt of a large range of grants. Why on earth should we stay here?" It was difficult sometimes to answer that question. There is a certain grim irony in the fact that I am now a member of the party of a Government which has to operate a completely unsatisfactory, illogical and damaging system. In Teignbridge my grant was taken from me.

It is a truism that good cannot come out of evil. Perhaps it can be said, if one looks at the matter dispassionately and tries to distance oneself from constituency interests, that the Government have made the best of a very bad job. What I hope, in terms of good coming out of evil, is that

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if in the long run what we have gone through this week and will have to justify to our constituents means the end of this wretched system and heralds a more sensible system under which good is done to the regions, in that sense, good may yet come out of evil.

1.59 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. David Trippier): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Devon, North (Mr. Speller) on his good fortune in the ballot, which has given us the opportunity once again to debate the problems of his constituency, particularly those of Ilfracombe. I thank him for his kind words about me. He has always been a very active, vociferous and able advocate on behalf of his constituents, and he demonstrated that skill to us all today.

I know that my hon. Friend and his constituents will be disappointed that north Devon is losing its assisted area status. I should also like to express my sympathy to my hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls). I understand the points that he made and recognise some of the problems that he identified.

It has been a difficult week for several of us. My hon. Friend the Member for Devon, North correctly referred to the fact that I was in a somewhat embarrassing situation as a Minister at the Department of Trade and Industry with shared responsibility for regional aid. No doubt it will be interpreted as my having reduced the aid in my constituency. These are difficult times, and tough decisions have to be made. It may seem stranger, as it would not take a very bright Member to discover in *Hansard* that in about 1980, as a Back Bencher, I was fighting for assistance in my constituency because it was heavily affected by the recession, due to its overdependence on the two traditional industries — textiles and footwear. I shall refer to that later.

We have considered the situation in north Devon seriously. We considered that the position in Ilfracombe and Barnstaple did not merit their continuing to receive preferential treatment over the rest of the country. The withdrawal of assisted area status also involves losing access to the European regional development fund. As my hon. Friend demonstrated, that could affect the necessary improvements to the infrastructure of the area. I know that there is considerable importance attached to that—not only in north Devon but in other parts of the country that are losing their assisted area status—but the European regional development fund quota section can be used only to support member states' own regional policies in their defined "aided areas". In the United Kingdom these are, of course, the assisted areas. However, as far as the areas that are losing assisted area status are concerned, I can assure my hon. Friends the Members for Devon, North and Teignbridge that the European Commission will accept applications for the European regional development fund quota section until March next year and will consider them for aid where the majority of the expenditure is completed within one year of the announcement made on Wednesday by the Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry, my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont).

My hon. Friend the Member for Devon, North referred to the object of the Ilfracombe harbour project, which of course would be to improve the economy of Ilfracombe and local employment prospects. Clearly, any cost-effective measure which increases employment opportunities would be welcome, but I remind my hon. Friend that other developments in the area are generating new jobs. For example, Pall Europe has announced plans to expand its Ilfracombe factory and, when that work is completed, to add another 140 jobs to the 100 already existing. Coutant Electronics plc is extending its premises in Ilfracombe, due for completion in April 1985, and is looking to create 25 jobs by the end of 1985, and more the following year. Expansion plans by engineering company J. and S. Marine could lead to the creation of 65 new jobs at Barnstaple. L. S. and J. Sussman Ltd. of Barnstaple has taken on 33 extra workers over the past year or so. Hobarts is celebrating 25 years at its Barnstaple factory with the opening of a new £180,000 extension, heralding job security for its present 175 employees and the prospect of a steady increase in staff over the next few years.

Some of these enterprises will have benefited from regional assistance, and undoubtedly such assistance has had an influence in encouraging industrial development in north Devon. It must be gratifying to my hon. Friend that the area is now better placed, relative to some other parts of the country, to build on its current assets. However, just as it would be foolish to view the future complacently through rose-coloured spectacles, so it would be equally wrong to regard regional assistance as the only means of helping industry.

I remind my hon. Friend of the other forms of financial aid available from the Department, notably under section 8 of the Industrial Development Act 1982. I am glad to record that some companies in north Devon have already taken good advantage of that facility, and I hope that more will do so in the future.

Mr. Speller: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for mentioning the other forms of aid available. I wonder whether, with his special responsibility for small businesses, he might see fit to produce some fairly simple literature. Some ministerial literature is difficult for Members of Parliament, and perhaps even for more intelligent people in trade, to understand. I should very much welcome the availability of more information so that those who are losing aid in one respect can be made aware of alternative sources. I approve of the system to which my hon. Friend referred, as it is clearly directed at good, sensible, job-creating work. I welcome that, but I hope that he will let us have more information which we, in turn, can pass on in the hope that that may be the beginning of the silver lining.

Mr. Trippier: My hon. Friend makes an important point. I think that he is referring to the repackaging exercise which I have recently completed, which will simplify the literature from the Department targeted at the very important small firms sector. With your permission, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and relating it to north Devon, I should like to deal with that in more detail later. I hope that the information that I have to give will be of some comfort to my hon. Friend.

I assure my hon. Friend again that any projects put forward for possible assistance under section 8, which is available nation-wide, will be given most careful consideration by me and my colleagues. The Government can also help by the provision of counselling assistance

through the Department of Trade and Industry small firms service based in Bristol and various forms of assistance to the small firms sector. Area counselling offices are situated in Barnstaple and South Molton and, in the past 12 months, more than 70 counselling sessions have been held. In the same period, more than 100 small businesses have been seen at the clinics held in Barnstaple and Bideford. Advice is provided to individuals considering setting up in business, as well as to established businesses.

With regard to local enterprise agencies, financial support has been offered by the Department to the North Devon Enterprise Group to provide a further source of advice to small businesses. This will complement the good work already done by the North Devon Manufacturers' Association, which I know is very active in the area.

In stressing the importance of local enterprise agencies, perhaps I may relate my comments to the situation in 1980 in my own constituency, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Devon, North referred. In the teeth of the recession, between 1980 and 1982, most travel-to-work areas experienced almost a doubling of unemployment. At that time, my constituency was the worst affected in the United Kingdom. Unemployment quadrupled, perhaps largely because of overdependence on the traditional industries of textiles and footwear. I thought that, short of sitting at my desk in the House with my head in my hands, the only way forward was to encourage indigenous growth. All hon. Members can hope that some large company will come and set up in their area—my hon. Friend will be no exception—but we could wait a long time for that. It is perhaps better to get on with the job of encouraging indigenous growth.

I had the opportunity one Friday afternoon, with several Conservative colleagues, to visit the first-ever enterprise agency, which was set up in St. Helens. It was on that model that the North Devon Enterprise Group has been built. I met for the first time an interesting and impressive character called Mr. Bill Humphrey, whom I have always regarded as the patron saint of enterprise agencies. He offered what I can only describe as a hand-holding service for small businesses. It was the first time that I or my colleagues had seen large industry become involved in the small firms sector.

Anyone who knows St. Helens knows that Pilkington Brothers is St. Helens, and that St. Helens is Pilkingtons. It had, unfortunately, had to lay off many people in order to remain competitive, but felt under a moral obligation to the community. As Bill Humphrey put it to me, perhaps Pilkingtons would make those people redundant today, but it would see them in the town centre the following weekend. Pilkingtons decided to do its best to encourage the start-up of small businesses by encouraging those who had been made redundant to establish small businesses and by encouraging existing small businesses to expand. In about 12 months, 150 small firms had been started and they employed about 250 people.

That was the most dramatic thing that I had seen since becoming a Member of Parliament and I tried to graft the experience on to my constituency. North Devon, I think wisely, has done the same. Industrialists in larger companies have recognised their moral responsibility to the community. As we need small firms and their employment potential, I am pleased to announce that there are now 228 local enterprise agencies in the United Kingdom. I opened the 228th in Aberdeen the other week. As the House knows, I have set a target of 300 in three years. It is now clear that we shall achieve that target. The enterprise agency is vital to north Devon for one reason. The failure rate of small firms—the news hits my desk—is one in three in the first 12 months. I am sure that my hon. Friend agrees that, unfortunately, north Devon is no exception.

Mr. Speller: This is an opportunity for me to ask my hon. Friend about just one case. Through his organisation we have the enterprise allowance scheme, which pays £40 a week to someone who is trying to start up a small business. The case concerns a young married couple. The wife has taken the allowance to start a small business making wedding dresses of natural fabrics such as cotton and silk. Because the husband was unfortunately made redundant recently, the £40 enterprise allowance is now treated as part of their income and is therefore deducted from his unemployment benefit, on which he keeps his family. Perhaps the best laid plans of Ministers can "gang aft agley", as they say in Aberdeen, when one side does not talk to the other. Perhaps Ministers could examine this matter, as it seems illogical that when a Minister pursues an excellent idea to enable people to get off the ground the beneficiary has the ground cut from beneath his feet when misfortune strikes a second member of the family.

Mr. Trippier: I am sympathetic to that point and I should like to examine it carefully. As my hon. Friend rightly said, the matter is one for the Department of Employment, but we have an important input into the enterprise allowance scheme because we mobilise the small firms service, for which I am responsible. I should be most grateful if my hon. Friend would write to me with details. I shall be only too pleased to take it up.

I referred earlier to the importance of the North Devon Enterprise Group. I wish it every success. In case anyone doubts the importance of enterprise agencies, I shall give the House some startling figures. The failure rate of small firms is one in three for the first 12 months. In areas where there are established enterprise agencies the failure rate is one in 12, that is about 8 per cent. The proof of the pudding is in the eating.

When I had the privilege of visiting my hon. Friend's constituency, I saw an exercise in self-help. The community was pulling itself up by its boot straps. I also saw the attention which the area paid to its small business men, who are very important people. The difficulty in north Devon and in many other parts of the United Kingdom is that too many people set up in business thinking that they know it all and consequently do not seek advice. They are then surprised when they go out of business in a relatively short time. I wish to use this occasion as an excuse to encourage people to take advantage of the small firm services, which is available nation-wide, and to get in touch with their enterprise agencies, which offer an effective hand-holding service. That way the failure rate can be improved.

My hon. Friend will no doubt welcome the fact that I wish to urge large firms in Devon in general and in north Devon in particular to recognise the importance of paying small firms' bills on time. I receive more lobbying on that matter than on any other.

With regard to the 64 schemes in the Department of Trade and Industry which are targeted on industry, we have unwittingly built up our own bureaucracy. Although it sounds impressive at a general election to say that we

[Mr. Trippier]

have built up 64 schemes, we are in danger of confusing the people whom we seek to help. I agree entirely with my hon. Friend about that. We have therefore just completed a repackaging exercise. The 64 schemes will be concertina-ed into four coherent packages which will cover schemes for regional assistance, exports, advisory services and support services.

For the first time we can set an example to industry in marketing our own products. In the past we did not set a good example generally. I also appreciate that Governments are fond of acronyms. There are many schemes with acronyms, such as CADCAM, CADTES, MAPCON, which mean very little to those whom we hope will be the recipients and beneficiaries of them. I also agree that because of the bureaucracy we need to scrap the considerable number of application forms that exist. I have introduced a communality of application forms, which will be shorter and written in plain English.

It is important for me to use this occasion to get the message across about the link between industry and education. We may not have concentrated as much attention as we should on the importance of bringing together industrialists and educationists. The Minister at the Department of Trade and Industry responsible for small firms is also responsible for industry education. That is one of the more frustrating jobs for which I am responsible. From 15 May 1985 we shall have another local enterprise week. The previous week was well supported in my hon. Friend's constituency. The theme for next year will be industry-education links. I am anxious to involve institutions such as further education colleges, which most communities have, and polytechnics and universities, where they exist.

At school level the idea is to try to get through to 13-year-old children the importance of wealth creation, which is even more important than wealth distribution.

Finally, on small firms, it is important to emphasise that we have still too much bureaucracy in terms of the constraints on such businesses. We are in danger of strangling them. When I visited my hon. Friend's constituency, I received this message loud and clear.

Recently I have completed an exercise whereby we have produced some flow charts. On one we have identified 45 different regulations which have to be checked and in many cases complied with by anyone considering setting up in business on his own account. On another flow chart we have identified 54 regulations which have to be checked and in many cases complied with by anyone contemplating employing only one person. It is a surprise to me that we have 1·3 million small firms when I look at those two charts. They are a tremendous disincentive to people whom we are encouraging to set up and employ others. We have decided that an efficiency exercise will be conducted on those charts. We hope that the results will be known by the end of January.

In north Devon the Government provide support for the area's tourist industry. This takes the form of promotional activity and advisory services provided by the English tourist board, assisted by the non-statutory West Country tourist board, and of selective assistance for tourism projects via the national scheme administered by the ETB under section 4 of the Development of Tourism Act 1969. Since August 1982, when the scheme was first extended to the whole of England, grant offers totalling £138,200 have been made to 18 tourist projects in north Devon.

Then there are the various schemes operated by other Government Departments. Under the youth training scheme the Manpower Services Commission estimated a need for 873 places for the youth training scheme in north Devon in 1984-85. Already more than this number—880—have been made available from a wide range of sources. These include 200 places on a broad-based scheme put together by the North Devon Manufacturers Association. This reflects the recognition by the association of the importance of attracting young people into manufacturing and confidence in the future of the employment they can offer.

There are three main agents with community programme schemes in the north Devon area. First, there is the Ilfracombe and District Industrial Development Committee, which has many schemes, including conservation and environment, youth, community and information schemes. Secondly, we have the Bridge Community Agency, which runs a skill swop centre, a welfare benefit campaign and several archaeological digs and environmental projects. Thirdly, we have the Council for Christian Care, which runs schemes mainly involving the tidying-up and restoration of church grounds and property.

English Estates has pursued an active policy of advance factory construction in north Devon.

Mr. Speller: My hon. Friend may not be aware of it, but in addition to the excellent bodies of which he has spoken the work of the Dartington North Devon Trust has been huge in our part of the world.

My hon. Friend also mentioned the Ilfracombe and district industrial development scheme, which proves my point when I say that we are prepared to help ourselves. But we need a little water in the pump with which to prime it.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend for listing these good organisations, and with the North Devon Manufacturers Association we are well equipped for the training of our youth. Finding jobs for them once they are trained is the problem.

My hon. Friend also referred to the tourist boards. By a sheer coincidence, I believe that I am the only qualified caterer in the House, which is probably why I am not allowed near the Services Committee. It is of some interest perhaps that the West Country tourist board does the investigation under my hon. Friend's scheme, but that the actual verdict comes down from the English tourist board. It is hard to explain to a hotelier in Ilfracombe why, when he saw a pleasant man or woman from the West Country tourist board in Exeter, rather a long time later he gets a yes or no from London from someone who has not seen the scheme but has only dealt with it on paper. There might be room for a little slimming down there, not least because of the sheer misunderstanding caused when a person sees Mr. Smith from Exeter and the decision comes from Mr. Jones in London. Queries cannot be raised with the person who has made the decision, because he has never been seen.

Mr. Trippier: I hope that my hon. Friend will forgive me for saying that I shall have to look into the tourist board

matter. That is the responsibility of my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry. I shall certainly do that.

I accept entirely the difficulties created when assistance available under regional policy goes to a firm which is operating on one side of the street, whereas a factory on the other side gets nothing. One must examine carefully the purposes of regional policy. Its purpose is to try to remove the disparities in levels of unemployment in the United Kingdom. I appreciate that, no matter which Government are in power, when the dividing lines for regional policy are set the Government will make as many enemies as friends.

The White Paper on regional policy said that we would look at things other then levels of unemployment, and that may be of some comfort to my hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge. We said that we would look at other matters such as over-dependence on traditional industries, obsolete infrastructure, and peripherality or distance to markets. Those have been looked at carefully, together with others, and we have put them in a synthetic index.

The most important point that I can make is that when we are using that synthetic index all those travel-to-work areas which go above the line will be assisted areas and those below it will not. I appreciate my hon. Friend's disappointment, but I am sure he will readily understand the difficult decisions which Ministers at the Department of Trade and Industry have had to make.

English Estates has pursued an active policy of advance factory construction in north Devon. On Mullacott Cross industrial estate all but one of the 11 units are occupied and the 19 units in Barnstaple, which are all small, are all now occupied.

Parts of north Devon, including Ilfracombe, continue to receive special support from the Development Commission through the coverage of the rural development areas. This means that small businesses can receive special concessions from the Council for Small Industries in Rural Areas on premises, business advice and finance.

I am aware that there is considerable interest in north Devon in the north Devon link road. Stage 1, from the M5 to Tiverton, is now completed and the road is open. Stage 2A, from Tiverton to Newtown, was the subject of a public inquiry between January and March 1984. The inspector's report is now with the Departments of the Environment and Transport and a decision will be given as soon as possible. Draft orders were published in November 1983 for stage 2B, from Newtown to Barnstaple, and I understand that it is going to public inquiry on 15 January 1985.

Also of interest in north Devon are the Barnstaple and Bideford bypasses. The former has just been the subject of a public inquiry while work has already commenced on the latter.

As my hon. Friend mentioned, north Devon, as with many parts of the south-west and indeed the United Kingdom, suffered from problems of drought last summer. Part of the problem will be resolved when a more secure supply can be provided upon completion of Roadford reservoir. Outline planning permission was granted by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment on 30 March 1983, but a number of reserved matters were retained for approval by him. Those include landscaping, access, and siting and design of buildings. These must come up for approval by 30 March 1986.

The South-West water authority is currently preparing an application on detailed matters and its submission is imminent. When dealing with this application, it is anticipated that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will also cover other related matters still outstanding, such as the appeal on the demolition of listed buildings. In the meantime, until Roadford reservoir is completed, problems may still exist on the Mullacott Cross industrial estate, where there have been difficulties in maintaining the pressure of the water supply——

It being half past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Local Radio Stations

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Archie Hamilton.]*

2.30 pm

Mrs. Angela Rumbold (Mitcham and Morden): Contrary to popular belief among my colleagues, my purpose is not to bring a single case for special pleading about the licensing of local radio, but to ask my hon. Friend the Minister to look urgently at the present system of regulation and licensing in local, independent radio to see whether it fits the principle of encouraging market forces to determine what can be allowed.

There is more and more interest in that matter and increasing pressure is being brought to bear on the issue. The present situation, in which several pirate radio stations are operating outside the law—which, I hasten to say, I in no way condone—must surely indicate that there is something wrong with our licensing procedures. Obviously, the answer to illegal action is to act vigorously, and the Independent Broadcasting Authority is urging the Government to close such illegal stations, but when I read the reasons given by the IBA for the crackdown I found myself wondering whether the IBA was more interested in shouting "Foul" because those independent local radio stations which it has licensed cannot compete as a result of the huge and over-bureaucratic regulations which the IBA imposes.

I am sure that there will be some agreement between my hon. Friend the Minister and myself if I say that when providing a service in the commercial world the first consideration is a proper endeavour to satisfy the customer. At the same time, however, no commercial operations can afford to work unless there are some simple rules within which they operate. Therefore, when looking, for example, at the situation of local independent radio in London today, we note that guidance is needed to prevent overlap in the spectrum; to avoid interference with essential services such as ambulance, fire and police, and even defence. Having said all that, we should look at the constraints that exist, laid down by the IBA, and try to see why only Capital and LBC can operate in London, with 8 million people to serve.

First and foremost, I maintain that the financial arrangements are prohibitive. If the independent radio stations are to compete in the true sense of the word, to raise revenue on a per capita basis of the listening population, and to add on additional levy to the Exchequer on top of the transmitting equipment fees, quite obviously precludes all but the most financially "secure" of operators from entering the independent radio field. In other words, radio stations such as Capital have a clear run because they take in so much revenue from advertising because, in turn, competition is strictly limited.

Regulation of content is another bone of contention, and it is the nub of my concern that the Government should look again at the whole operation. As the newspapers have found, there is a growing demand for local information. By "local" I mean local communities within 10 to 15 minutes' drive of each other. Therefore, in London it is not local to announce to an audience in Mitcham and Morden that the coming Saturday will see the advent of Christmas fayre at a certain church hall in Chingford, or vice versa. However, it is local news to point out that certain primary schools are holding their Christmas pantos on certain days and that the funds raised will go to local charities. That is of considerable interest to local communities. It is also helpful to broadcast information for different groups—whether the young, the elderly, the disabled, ethnic minorities or even local business men who, in addition to benefiting from that, would also be paying for it.

I wish to discuss the allocation of space in the spectrum. The radio spectrum is a resource owned by the country and it has a finite capacity in each area—although at a far higher level than the present broadcast usage in the United Kingdom. It is proper and generally agreed that a licence fee should be charged. I want to suggest a new approach. Fees could be based on a simple multiple of transmitter power and the number of hours on the air. At 50p per watt and 20p per hour, a women's institute or a scout group could broadcast four hours of programmes every Sunday evening over three miles for £21 a year. A music station broadcasting for 12 hours a day, every day, for 15 miles would pay £22,000 a year. I believe that 12 hours a day should be the maximum, as that would discourage stations wanting a 24-hour service.

Providing the channels for that would be a simple engineering decision. On VHF, the entire 200-channel-wide band from 88 to 108 MHz is allocated by international agreement to FM broadcasting. There is no adequate reason why Britain is uniquely unable to join the remainder of the world and use the whole band. Twenty channels, perhaps from 106 to 108 MHz, should be designated for new, unprotected broadcasters.

The position is more complicated for medium wave, as certain channels are already used that are scattered over the whole band. The solution is to allow unprotected broadcasters to operate on any frequency that is three or more channels away from BBC or IBA stations, with published coverage maps of the area in question. More power is needed for a similar coverage to VHF and a power tariff on one tenth would reflect that.

Equipment of adequate specification can be assured through the same procedures that have been established for local citizens band transmitters. Stations would pay on their transmitter output power, leaving the siting, aerial design and choice of channel—all of which determine coverage achieved—to the competence and ingenuity of each station. Every hour, the station should announce its licence details, revealing such particulars as, "This is XYZ radio on 107 VHF, using 10 watts from North Hill lane, licence No. 123, for three hours every evening." Such arrangements would allay the understandable fears among established broadcasters that their prominence and quality of signal coverage will be at peril when new stations are legalised.

Being an unprotected broadcaster means that there will be no assurance of the coverage available—unlike the position for the BBC and IBA stations. The more stations that come on the air in one locality, the smaller will be the coverage of each service. It is a familiar feature in other kinds of radio communication. The time has now come for it to be accepted in specialist, small business, ethnic and voluntary broadcasting. A start on that must be made immediately by the issue of some experimental licences.

The last point of argument lies in the content of output. I am constantly asked whether I want endless pop music on independent radio. My answer—and I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister will agree with me—is that

the stations are not for me to regulate; they are there for the consumer. Ultimately, the market will dictate listening requirements.

The notion that the Government or their appointed bodies can continue closely to regulate local broadcasting will survive for only as long as the idea that printing presses should be allowed to produce only the Bible and approved texts. While equipment has become cheaper and smaller, there has been no movement in licensing provisions in Britain. There is no clear thought from the various lobbies that would prove flexible enough to cope with potential demand.

On news and magazine stands there are all sorts of offerings from all sorts of publishers. The more titles that we have, the less the prominence of each one. Part of radio will eventually be the same and the need now is to devise a licensing procedure to allow orderly progress.

I ask the Minister seriously to consider the possibility of making a start by issuing some experimental licences in the London area as soon as possible on the basis of the suggestions that I have outlined.

2.40 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Mellor): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Mrs. Rumbold) for having raised on the Floor of the House the interesting issue of local community broadcasting and for giving me the opportunity to outline the Government's views. As my hon. Friend is aware, my hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey (Mr. Shaw), the Minister of State, Home Office, is the Minister with responsibilities for broadcasting. He has ministerial and parliamentary engagements in the north of England today, and as I was engaged in a debate on licensing earlier it seemed that I should reply for the Government in this debate. I hope that she will accept my apologies for a substitution which, I hope, is not entirely distasteful to her.

I shall outline briefly the basis on which our broadcasting services have developed. It has been the policy of successive Governments—it has been endorsed by Parliament on many occasions and by various committees of inquiry, most recently the Annan committee—to entrust broadcasting to independent but publicly accountable authorities, and under these arrangements only the BBC and the IBA are licensed by my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary under the Wireless Telegraphy Act 1949 to operate transmitters for broadcasting. This approach is not a matter of tradition. The two authorities act as trustees of the public interest and are accountable, through my right hon. and learned Friend, to Parliament, which is important. Certain obligations are placed on the broadcasting authorities, including the requirement to be impartial in matters of controversy and requirements as to the content of material that they broadcast.

People are rightly exercised—we still hear a good deal of this—about broadcasting standards whether on radio or television. In the United Kingdom we have been able to maintain high standards to the point that most of us have experienced the envy of many overseas visitors about the quality of our broadcasting services. I suggest that that has been achieved only because of the bipartisan policy that I have described. The existing framework has served us well and should not be lightly cast aside or undermined, even though it allows for expansion. Of course, expansion is something to which successive Conservative Governments have been devoted.

We do not regard the existing arrangements as fixed or immutable. There is some scope for the development of local broadcasting services of the sort for which my hon. Friend has been asking. Nor do I think we can regard the present arrangements as providing just a cosy duopoly for the two broadcasting authorities.

In independent local radio, companies compete with one another for the independent local radio franchise for a particular area. Once the IBA has awarded a contract, the contractor faces competition for audiences from BBC local and national radio, other ILR stations and television. There is competition for advertising from local newspapers and the ever-increasing number of free sheets with which my hon. Friend and I are familiar in south-west London. There are no fewer than four free sheets circulating in the borough in my constituency.

Audience figures testify that the pressure on local radio has increased with the introduction recently of breakfast television. It seems likely to increase further as we contemplate other great broadcasting developments, such as independent national radio, which interest many, satellite and cable services and community radio, with which my hon. Friend is primarily concerned.

I have referred to some of the obligations that are imposed on broadcasting authorities. I do not think that we can get away without various obligations being imposed for as far ahead as we can see. It is necessary that independent stations should have to meet the engineering and other standards that are laid down by the IBA as well as meeting the standards of broadcasting quality to which I have referred.

It is important, when understanding the ability of the offical ILR stations to compete, to recognise some of the other constraints under which they operate. In addition, they have to pay substantial sums in royalties to the copyright authorities and comply with agreements on the amount of recorded music broadcast. On the other hand, pirate operators observe no common standard, pay no royalties and frequently plagiarise news broadcasts in an endeavour to give themselves broader appeal. However much one is aware of the fact that one or two pirate operators want to regularise their position, one starts by having to say that it is not surprising that their much lower overheads permit them to offer advertising at a much lower rate than an ILR station. One can understand why the legitimate broadcasters do not always consider that to be fair competition, indeed, far from it.

Against that background, I ask my hon. Friend to look cautiously at the periodic appeals by pirate operators to an ethos of opportunity and a free market, because those appeals need to be looked at more closely. As my hon. Friend knows, the Government are committed to free enterprise and competition. I think that we can say that we have done more than most to create a climate in which free enterprise and competition can flourish and to encourage the development of new small businesses. We are committed also, however, to the rule of law. We are committed to a framework of responsible broadcasting which requires rules and someone to enforce them. We do not subscribe to notions of competition that are unfair as well as illegal.

The question of competition cuts both ways. Some 51 independent local radio stations are in operation, and it is

[Mr. David Mellor]

open to all the pirates to compete for those franchises. I think it is fair to say that they have not chosen to do so, even though many ILR stations were founded by small business men and are not just part of a much larger set-up.

My hon. Friend rightly stressed local needs. I think that they are important. A point made in favour of licensing pirate operators is that they fulfil local ethnic or other specialist needs. What constitutes a local need and whether it is being met are plainly in the eye of the beholder. Although my hon. Friend has been scrupulously fair in not promoting one station, I know that she has one station in mind which operates from her constituency. I know that station well because many people in my constituency listen to it and make it clear to me that they enjoy it. It gives me no pleasure to have to be critical of that radio station, but I know that my hon. Friend understands, just as I hope does any sensible person outside Parliament who is hearing this debate, that no Government Minister can do other than deprecate the position of a service outside the law.

Those who take the law into their own hands must expect to pay such penalties as are imposed. There can never be a position, however free and easy one may wish to be in the interests of the widest community involvement in a radio station, where there is not firm regulation of the air waves. The air waves are an important intrusion into people's homes, with a capacity for evil as well as good. There must be regulation if standards are to be maintained. I keep returning to that point, but I think it is the answer to the suggestion that just a lot of stuffy bureaucrats are preventing the flourishing of small stations which, as seen by the very fact that so many people listen to them, are plainly meeting a need that the other stations do not meet. I believe that there is more to the matter than that.

I turn to the vexed question of licensing. The operation of a radio station without a licence is, as my hon. Friend knows and has properly been made clear, a criminal offence against the Wireless Telegraphy Act 1949, because it is likely to cause interference to other users and can deprive some people of the services they now receive. It is also a deliberate departure from the regulations on broadcasting which Parliament has, at the instigation of successive Governments, established under the international radio regulations, which have the status of solemn treaties between Governments. All broadcasting stations require international clearance, and the Government have an obligation to do what they can to prevent illegal broadcasting. To that extent, we have no choice but to take an attitude that is opposed to the existence of pirate stations.

Moreover, as my hon. Friend knows, the radio spectrum is a scarce resource, and the pirates have pre-empted frequencies that are in many cases earmarked for future use. It cannot be an excuse that there is room for more, because the heart of what I am saying is that further frequencies can be permitted only in the context of planned and properly regulated growth. That is why the Government do not believe that it would be sensible or fair to issue pirate broadcasters with licences to broadcast. To do so on the basis suggested by the pirate broadcasters would be progressively to undermine the broadcasting structure that has evolved over the years.

That does not mean that the Government are dismissive of community radio. I shall say something of how we see its future, and try to answer the question whether there is a prospect of a new tier of broadcasting on a local or community basis. I am glad to tell my hon. Friend that the Government envisage much scope for progress in that direction, although I would not want my remarks to be interpreted as implying that pirate stations will necessarily be legitimised.

For some time, the Government have been alert to the case for developing community radio. The term is generally used to describe two possible concepts. The first is what might be called neighbourhood broadcasting, which is what my hon. Friend had in mind when she made the valid point that London is more of a region than a community and that there are great differences between what happens in Putney or Morden and what happens in east or north London. The Government envisage low-powered transmitters, broadcasting to localities and perhaps financed and run by the local communities.

The second concept is of stations broadcasting across a wider geographical area, which appeal to a community of interests, such as an ethnic group or the devotees of a type of music who do not hear enough of what they like on existing more broadly based stations.

The issues involved in community radio were first explored in a report of the Home Office local radio working party, which was published in 1980. The working party noted that community radio raised important issues of broadcasting policy, and that if it were to develop it would also raise difficult questions of resources, through the need for additional frequencies and for a regulatory framework. Since then, however, other developments—DBS and cable, provision for which was made in the Cable and Broadcasting Act 1984—have had to take priority. I make no apology for that. We do not have the manpower to deal at one go with all the possible innovations in a fast-developing area of broadcasting. We must have priorities, and it would have been difficult not to give cable priority at that time.

The spectrum of frequencies available for radio broadcasting on VHF will increase following the international VHF band II planning conference which is now taking place in Geneva. In preparing our proposals for that conference, we have taken account of the possible needs of community radio, with the aim of avoiding the spectrum restraints that could otherwise apply in the future. Although many of the new frequencies will not become available until 1990 and thereafter, we shall at least be able to give some thought after the conference to the range of services that it might be possible to accommodate in the increased spectrum.

Some community radio enthusiasts may question whether we should have a regulatory framework. My hon. Friend must agree that there should be a basis for the allocation of frequencies—perhaps with provision in appropriate cases for time sharing—and for choosing between competing applicants if, as seems possible, there are insufficient frequencies to accommodate all those who wish to broadcast. If there is no means of deciding those matters, the result will be nothing short of anarchy of the airways, in which those who have the most powerful transmitters will dominate. That cannot be right.

Other questions that must be determined are how the stations should be financed and whether, if they are profit-making, there should be limits on the amount of profit.

Should there be conditions about transmitter power and, if so, who should enforce them? What are the implications for the existing broadcasting structure?

Those matters cannot be lightly pushed to one side. They merit careful thought and it is more than an excuse for inaction to raise them. We want to make progress on them. There is a genuine commitment to that—the same commitment which has made the Government innovative on broadcasting matters. A Conservative Government introduced independent television, a Conservative Government gave the go-ahead for independent local radio and a Conservative Government plan an independent national radio station. We have a proud record of innovation on which we want to build.

We intend to begin our consideration of the means by which community radio can be developed at about the turn of the year, when we shall know the outcome of the Geneva conference. That will give us a basis for planning for the future.

My hon. Friend made her case with typical cogency, moderation and good sense. I hope that I have responded in kind and that she will not be disappointed when I say that the Government cannot license pirate stations as they stand. I hope that my hon. Friend will accept that the reasons that I have outlined are fair.

However, I am sure that my hon. Friend will be encouraged by my view, which picks up some of the points in her speech, that the way forward is to look to the development of community radio as a way of encouraging the development of community identity. However, it must be an orderly development. The Government will seek to remove the obstacles and create the opportunities for community radio stations to develop.

We look to those with interest and enterprise to explore the potential for community radio. Provided that the illegal broadcasters meet the criteria for community radio—we shall try to make them as light as possible, consistent with the maintenance of standards—it will be open to them to apply in the same way as any other group. However, I cannot, on behalf of the Government, offer them preferential treatment, and I do not think that they could expect it merely because they have pre-empted frequencies.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at four minutes to Three o'clock.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 19 November 1984

WALES

Social Care

14. **Mr. Hooson** asked the Secretary of State for Wales what is his latest information on the number of social workers employed by Welsh local authorities and the amount of Welsh Office grants to voluntary organisations involved in social care; and how these figures compare with those in 1979.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Social work staff including trainees and welfare assistants numbered 1,249 in September 1979 and 1,418 in September 1983. The whole-time equivalents were 1,202 and 1,359, respectively.

Grant aid to voluntary organisations was £1·53 million in 1983-84 compared with £538,000 in 1979-80.

Drug Abuse

15. **Mr. Raffan** asked the Secretary of State for Wales what initiatives he plans to meet the problem of drug abuse in North Wales.

18. **Sir Anthony Meyer** asked the Secretary of State for Wales what assistance he has offered to area authorities and other local authorities in Wales to combat drug abuse.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: As I told my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, Moorlands (Mr. Knox) on 9 February 1984, my right hon. Friend has extended the purposes for which the Welsh Office central reserve for NHS psychiatric services may be used to include schemes to combat drug misuse. This is in addition to the record levels of resources we are already providing for the NHS in Wales. Authorities have also been reminded of the continued availability of joint finance for schemes to combat drug misuse which are provided by social services authorities, voluntary organisations and other service providers. Bids have been requested by 21 December this year and any assistance would begin from April 1985.

Bus-Rail Substitution

17. **Mr. D. E. Thomas** asked the Secretary of State for Wales how the rural passenger will benefit from the bus-rail substitution proposals contained in "Local Choice in Public Transport."

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: No bus substitute service would be introduced before the existing statutory procedures governing the closure of the rail service concerned had been completed. Where a bus substitute service was introduced it would offer a good quality, attractive, guaranteed and, where necessary, subsidised alternative to the closed rail service.

Council Property Sales

19. **Mr. Gwilym Jones** asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many sales of public sector dwellings have been completed in Wales *(a)* under the right-to-buy provisions and *(b)* under voluntary provisions since May 1979.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Between May 1979 and 30 June 1984, Welsh local authorities, the Cwmbran Development Corporation and Mid-Wales Development sold 36,038 dwellings under the right-to-buy provisions and 4,466 under voluntary provisions. In addition, we estimate that 800 properties have been sold by housing associations under the right-to-buy or through voluntary or co-ownership arrangements.

Common Agricultural Policy

20. **Mr. Harvey** asked the Secretary of State for Wales whether he is aware of any proposals to alter the arrangements for the sheepmeat régime or the variable beef premium in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: The present arrangements for both the sheepmeat régime and the variable beef premium will be considered as part of the overall 1985-86 common agricultural policy price fixing negotiations.

Milk Quota Scheme

22. **Sir Raymond Gower** asked the Secretary of State for Wales what is his latest assessment of the impact of the milk quota scheme on farmers in Wales and in the Vale of Glamorgan, respectively; how many farmers in each case have submitted reports and claims which have been deemed of special need; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: Some 4,500 special case applications have been submitted in Wales of which 56 came from the Vale of Glamorgan. It is too early for accurate analysis of the results of these cases. The effects of the implementation of milk quotas will depend on decisions taken by individual farmers.

Torfaen (Investigation)

23. **Mr. Abse** asked the Secretary of State for Wales when the present investigation into the significantly higher rate of children born with congenital disabilities in Torfaen will be completed; whether the investigation includes a survey of the statistics of early termination of pregnancies prompted by detection of abnormality; and whether he will present the results of the investigation to a public inquiry set up to review the environmental hazards caused by the burning of poly-chlorinated biphenyls at the Re-chem International factory.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: None of the evidence at present available substantiates the suggestion that the operation of the Re-chem plant creates environmental hazards or harm to health. The figures so far published for congenital malformations at birth among babies in Torfaen are comparable with rates for the rest of Wales, although the rate for Gwent as a whole is lower than both. The Department is examining in greater detail the incidence of the most serious abnormalities in Gwent and elsewhere so as to put the Torfaen figures into their context. This work will inevitably take time but is being given priority, and the results will be published. Meanwhile, the position is being continuously kept under review, and, should the need for additional work be indicated at any time, it will be done.

Coal Industry Dispute

16. **Mr. Terlezki** asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement about the effect on industries in Wales of the miners' strike.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: The coal mining industry and its related industries are clearly badly affected. Other industries throughout Wales are generally continuing to operate without serious difficulty, but there may be injurious effects upon business and retailing in coal mining areas. It is time that the National Union of Mineworkers brought this costly and damaging strike to an end, in Wales and elsewhere.

Bypasses

Mr. Geraint Howells asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he intends to build a bypass at Fishguard and Goodwick during the next five years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: We are satisfied that the A40 trunk road is basically adequate for the traffic it now has to carry, but we shall keep the need for improvement under review.

Unemployment (Teifi Valley)

Mr. Geraint Howells asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he has any plans to combat the high unemployment in the Teifi valley in mid-Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: My hon. Friend the Minister of State convened and chaired a meeting earlier this year of a wide range of bodies and individuals concerned with encouraging new employment opportunities in the Teifi valley. The meeting produced useful ideas for assisting development in the valley, many of which are now under way. These include improved business advisory services, promotion of the valley as an employment and tourism centre, additional funding for social and community developments and the appointment of a secondee from the private sector to look afresh at the needs and opportunities of the area. These initiatives are in addition to the programmes of assistance to the area from Government, statutory agencies and European sources.

Small Businesses

Mr. Geraint Howells asked the Secretary of State for Wales, what measures his Department has taken to encourage the setting up of small businesses in Wales during the last five years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the member for Mitcham and Morden (Mrs. Rumbold) on 30 October 1984, at column 887. The measures referred to in that reply represent a continuation and development of the range of assistance given by my Department, the Welsh Development Agency, Mid Wales Development and the Wales Tourist Board during the last five years to encourage the setting up of small businesses in Wales.

Wine Production

Mr. Geraint Howells asked the Secretary of State for Wales what is the present level of wine production in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: The information is not available.

New Jobs

Sir Raymond Gower asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many new jobs have been created in Wales and in the Vale of Glamorgan, respectively, in each of the last four years.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: Comprehensive information on jobs created is not available. However, since 1 May 1979, projects for which offers of selective financial assistance have been accepted or which were allocated Government-financed factories promised over 67,000 jobs in Wales as a whole. For the same period the figure for the Vale of Glamorgan district is 1,150.

Public Expenditure

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will list those Welsh local authorities whose provisional expenditure targets for 1985-86 have been increased by five per cent. or more, by 10 per cent. or more, by 15 per cent. or more and by 20 per cent. or more, showing for each authority the percentage overspend or underspend on target and on grant-related expenditure bugeted in 1984-85;

(2) if he will list the Welsh authorities with the smallest increase or largest decrease in their expenditure target between, *(a)* 1984-85 and 1985-86 and *(b)* 1982-83 and 1983-84.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: Expenditure targets for the years 1982-83 to 1984-85, and provisional targets for 1985-86, were, following consultations with the Welsh local authority associations, largely determined by reference to previous year's spending and not the previous year's targets. In addition, adjustments for changes in the level of the national insurance surcharge on local government employees and the increased role of the Manpower Services Commission in funding parts of the further education service are only reflected in the appropriate year. Thus, it is not possible to make meaningful comparisons between targets for successive years. The largest decrease in target between 1982-83 and 1983-84 was £178,000 for Taff Ely borough council. The largest decrease from the 1984-85 target to the 1985-86 provinsional target was £982,000 for Torfaen borough council. The additional information requested for those authorities whose provisional expenditure target for 1985-86 was 5 per cent. or more greater than their 1984-85 target is set out in the following table:—

	Percentage increase 1984-85 to 1985-86 target	*Percentage difference between expenditure and:*	
		Target	*G.R.E.*
Gwynedd	5·2	+1·6	−1·4
Midglamorgan	5·3	+3·7	+5·8
Powys	5·6	+2·0	+2·8
Clwyd	6·9	+2·4	+1·8
Ynys Mon	5·2	+3·3	−0·1
Radnor	5·5	−0·1	−3·8
Dwyfor	5·6	+1·7	+8·8
Islwyn	5·8	0·0	−7·9
Rhondda	5·9	0·0	+12·7
Montgomery	6·0	−0·1	−9·7

	Percentage increase 1984-85 to 1985-86 target	Percentage difference between expenditure and: Target	G.R.E.
Alyn and Deeside	6·7	0·0	−12·1
South Pembroke	7·2	0·0	−8·6
Carmarthen	7·8	0·0	−11·2
Monmouth	8·2	0·0	−4·1
Wrexham Maelor	9·3	+7·2	−7·0
Ceredigion	10·7	−0·1	−12·0
Llanelli	10·9	0·0	+1·7
Swansea	12·6	+4·2	+7·8
Newport	13·7	+10·1	+9·7
Blaenau Gwent	14·2	0·0	+8·6

Block Grants

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish the total claims on block grants at original budget stage in each year from 1981-82 to 1984-85 for Welsh authorities, showing for each year the percentage over or under claim.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: The information requested is as follows:

Year	Total block grant claims £ million	Percentage over claims Per cent.
1981-82	728·6	4·58
1982-83	814·9	3·15
1983-84	811·5	1·12
1984-85	807·6	1·08

In no year was there an underclaim.

Rates

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total paid in *(a)* domestic and *(b)* non-domestic rates in Wales, showing domestic rates net of rebate in each year from 1981-82 to 1984-85.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: The information requested is as follows:

£ million

Year	Domestic rates*	Non-domestic rates
1981-82	148·3	232·4
1982-83	173·8	240·6
1983-84	149·5	243·0
1984-85	171·8	264·8

*Excluding domestic rate relief and rate rebates. In 1981-82 and 1982-83 that part of rate rebates paid as part of supplementary benefit is not separately identifiable, and so has not been excluded. Domestic relief was reduced from 36p to 18½p in 1982-83.

Urban Development Grants

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many projects in Wales to date are covered by urban development grants; how much public expenditure is involved in the current financial year; and how much is committed in future years.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: Since the introduction of the urban development grant scheme in April 1982, 28 projects throughout Wales have been the subject of grant aid approvals or offers in principle. On current estimates the grant aid involved would be about £5 million in the present financial year, with £3 million remaining committed for 1985-86.

Local Authorities (Fees and Charges)

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total Welsh local authority income from fees and charges for each year from 1981-82 to 1984-85.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Total income received by Welsh local authorities from fees and charges, including council house rents, in 1981-82 and 1982-83 was as follows:

Year	£ million
1981-82	255·4
1982-83	275·7

Figures are not yet available in sufficient detail to provide information on income from fees and charges in 1983-84 and 1984-85.

Rate Support Grant

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total payment of rate support grant to Welsh local authorities in each year from 1981-82 to 1984-85.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: The information requested is as follows:

	£
1981-82	745,035,999
1982-83	796,416,998
1983-84	815,587,897
1984-85	*803,350,000

* Estimate.

Rate Rebates

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total paid in rate rebates in Wales for each year from 1981-82 to 1984-85.

Mr Nicholas Edwards: The information requested is as follows:

	£ million
1981-82	11·719
1982-83	18·231
1983-84	38·662
1984-85	*43·200

* Estimate.

The figures include rate rebates paid in respect of supplementary benefit recipients under the housing benefit scheme. The latter was introduced partially in November 1982 and fully in April 1983.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Secretary of State (Disciplinary Powers)

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list his powers to discipline or otherwise rebuke the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis.

Mr. Giles Shaw: My right hon. and learned Friend has no such statutory powers; the Commissioner is appointed by Her Majesty the Queen and holds office at pleasure.

Metropolitan Police (Computers)

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the private acquisition by a Metropolitan police police officer of a computer for use in Bethnal Green police station, indicating what information will be held on the computer, who will have access to it, and who now owns the computer; and whether any other privately-purchased computers are being used by the Metropolitan police.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that a constable working in a unit in Bethnal Green charged with analysing burglaries with a view to improving the deployment of police officers, has used a microcomputer, which she owns, to assist her work. The computer holds information about the type of premises burgled, the time of the burglary, the method of entry, the property stolen and other relevant details, but does not hold personal data about victims. Only her colleagues in the unit have access to the computer.

I understand that there are eight other privately-owned computers in use in the Metropolitan police for statistical and administrative purposes.

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department when it is intended to replace the Metropolitan police "C" department computer with new hardware.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that the matter is under consideration.

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the criminal information system for the Metropolitan police will be operational.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The Metropolitan police is currently considering its operational requirement for a computerised crime reporting system and final decisions have not yet been taken to procure such a system.

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the Metropolitan police "C" department computer has been used during the current miners' strike; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that the computer facilities dedicated to "C" department have continued to be used normally during the period of the current dispute; no special modifications have been made because of the dispute.

Extradition Treaties

Mr. Terlezki asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many countries there are with which the United Kingdom does not have an extradition treaty.

Mr. Mellor: There are 77 countries with which the United Kingdom does not have an extradition treaty or any corresponding arrangement under the Fugitive Offenders Act 1967.

Mr. Terlezki asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to conclude extradition treaties with countries with which there is presently no treaty.

Mr. Mellor: We are currently holding discussions with a view to concluding an extradition treaty with Spain.

Mr. Terlezki asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many individuals sought by the police are known to be resident in countries with which the United Kingdom has no extradition treaty.

Mr. Mellor: The information requested is not held centrally and could not be obtained without disproportionate cost.

Citizenship

Mr. Stuart Holland asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the Government intend to revise the British Nationality Act to allow British citizenship to residents of St. Helena.

Mr. Waddington: There are no plans to do so.

Mr. James Farrell

Mr. Bidwell asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has yet completed his investigation into the case of James Farrell now in Her Majesty's prison, Long Lartin, South Littleton; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: Police inquiries into certain aspects of this case are still in progress. Once the results of these inquiries are available, the review of the case will be completed as soon as possible.

Prostitution

Mr. Tom Cox asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the total amount of money owing for the non-payment of fines at the South Western magistrates' court for offences concerning prostitution as on 31 October.

Mr. Mellor: The total amount of fines outstanding at the South Western magistrates' court as at 30 September 1984 was £428,000. Part of this sum consists of fines in respect of which the time allowed for payment had not expired. Information in respect of fines outstanding for particular offences is not available.

Probation Committees

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department which existing local authorities will provide the servicing for the probation joint committees in metropolitan county areas in the event of the abolition of the metropolitan counties.

Mr. Mellor: Following the abolition of the metropolitan county councils, the duty to meet the expenses of probation committees in the metropolitan counties will pass to the district councils; it will be for each of these probation committees to make such arrangements as it sees fit for the provision of specialist services by outside organisations, which could include one or more of the district councils in the area.

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether, in the event of the abolition of the

metropolitan counties, the successor probation committees will be empowered to determine their own budgetary requirements without reference to or consultation with all the metropolitan districts in their areas.

Mr. Mellor: Following the abolition of the metropolitan county councils, the duty of probation committees in the metropolitan counties to consult local authorities on their proposed expenditure in support of probation officers will be revoked. But each of these probation committees will be required to co-opt a member of every district council in the area, and to furnish copies of its annual estimates to those councils; and it will be open to a district council or the probation committee—as it now is to the county council or that committee—in the event of disagreement on the provision for expenditure in support of probation officers, to seek a determination by my right hon. and learned Friend.

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department on whom the responsibility will fall for determining the numbers of local authority representatives to be co-opted on to probation committees should Cmnd. 9063 be implemented; and what are his proposals for governing the composition of such co-options.

Mr. Mellor: The Government propose that, after the abolition of the Greater London council and the metropolitan county councils, probation committees in outer London and the metropolitan counties should be required to co-opt one member from each of their constituent borough or district councils unless the Home Secretary has by order specified that a greater number should be co-opted from any particular council. The procedure to be followed by a probation committee in co-opting will be specified in an order to be made by the Home Secretary; consultations are being held on the details of the arrangements.

Police and Fire Services

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will ensure that police and fire service operational manpower numbers within metropolitan areas will be maintained at least at their present levels after March 1986 should Cmnd. 9063 be implemented.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Decisions on the levels of operational manpower will be taken by the new joint authorities subject to existing statutory requirements and to the transitional precept and manpower controls described in paragraph 6.6 of Cmnd. 9063.

Stoke Heath Youth Custody Centre

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will order an inquiry into the running of the Stoke Heath youth custody centre following complaints sent to him by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside;

(2) if he is satisfied with the supervision at the Stoke Heath youth custody centre; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: The hon. Member has written to my right hon. and learned Friend about the health of an inmate at Stoke Heath and we will reply to his letter as soon as we can. If he has any further points to put, we will naturally look into them. But we see no need for an inquiry into the establishment.

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the death of the young prisoner in the Stoke Heath youth custody centre, details of which have been sent to him by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside.

Mr. Mellor: Stephen McLachlan died in Stoke Heath youth custody centre during the night of 9-10 July 1984. His death was the subject of an inquest held on 5 September 1984 at Market Drayton. The jury's verdict was that he died of natural causes and that the cause of death was aggravated by self-neglect.

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons have received injuries at the Stoke Heath youth custody centre in each of the past five years.

Mr. Mellor: Information in this form is not routinely collected and is therefore not readily available.

Coal Industry Dispute

Mr. Marlow asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have been charged in connection with the current dispute in the mining industry; how many have been finally dealt with by the courts; how many have been fined; and how many have been sentenced to imprisonment.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Between 13 March and 13 November inclusive 6,655 people were charged with offences in connection with the miners' dispute and 3,049 of these cases have now been dealt with by the courts. Of the 2,404 convicted, 1,584 have been fined and 49 have received custodial sentences.

Mr. Nellist asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give details, by police force area, of the total number of arrests to the latest available date in connection with the coal strike, and provide a breakdown of arrests by offence charged with outcome of trial and those still awaiting trial.

Mr. Soley asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will publish in the *Official Report* the following information on the mining dispute: *(a)* the number of arrests in each police area, *(b)* the number of those arrested who were released without being charged and *(c)* the charges laid and the number of persons charged with each offence listed.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The information available centrally about the number of arrests made in each police force area in connection with the miners' dispute relates to the period 13 March to 13 November inclusive and is as follows:

Police Force area	*Number of arrrests*
Clevaland	58
Cumbria	25
Derbyshire	1,112
Durham	396
Dyfed/Powys	2
Essex	212
Greater Manchester	234
Gwent	167
Hampshire	11
Humberside	94
Kent	211
Lancashire	26

Police Force area	Number of arrests
Leicestershire	54
Merseyside	182
Metropolitan	126
Northumbria	458
North Wales	31
North Yorkshire	139
Nottinghamshire	2,329
South Wales	330
South Yorkshire	1,007
Staffordshire	385
Thames Valley	3
Warwickshire	194
West Yorkshire	144
TOTAL:	7,930

Note: 1,275 of those arrested in this period were released without charge.

The information available centrally about charges laid in connection with the miners' dispute during the same period is as follows:

Offence	Number of charges
Section 5 of the Public Order Act (conduct likely to cause a breach of the peace)	3,471
Obstruction of a police constable	1,554
Obstruction of the highway	596
Criminal damage	758
Criminal damage with intent to endanger life	4
Arson	10
Assaulting a police constable	280
Assault occasioning actual bodily harm	305
Greivous bodily harm	36
Theft	146
Resisting arrest	18
Offensive weapon	42
Conspiracy and Protection of Property Act 1875	236
Burglary	17
Handling stolen property	1
Drug offence	1
Breach of the Peace	132
Breach of bail conditions	28
Attempt (various offences)	17
Drunkenness	56
Unlawful assembly	507
Railway offences	17
Affray	21
Riot	137
Incitement	1
Reckless driving	15
Threats/Conspiracy to cause damage	12
Explosives offence	3
Threats to kill	3
Unlawful imprisonment	2
Other offences	143
TOTAL:	8,569

Of the 6,655 people charged during this period, 3,606 cases have not yet been resolved; 645 of the cases dealt with resulted in acquittals, and 2,404 in convictions.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers have been sent to aid other forces from each force in England and Wales for each week of the mining strike.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The information requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers there have been from other areas in each aided force for each week of the mining strike.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I shall write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many officers in each force in England and Wales have been placed on stand-by in their force areas for each week of the mining strike.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The information requested is not recorded centrally.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give the number of metropolitan police district support units that have been sent to aid other forces for each week of the mining strike.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The Commissioner tells me that officers serving in district support units of the Metropolitan police have been sent on mutual aid to other police forces on only one occasion. This was on the night of 18-19 June, when 93 officers drawn from district support units attended at Betteshanger colliery, Kent.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give the numbers of metropolitan police vehicles employed each week in policing the mining strike in aided force areas.

Mr. Giles Shaw: This information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give the total number of *(a)* uniformed police and *(b)* Criminal Investigation Department and Special Branch officers who have been sent each week to aid other forces during the miners' strike.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The table gives, to the nearest 100, the maximum number of uniformed officers deployed to aid other forces during each week of the dispute.

Maximum number of officers from other forces deployed on any one day

Week	Number
14 March to 18 March	6,900
19 March to 25 March	7,500
26 March to 1 April	5,800
2 April to 8 April	5,500
9 April to 15 April	5,600
16 April to 22 April	4,800
23 April to 29 April	3,700
30 April to 6 May	4,500
7 May to 13 May	4,800
14 May to 20 May	4,300
21 May to 27 May	5,100
28 May to 3 June	4,800
4 June to 10 June	5,800
11 June to 17 June	5,500
18 June to 24 June	8,100
25 June to 1 July	4,900
2 July to 8 July	4,800
9 July to 15 July	5,300
16 July to 22 July	5,200
23 July to 29 July	4,600
30 July to 5 August	4,200
6 August to 12 August	4,600
13 August to 19 August	5,400
20 August to 26 August	5,600

Week	Number
27 August to 2 September	6,100
3 September to 9 September	6,800
10 September to 16 September	5,900
17 September to 23 September	6,300
24 September to 30 September	6,600
1 October to 7 October	6,600
8 October to 14 October	6,600
15 October to 21 October	5,300
22 October to 28 October	5,500
29 October to 4 November	5,500
5 November to 11 November	5,400

The information requested about CID and Special Branch officers is not available centrally.

Kerb Crawling

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if the Criminal Law Revision Committee has yet reached any conclusions on the need for changes in the law relating to kerb crawling; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if the policy advisory committee on sexual offences has yet reached any conclusions on the need for changes in the law relating to kerb crawling; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: The Criminal Law Revision Committee, advised by the policy advisory committee on sexual offences, submitted a report on "Prostitution in the Street" which was published in August (Cmnd. 9329). The report recommends the creation of a new offence to deal with the nuisance of kerb crawling. As I said in a reply to a question from the hon. Member on 14 November, at columns 258-59, we welcome the committee's recommendation and, although there will be no early opportunity to give effect to it in Government legislation, we would support a Bill introduced by a private Member for that purpose.

Metropolitan Police (District Support Units)

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give the number of district support units in each of the metropolitan police divisions.

Mr. Giles Shaw: There is one district support unit for each of the 24 districts of the Metropolitan police.

Police Support Units

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give the number of police support units (or their equivalents) for each police force in England and Wales in 1981 and 1984.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Police support units are not maintained on a permanent basis. They consist of 23 officers drawn together from normal operational duties to make a unit as and when required.

Mr. Mohammed Siddique

Mr. Terry Davis asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the answer of the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State on 12 November, *Official Report*, column 71, whether Mr. Mohammed Siddique was interviewed by the governor or deputy governor of Winson Green prison before 12 November in connection with his wish to grow a beard.

Mr. Mellor: I regret that the statement that Mr. Siddique had not applied to the governor for permission to grow a beard, whilst correct when the reply was prepared was no longer correct when the reply was sent to the hon. Member on Monday 12 November. Following an application to the governor, Mr. Siddique was granted permission to grow a beard on Sunday 11 November.

Winson Green Prison

Mr. Terry Davis asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether there are any restrictions on the clothes which may be worn by men on remand in Winson Green prison.

Mr. Mellor: The prison rules provide that an unconvicted prisoner may wear his own clothing if it is suitable, tidy and clean. Convicted but unsentenced prisoners on remand are required to wear prison clothing, and so are unconvicted prisoners who do not have suitable clothing of their own. These provisions are followed at Birmingham prison. If the hon. Member has a particular case in mind, I should be glad to look into it.

Mr. Terry Davis asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department why Mr. Mohammed Shafi Malik was not allowed to visit Mr. Raja, who is on remand at Winson Green prison on 31 October.

Mr. Mellor: Mr. Malik's name was accidentally omitted from the list of Mr. Raja's approved visitors maintained at the prison gate lodge and he was not, therefore, admitted to the prison. Apologies have been made to Mr. Malik and Mr. Raja, and the list of approved visitors to Mr. Raja has been brought up to date.

Fire Services

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the criteria by which he measures the efficiency of the service provided by local authority fire departments.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Fire authority performance of statutory duties is inspected by Her Majesty's inspectorate, particular attention being paid to observance of nationally recommended standards of fire cover.

National Community Service

Mr. Murphy asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will give consideration to the introduction of a form of national community service for school leavers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Morrison: I have been asked to reply.

Minimum age school leavers are already guaranteed the offer of a full year's training and work experience under the youth training scheme, and the scheme offers places for 17-year-old leavers as well. In addition, the voluntary projects programme and the opportunities for volunteering scheme run by the Department of Health and Social Security provide opportunities for young people to undertake work of benefit to the community. While all these schemes are kept under regular review, we have no immediate plans to extend the range of measures available.

North Cornwall (Swimmers)

Mr. Lilley asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many people were drowned off the beach at Porthowan in each of the last three years;

(2) how many people were drowned off the coast of north Cornwall in each of the last three years.

Mr. John Patten: I have been asked to reply.

Information available centrally about deaths from drowning is collected through death registration by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys. The amount of detail available is dependent on information supplied by Her Majesty's coroners.

In the years 1981 to 1983 no drowning deaths were identified as occurring off the beach at Porthowan. Thirteen deaths occurring off the north Cornish coast were registered in this period—five in 1981, five in 1982 and three in 1983. These include one known suicide and two deaths probably involving falling from cliffs.

SCOTLAND

Home Insulation

Mr. Cook asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish in the *Official Report* figures showing in constant prices expenditure by local authorities on insulation of their housing stock for each of the last five years; and if he is satisfied that the inclusion of grants for such expenditure in the general allocation has not resulted in a fall in expenditure.

Mr. Ancram: The information requested is as follows:

£ million

	Cash	*At 1983-84 prices*
1979-80	4·2	6·1
1980-81	3·7	4·5
1981-82	2·5	2·8
1982-83	2·1	2·2
1983-84	2·3	2·3

I have no reason to believe that the inclusion of funds for the insulation of local authority houses in their allocation has been the sole, or even the most significant factor in this pattern of expenditure. Since 1980-81, when resources for this purpose were included in the HRA-block allocations, the pattern reflects decisions by local authorities in allocating the resources available to them. Over this period, expenditure has not dropped markedly in relation to the number of houses still without insulation.

Roads

Mr. David Marshall asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will show for each regional authority *(a)* provisional outturn expenditure in 1983-84 and *(b)* planned expenditure in 1984-85 and 1985-86 on (i) highway structural maintenance, (ii) highway routine maintenance and (iii) highway capital.

Mr. Ancram: Information available to me on regional authorities' current highway expenditure does not identify separately expenditure on structural and on routine maintenance, and includes expenditure on road lighting and road safety measures. Provisional outturn expenditure in 1983-84 is set out in the table. An estimate of current expenditure by each regional council in 1984-85 appears in "Rating Review part I: Estimates of Income and Expenditure 1984-85"; published by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, of which a copy is available in the Library. No comparable estimate is yet available for 1985-86.

The table also shows provisional outturn capital expenditure in 1983-84, allocated provision for local authority roads and transport projects in 1984-85, and provisional allocations intimated for 1985-86. Each regional and island council has discretion to determine the distribution of expenditure within its overall allocation.

£000

Region	*1983-84** *Capital expenditure on roads*	*Current† expenditure on roads maintenance and road lighting*	*1984-85 Capital expenditure allocation roads and transport*	*1985-86 Provisional capital expenditure allocation on roads and transport*
Borders	1,554	4,626	2,115	2,400
Central	3,291	7,834	4,031	3,500
Dumfries and Galloway	1,932	5,622	2,341	2,400
Fife	4,986	9,904	6,327	6,100
Grampian	9,500	15,221	10,762	11,600
Highland	9,186	18,849	9,152	10,300
Lothian	15,179	20,402	21,570	22,600
Strathclyde	54,720	58,138	67,477	68,500
Tayside	6,965	16,182	8,070	8,000
Orkney	457	2,067	557	600
Shetland	3,734	2,116	5,010	4,300
Western Isles	3,053	3,034	3,889	4,400
Regions Total	114,557	163,995	141,301	144,700

*Provisional outturn figures.

†Includes expenditure on roads administration.

M. D. Sudjic (Appeal)

Mr. Henderson asked the Secretary of State for Scotland when he now expects a determination of the appeal by M. D. Sudjic undertaken by the service committee appeal hearing on Wednesday 18 April.

Mr. John MacKay: The decision on this appeal is likely to issue about the end of this month.

Co-operatives

Mr. Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the number of *(a)* registered workers' co-operatives and *(b)* community co-operatives in Scotland; and how many people they employ.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The latest figures available to my Department indicate that approximately 92 Scottish co-operatives have been registered. Of these, it is estimated that 43 are workers' co-operatives and 39 community co-operatives or community businesses, employing 363 and 931, respectively.

Rent and Rate Rebates

Mr. Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many persons in Scotland during the financial years 1982-83 and 1983-84 received *(a)* rent rebates and *(b)* rates rebates.

Mr. Ancram: Rent rebates and most rates rebates have been since 1 April 1983 a part of the housing benefit system which is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services. I have asked him to write to the hon. Member. The amounts of rates rebates on accommodation for disabled persons and on all property in enterprise zones, both of which remain my responsibility, are shown below, but no figures for the number of persons, households or premises are held centrally.

Rates rebates granted in Scotland

	1982-83 £ *million*	*1983-84* £ *million*
Accommodation for disabled persons	9·4	11·1
Property in enterprise zones	2·0	2·2

Corstorphine Hill

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he will give favourable consideration to the request from Edinburgh district council that Corstorphine hill be designated as countryside.

Mr. Ancram: Such a request reached my Department on 15 November and is now under consideration. In reaching a decision on the request, my right hon. Friend will take into account my hon. Friend's views.

Western Relief Road

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for Scotland where and when the Parliamentary Commission on the proposed Western relief road will sit; and whether interested bodies in Edinburgh will be able to make representations to the commissioners in due course.

Mr. Ancram: The inquiry by commissioners will be held in the Lothian regional council chamber, Parliament square, Edinburgh, and will open at 11 am on Thursday 22 November 1984. Those bodies which objected to the proposed order in the manner, and within the time, prescribed in general orders made under the Private Legislation Procedure (Scotland) Act 1936, will be heard by the commissioners. No other bodies are entitled to be heard although the commissioners do have a discretion to hear them.

Hepatitis B

Mr. George Robertson asked the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) which hospitals in Scotland are designated to receive cases of acute hepatitis B; and what is the geographical catchment area for each one;

(2) if he will list, for each of the last five years, the number of acute hepatitis B cases admitted to each hospital in Scotland which is designated to handle such cases.

Mr. John MacKay: Hospitals are not specially designated for the reception of such cases. Figures are not readily available for 1979, but the numbers of discharges from Scottish hospitals with a primary or secondary diagnosis of viral hepatitis B for the years 1980 to 1983 are given in the table.

Discharges of viral hepatitis B cases (primary or secondary diagnosis) from Scottish hospitals

Hospital	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	**1983*
Ayrshire Central Hospital	3	4	3	11
Crosshouse Hospital, Kilmarnock				1
Davidson Cottage Hospital	1			
County Hospital, Oban			1	
Inverclyde Royal Hospital	3	1	5	2
Hawkhead Hospital	1	1		3
Royal Alexandra Infirmary	2			
Cameron Hospital	2	3	1	11
Belvidere Hospital	16			1
Glasgow Royal Infirmary	2	6	4	3
Ruchill Hospital	36	46	75	105
Stobhill Hospital	2	1	2	2
Victoria Infirmary, Glasgow		1		4
Southern General Hospital		8	1	1
Gartnavel District General Hospital	1	7	2	3
Western Infirmary	1	1	1	3

Hospital	1980	1981	1982	*1983
Dunbar Hospital, Thurso				2
Caithness Central Hospital		1	1	
Raigmore Hospital, Inverness		2		
Culduthel Hospital, Inverness		4	6	1
Monklands District General Hospital	1	8	2	12
Law Hospital	2			
Stonehouse Hospital				1
Aberdeen Royal Infirmary		8		
Woodend Hospital		2	3	1
City Hospital, Aberdeen	4	12	10	3
Glen O Dee Hospital			1	
Fleming Hospital		1		
Eastern General Hospital			2	1
Leith Hospital				1
Roodlands General Hospital	1			
Western General	1		2	
City Hospital, Edinburgh	28	6	38	40
Deaconess Hospital				1
Princess Margaret Rose	1			2
Royal Hospital for Sick Children, Edinburgh		1		
Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh	5	5	4	7
Ninewells Hospital, Dundee			2	
Kings Cross Hospital, Dundee	5	20	15	8
Perth Royal Infirmary			1	
Falkirk and District Royal Infirmary		1	4	2
Stirling Royal Infirmary	1	1	1	
Dumfries and Galloway Royal Infirmary	1			
Total	120	151	187	232

Source: Scottish Hospital In-Patient Statistics.
* Provisional.

Electricity Output

Mr. Skinner asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage of electricity output in Scotland came from nuclear power in the year before the coal dispute started; and what percentage is now coming from such stations.

Mr. Allan Stewart: For the 12-month period prior to November 1983, 39 per cent. of electricity output in Scotland came from nuclear power; and for the period from November 1983 to August 1984, the latest date for which published data is available, the figure was 36 per cent.

Residential Homes

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has plans to introduce legislation to give local authorities additional powers to detect any unregistered premises offering nursing care to the elderly and to enable those authorities to take action against those registered establishments which fail to meet the requisite standards; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John MacKay: Health boards are already empowered to enter and inspect any premises which they reasonably believe to be used as a nursing home and to cancel the registration of establishments which fail to meet the requisite standards. Failure to comply with the requirement to register or the conditions of registration is punishable on summary conviction by a fine. Additional powers do not seem necessary.

Coal Industry Dispute

Mr. Nellist asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give details, by police force area, of the total number of arrests to the latest available date in connection with the coal strike, and indicate the number of arrests by offence charged with, the sentences on conviction and the numbers still awaiting trial.

Mr. Ancram: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Falkland Islands

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs why the hospital site at Port Stanley has yet to be cleared.

Mr. Raison: The site will be cleared when work on the new hospital facility begins. It would be uneconomic to do so earlier.

Ethiopia

Mr. Randall asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will change his policy towards Ethiopia and make British funds available for its longer term development as well as for the present humanitarian needs.

Mr. Raison: We are helping long-term development through the waiving of aid debt and through a limited

programme of technical co-operation which concentrates on education. The Commonwealth Development Corporation and British voluntary agencies, through the joint funding scheme, can also operate in Ethiopia with support from the aid programme. British funds are also, of course, channelled through the European Community, which has a substantial development programme in Ethiopia.

Mr. Randall asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place in the Library copies of the assessments by *(a)* the ambassador and *(b)* the international and voluntary organisations on the needs and on the possibilities for effective assistance against famine in Ethiopia.

Mr. Raison: Communications with our ambassador are confidential, but we regularly receive and respond to his recommendations on what we ought to supply. It is for the organisations that the hon. Member has in mind to decide whether or not to publish their assessments.

St. Helena

Dr. Marek asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will send the report on St. Helena by Sir Neil Marten to the island Governor so that it can be made available to members of the Legislative Council.

Mr. Raison: No. Sir Neil Marten visited St. Helena as my personal representative and therefore reported personally to me.

Mr. Nellist asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs why the amount of food aid from the United Kingdom to Ethiopia fell from £5,194,000 in 1982 to £2,510,000 in 1983.

Mr. Raison: The figures quoted reflect the level of calls on our bilateral food aid by the world food programme for use in development projects in Ethiopia, as well as 1,500 tonnes of cereals supplied direct in 1982. The figures do not include food aid provided by the European Community.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

East Germany (Property Claims)

Mr. Nicholas Brown asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if, in the light of the recent accord between the East German Government and the Government of Finland in respect of payments by the East German Government to Finnish subjects who owned property in East Germany in 1945, he will take further steps to press the claims of British nationals with similar claims.

Mr. Renton: We understand that the agreement between Finland and the German Democratic Republic which was initialled on 3 October 1984 dealt with some 30 claims which Finnish citizens had made against the German Democratic Republic. We have held six rounds of detailed talks with the East German authorities since 1980 on the more than 300 British claims against the German Democratic Republic. The East German authorities have recently accepted our invitation to a plenary session of discussions on these claims in the first half of next year. We trust that this will contribute to an early settlement of the claims.

Falkland Islands

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the annual average wage of a farm worker in the Falkland Islands.

Mr. Renton: The minimum basic monthly wage—based on a 40-hour week—as agreed between the Falkland Islands Sheep Owners Association and the General Employees Union in October 1984 is as follows:

Minimum Basic Wage	£
1. Foreman	311·13
2. Head Shepherd (outside house)	299·47
3. Head Shepherd (settlement)	283·38
4. Handyman	283·38
5. Mechanic	283·38
6. Cook	290·72
7. Cowman/Gardener	276·04
8. Shepherd (outside house)	271·71
9. Shepherd General	254·19
10. Trainee Shepherd	250·88
11. Tractor driver	255·44
12. Leading hand (labourer)	257·84
13. Farm Labourer (18)	240·97

Based on these figures the average annual wage is £3,284·80. In addition, long service awards are paid and employees on West Falkland receive a special allowance of £7·50 per month. There are additional perquisites including, according to employers, free housing, peat, meat and milk worth approximately £2,000 annually. There is also a quarterly cost of living review.

Mr. John Sprange

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs for what reasons charges were brought against a British citizen, John Sprange, by the Berlin authorities for bringing a military device, namely a balloon, into Berlin.

Mr. Renton: The Berlin prosecutor—representing the Berlin legal authorities—brought charges against Mr. Sprange because he had reason to believe that Mr. Sprange had on 28 August 1983, infringed the law applicable in Berlin; specifically Allied Control Council Law 43. The case was heard by the Berlin court on 8 November. Mr. Sprange was fined 100 deutschmarks.

Hong Kong

Dr. Marek asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he intends to take to bring about direct election to the Legislative Council in Hong Kong; and when he expects the first directly elected member to sit on the Council.

Mr. Luce: On 21 November the Hong Kong Government will publish a White Paper on the further development of representative government in Hong Kong. This will take into account public comment in Hong Kong on the proposals contained in the Green Paper which was published there on 18 July. It would be inappropriate to comment on such matters before the White Paper has been published.

Pakistan

Mr. Madden asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has made representations to the Government of Pakistan about the respect for human rights in that country.

Mr. Renton: The Pakistan Government can be in no doubt about the strength of our views concerning violations of human rights wherever they occur. We have very recently reiterated our concern to the Pakistan Government about human rights issues and about certain aspects of the application of martial law in Pakistan.

St. Helena

Dr. Marek asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs why his Department's briefing on St. Helena was not sent to the hon. Member for Wrexham in time to arrive before he left the United Kingdom to visit the island.

Mr. Renton: The briefing material on St. Helena was sent by post direct to the hon. Member's private address. A copy was also sent to the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, United Kingdom branch, for him. I am sorry if neither reached the hon. Member before his departure for St. Helena.

British Overseas Citizens

Mr. Freeson asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what account he takes of the income of a member of a family settled in the United Kingdom in issuing quota vouchers to his family in India who are British overseas citizens.

Mr. Waddington: I have been asked to reply.

Account is not normally taken of income in issuing special vouchers to British overseas citizens heads of household. The dependants of British overseas citizens settled here are admitted by entry clearance procedures. The income of the sponsor and other members of the family in this country is taken into account in these cases only in order to ensure that the applicants would not become an immediate burden on public funds. But income is not assessed where the sponsor has become a British citizen or was settled in the United Kingdom on the coming into force of the Immigration Act 1971.

ENERGY

Coal Production

24. **Mr. Hardy** asked the Secretary of State for Energy what has been the volume of coal production to date in 1984; and how this compares with production over the same period in 1983.

Mr. David Hunt: The latest published information is in Energy Trends for October 1984, which is available in the Library of the House.

Civil Nuclear Facilities

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will publish a list of all civil nuclear facilities.

Mr. Goodlad: The main organisations involved in civil nuclear operations are the UK Generating Boards, the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority, British Nuclear Fuels plc, the National Nuclear Corporation and Amersham International. The principal sites of these organisations are as follows:

Central Electricity Generating Board
- Bradwell Nuclear power station
- Berkeley Nuclear power station
- Berkeley nuclear laboratories
- Dungeness 'A' nuclear power station
- Dungeness 'B' nuclear power station
- Hartlepool nuclear power station
- Heysham I nuclear power station
- Hinkley Point 'A' nuclear power station
- Hinkley Point 'B' nuclear power station
- Oldbury nuclear power station
- Sizewell A nuclear power station
- Trawsfynydd nuclear power station
- Wylfa nuclear power station

South of Scotland Electricity Board
- Hunterston 'A' nuclear power station
- Hunterston 'B' nuclear power station

United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority
- Atomic Energy establishment Winfrith
- Windscale, nuclear power development laboratories, Sellafield
- Dounreay nuclear power development establishment
- Springfields nuclear power development laboratories
- Atomic energy research establishment Harwell
- Atomic energy establishment Culham

British Nuclear Fuels plc
- Sellafield works
- Springfield works
- Capenhurst works
- Chapelcross works
- Drigg

Amersham International
- Amersham
- Harwell
- Cardiff

The National Nuclear Corporation and the other organisations also have other establishments for design work and administrative purposes. Civil research reactors are also operated at the following sites:
- University of Strathclyde: Scottish universities research reactor, East Kilbride
- Imperial College: consort research reactor, Ascot
- Victoria University, Manchester: research reactor, Risley
- Imperial Chemical industries: triga reactor, Billingham

In addition there are a number of firms and organisations involved in the nuclear programmes which in some cases hold small quantities of nuclear material. Similarly nuclear materials are used in small quantities for other purposes such as medicine.

Plutonium Exports (Japan)

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he has received assurances that no plutonium exported to Japan will be used in the production of nuclear weapons.

Mr. Goodlad: Yes. Article III(a) of the United Kingdom/Japan "Agreement for Co-operation in the Peaceful Uses of Atomic Energy" (Cmnd. 3853) specifically provides that materials, including special fissionable materials, obtained under the agreement shall only be used for peaceful purposes.

Laser Isotope Separation

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Energy whether the Central Electricity Generating Board, or any other of the agencies for which he has responsibility, are engaged in, or plan to engage in, research into laser isotope separation.

Mr. Goodlad: Yes, research is being conducted by the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority into the separation of uranium isotopes by this method.

British Nuclear Fuels Limited

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Energy what percentage of British Nuclear Fuels Limited's annual turnover is accounted for by work for the Ministry of Defence.

Mr. Goodlad: Under 10 per cent. of BNFL's turnover typically derives from work for the Ministry of Defence.

Plutonium Production (Wylfa)

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Energy (1) how much plutonium has been produced at Wylfa since its inception;

(2) if he will publish a record to account for the plutonium produced at Wylfa during the first three years of its existence;

(3) how much of the plutonium exported to Japan by the United Kingdom is derived from reprocessed fuel from the Wylfa reactor.

Mr. Goodlad: I have nothing to add to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, Central (Mr. Moore) to my hon. Friend the Member for Bedfordshire, North (Mr. Skeet) on 9 March 1983 at column *401*.

Plutonium

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Energy (1) how much plutonium derived from fuel discharged from Central Electricity Generating Board reactors has been sent to the United States of America;

(2) whether any plutonium derived from eradiated fuel produced in Central Electricity Generating Board reactors has been applied to weapons use either in the United Kingdom or elsewhere;

(3) whether any plutonium sent to the United States of America has been incorporated into the United States of America military stockpile;

(4) how much of the plutonium sent to the United States of America has been used in civil fast reactor research.

Mr. Goodlad: Each of these matters has been covered in previous answers. On the export of plutonium to the United States of America I would refer the hon. Member to the answers given by my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, Central (Mr. Moore) to questions from my hon. Friend the Member for Bedfordshire, North (Mr. Skeet) on 9 March 1983, at column *401*, and 5 May 1983, at column *116*; to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Erewash (Mr. Rost) on 27 July 1982, at column *438*; and to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's answer of 2 July, at column *36*, and my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement's of 25 April 1984, at column 506, to questions from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris). On the use of plutonium in the United Kingdom and elsewhere I would refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, Central (Mr. Moore) to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Bedfordshire, North (Mr. Skeet) on 4 February 1983, at column *206*. I have nothing to add.

Energy Consumption

Mr. Hardy asked the Secretary of State for Energy what is the expected total of energy consumption in the United Kingdom in 1984; what was the total consumed in 1983; and what was the estimated total cost of energy consumption in 1983.

Mr. Peter Walker: Provisional figures for total energy consumption, on a primary fuel input basis, in the first nine months of 1984 was 223·8 million tonnes coal equivalent, compared with 227·2 million tonnes in the same period in 1983, a fall of 1·5 per cent. Consumption in 1983 as a whole was 312·9 million tonnes coal equivalent.

Total expenditure on energy by final users in 1983 is estimated to have been £34,980 million. Figures are not readily available for periods shorter than calendar years.

Sun Oil Company (Oil Rig)

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will place in the *Official Report* information concerning the contents and value of contracts awarded to United Kingdom-based firms by Gotaverken Arendal, for subcontract work and services in the construction of the semi-submersible oil rig ordered by the Sun Oil Company.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: No. The information is commercially confidential.

Electricity Generation

Mr. Skinner asked the Secretary of State for Energy what percentage of electricity output in England and Wales came from nuclear power in the year before the coal dispute started; and what percentage is now coming from such stations.

Mr. Goodlad: In the year from November 1982 to October 1983, 15·5 per cent. of electricity generated by the CEGB was produced at nuclear stations. The latest published information is for August 1984 when the figure was 19·3 per cent. The increase is the result of the commissioning of new nuclear capacity and because the proportionate nuclear contribution is higher during the summer months when demand for electricity falls.

Mr. Skinner asked the Secretary of State for Energy (1) what is the total value of electricity produced by nuclear power in England and Wales in the six months preceding the start of the coal dispute and in the six months since the start of the dispute;

(2) if there have been any changes in the cost per unit of electricity produced from nuclear power stations as a result of increased output since the coal dispute began;

(3) if there have been any changes in operating costs in total per unit of output in nuclear power stations since the coal dispute began.

Mr. Goodlad: There have been no changes in the cost per unit of electricity produced from nuclear power stations since the coal dispute began. Information about the value of electricity produced by nuclear power during the past year is not readily available.

Mr. Nellist asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list, by percentage for each of the last 12 months, the amount of electricity generated by *(a)* coal-fired power stations, *(b)* oil-fired power stations and *(c)* nuclear fired power stations.

Mr. Goodlad: The latest published information on the generation of electricity by fuel is available in the October issue of *Energy Trends*, a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Mr. Nellist asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will give details of oil imports for electricity generation in 1983 and for the latest available date in 1984, indicating the country of export by percentage of shipments and the value of such at current prices.

Mr. Goodlad: This information is not available.

Mr. Skinner asked the Secretary of State for Energy how many units of electricity were produced from nuclear power in the six months preceding the start of the coal dispute; how many were produced in the six months period after the start of the coal dispute; and what was the figure for the corresponding six months period in 1983.

Mr. Goodlad: Electricity generation at CEGB nuclear power stations for the periods mentioned was as follows:

	Gigawatt hours
November 1982-April 1983	18,648
May-October 1983	16,507
November 1983-April 1984	19,051

Nuclear Power Stations

Mr. Skinner asked the Secretary of State for Energy (1) if he has had consultations with the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate, the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority or the Health and Safety Commission about the effects of delaying maintenance in nuclear power stations as a result of the coal dispute; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he has received any representations about the effects on nuclear power stations of delays in maintenance as a result of the coal dispute;

(3) if he is satisfied that delays in maintenance at nuclear power stations do not affect the safety of those stations.

Mr. Goodlad: Nuclear power stations are required to be shut down every two years for inspection and maintenance under conditions attached to their nuclear site licences. These conditions are enforced by Her Majesty's Nuclear Installations Inspectorate and I am satisfied that in every respect these requirements are being met.

Fuel Stocks

Mr. Nellist asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will give the latest available figures for fuel stocks at power stations.

Mr. Goodlad: The latest published figures are for stocks of coal at power stations in Great Britain at the end of August. These show stocks of 15·527 million tonnes of coal. I doubt if there has been much if any reduction since then.

Coal Imports

Mr. Nellist asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will give details of the total amount of coal imported during 1979, 1980, 1981, 1982, 1983 and to the latest available date in 1984, giving for each year a breakdown of the countries of export.

Mr. David Hunt: I refer the hon. Member to the answer which I gave to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mr. Parry) on coal imports on 13 November at column *167*.

Coal Supplies

Mr. Nellist asked the Secretary of State for Energy what recent discussions staff from his Department have had with staff from other Government Departments, or with nationalised industries, over the future movement of coal supplies.

Mr. David Hunt: The movement of coal from National Coal Board sites is a matter for the NCB. The movement of non-indigenous coal is a matter for importers and the distributive trade.

Central Electricity Generating Board

Mr. Nellist asked the Secretary of State for Energy what facilities are available to the Central Electricity Generating Board for receiving long-term weather forecasts.

Mr. Goodlad: There are close contacts between the Meteorological Office and the CEGB for receiving weather data; long-term weather forecasts were discontinued four years ago.

Power Stations

Mr. Nellist asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will publish in the *Official Report* (i) a table showing the number of power stations for each of the last 10 years *(a)* commissioned, *(b)* completed and *(c)* whether coal, oil, dual coal/oil, or nuclear fuelled and (ii) a list of all power stations commissioned since 1974, showing *(a)* dates of decision taken and coming on stream and *(b)* fuel used.

Mr. Goodlad: This information is not readily available.

Coal Industry Dispute

Mr. Nellist asked the Secretary of State for Energy if, for the duration of the coal dispute, he will make it his practice to answer questions about its consequences for individual power stations.

Mr. Goodlad: No.

NCB (Mining Sites)

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Energy (1) in respect of how many mining sites he has given permission to the National Coal Board for their sale in the last five years and to date in 1984; and if he will list the purchasers;

(2) if he will list the land owned by the National Coal Board which has been sold after his permission has been sought, other than land sold for housing purposes, in the last five years and to date in 1984; and if he will list the purchasers.

Mr. David Hunt: The National Coal Board does not require any consent from the Secretary of State for Energy before it may sell the surface land of disused mines, or any other land owned by it.

ENVIRONMENT

Rate Rebates

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the total paid in rate rebates in each year from 1981-82 to 1984-85.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: The available information is as follows:

	Rate Rebates-England (£ million)
1981-82	339
1982-83	519
1983-84	1,090
1984-85	1,106

Notes: (i) The figures include rate rebates paid in respect of supplementary benefit recipients under the housing benefit scheme. The latter was introduced partially in November 1982 and fully in April 1983. Equivalent sums paid to supplementary benefit recipients under the previous arrangements are not included.

(ii) The figure for 1984-85 is the current public expenditure provision.

Rates

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the total paid in *(a)* domestic and *(b)* non-domestic rates, showing domestic rates net of rate rebates, in each year from 1981-82 to 1984-85.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: Estimates for England are as follows:

	Domestic Rates (£ billion)				*Non-domestic rates £ billion*
	*Gross**	*Domestic rate relief grant*	*Rate rebates†*	*Net*	
1981-82	4·91	0·66	0·34	3·91	5·41
1982-83	5·58	0·68	0·52	4·38	5·86
1983-84	5·96	0·69	1·09	4·18	6·27
1984-85	6·32	0·69	1·11	4·52	6·64

* i.e. before deduction of domestic rate relief grant and rate rebates.
† I refer the hon. Member to another answer I am giving him today on this subject.

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how the level of rates in the Huddersfield area compares with the level of rates in the south-eastern region.

Mr. Waldegrave: In 1984-85, the general rate poundage in Kirklees district council (which includes Huddersfield) is 1·7 per cent. higher than the average general rate poundage in the south eastern region.

Housing (Expenditure)

Mr. Alton asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will estimate the impact of proposed cutbacks in the housing budget, housing improvement grants, and the proposed halving of new building starts on decaying inner city areas and upon the construction industry.

Sir George Young: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 12 November to my learned Friend the Member for Leominster (Mr. Hind) at column *68-69* about the Department's public expenditure plans for 1985-86, including those for housing.

Departmental Press Release

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment for what reason his Department's press release No. 303 of 26 June did not appear on Central Office of Information news distribution list Nos. 121 and 122; and what distribution arrangements were made for this press release.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: I have been unable to establish why press notice 303 was inadvertently left off the Central Office of Information news distribution list Nos. 121 and 122. However, I can assure the hon. Member that copies of the press notice were placed in the Lobby and were distributed to all national daily and Sunday newspapers, the Press Association, Reuters and the national television and radio networks. Copies were also distributed to the journals and organisations concerned with local government matters.

Housing Defects Act

Mr. John Fraser asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of expenditure by local authorities under the Housing Defects Act for 1984-85.

Mr. Gow: The Act, and a scheme of assistance in respect of prefabricated reinforced concrete houses designed before 1960, comes into effect on 1 December 1984. Local authorities will not incur capital expenditure under the Act until applications have been determined and payments have been made. Payments do not fall to be made until the reinstatement works, or stages of reinstatement works, or repurchase, have been completed. As the scheme comes into effect with only four months of the financial year 1984-85 remaining, I estimate that expenditure this year will be small.

Local Authorities (Discrimination)

Mr. Heddle asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he is considering any proposals to prevent local authorities from discriminating against private companies for reasons which have nothing to do with the quality of their work.

Mr. Waldegrave: There are practical problems in tackling this sort of behaviour but we are carefully examining the options open to us.

Home Loan Scheme

Mr. Terlezki asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many young first-time home buyers have taken up the options available under the Government's home loan scheme *(a)* in the United Kingdom, *(b)* in England, *(c)* in Wales and *(d)* in Cardiff for the years since 1978; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: We estimate that 18,000 people have benefited from interest-free loans and savings bonuses under the scheme since 1980 when the first benefits became available. I regret that figures for the take-up of the scheme are not available other than for the United Kingdom as a whole.

Mr. Terlezki asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will consider increasing sums available under the home loan scheme to attract more young people to the scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: My right hon. Friends increased the house price limits for the homeloan scheme applying in England, Wales and Scotland in August of this year, but we have no plans at present to increase the benefits available under the scheme.

Water Meters

Mr. Murphy asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what encouragement the Government are giving to the introduction of water meters for domestic consumers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gow: I have invited the water industry to undertake a joint study with my Department and to report to the Government on the possible extension of water metering generally to households.

The chairman of the Thames water authority has agreed to head the steering group for this study, in which the water companies will participate.

I hope that the steering group will report early next year.

Flats (Marketability)

Mr. Wheeler asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will introduce legislation to provide increased protection for owners in blocks of flats whose marketability is adversely affected by planning permission.

Mr. Macfarlane: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my hon. Friend on 31 October at column *1040*.

Rate Support Grant (Home Counties)

Mr. Murphy asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give consideration to the introduction of a multiplier for the home counties when assessing rate support grant; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: My right hon. Friend is required to determine multipliers in accordance with principles applicable to all local authorities, or all local authorities in the same class. I will consider any representations which are made, but there are at present no plans to amend the legislation in this respect.

Rate Support Grant (New Towns)

Mr. Murphy asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give consideration to the inclusion of a new town factor in the formula used for assessing rate support grant; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: I discussed this issue on 9 November with a deputation from the new towns committee of the Association of District Councils. I made it clear that I remain willing to consider constructive proposals for improvements in grant related expenditure assessments for individual services provided by local authorities with new towns in their areas.

Land Purchases (Nature Conservancy Council)

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle asked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will list the land purchases for which the Nature Conservancy Council has given or offered support in the present financial year; and what percentage of the overall cost the Nature Conservancy Council's grant represented in each case;

(2) if he will list the applications made by voluntary bodies to the Nature Conservancy Council for grant towards the purchase of sites of special scientific interest land since April 1983, that were subsequently refused support, and the reasons for their rejection.

Mr. Waldegrave: I regret that the information is not immediately available. I shall write shortly to my hon. Friend and arrange to place in the Library the details of land purchases and applications made by voluntary bodies to the Nature Conservancy Council.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will increase the Nature Conservancy Council's grant-in-aid so that the Nature Conservancy Council can further assist the purchase of sites of special scientific interest land by voluntary bodies.

Mr. Waldegrave: I have already announced an increase of £2·55 million in the Nature Conservancy Council grant-in-aid for 1984-85, subject to the approval of Parliament of the necessary supplementary estimate. The provision for their grant-in-aid for 1985-86 will be increased to £22·7 million, again subject to the approval of Parliament. This represents an increase of £7 million, or 45 per cent. over the original provision for 1984-85, much of which will go to assist site safeguard. It is for the Nature Conservancy Council to decide how precisely to allocate the resources available to them.

Empty Council Houses

Mr. Powley asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list by authority the number of council houses empty for longer than three months, six months and 12 months at the most recent date available.

Sir George Young: Information about all vacant dwellings owned by local authorities and about those vacant for more than a year, but not for other lengths of time, is collected in English authorities' annual housing investment programme returns: copies are available in the Library.

The estimates based on the latest returns relating to 1 April 1984, are:

	Number
Vacant including those closed under slum clearance powers	112,700
of which, those vacant for more than a year	25,300

Manchester (Boundaries)

Mr. Sumberg asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has received any representations from the city of Manchester to extend its boundaries.

Mr. Waldegrave: The city council's leader has written to my right hon. Friend to say he considers Manchester may be too small. Any such representations should however be sent to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England. The commission will review metropolitan districts in greater Manchester as part of its mandatory review under section 48(1) of the Local Government Act 1972, though it has been directed by my right hon. Friend to defer consideration of greater London and metropolitan areas until the period 1 April 1987 to 31 March 1992.

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Mr. Weetch asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether it remains the policy of the Government to give overriding importance to areas that have been designated as areas of outstanding natural beauty; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: The Government's policy towards areas of outstanding natural beauty was set out in a detailed statement by my right hon. Friend the former Secretary of State on 29 July 1982 at column *707-10*. That remains our position.

Mr. Weetch asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the existing areas of outstanding natural beauty, designated by the Countryside Commission, in East Anglia.

Mr. Waldegrave: The areas are:

Norfolk coast, confirmed in 1968.
Suffolk coast and Heaths, confirmed in 1970.
Dedham Vale, confirmed in 1970.
Dedham Vale extension, confirmed in 1978.

Beach Pollution

Mr. Terlezki asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will take steps to require local authorities to publish the pollution figures for the beaches in their areas.

Mr. Waldegrave: I would refer my hon. Friend to the answer given on 13 November to his very similar question. A report containing available information on the quality of beaches and bathing waters in England and Wales was recently deposited in the Library.

Local Government Reform

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will outline his present proposals for servicing the police, fire and public transport joint boards should the metropolitan counties be abolished.

Mr. Waldegrave: This will be for the boards themselves to determine, subject to the need to comply with the transitional manpower controls.

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether, should Cmnd. 9063 be implemented, a metropolitan district council will have the right to challenge a charge made upon it by the residuary body appointed by him to wind up the metropolitan county affairs.

Mr. Waldegrave: No. The Bill to effect the abolition of the Greater London council and the metropolitan county councils, which my right hon. Friend will shortly present to the House, will make appropriate provision for the audit of the residuary bodies, for the questioning of the auditor, and for the inspection of their accounts.

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the bodies representative of the minerals industry interests which have indiacted their support for his proposals to transfer the minerals planning function to district councils in the event of the implementation of Cmnd. 9063.

Mr. Macfarlane: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) on 25 October at c. *695*.

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimates have been made of the immediate direct and indirect effects in the event of the abolition of the metropolitan county councils on the numbers in employment in each of the towns or cities in which they presently have their main office complexes.

Mr. Waldegrave: No such estimate is possible at this stage.

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he intends mineral planning and waste disposal to continue to be administered on a county-wide basis in the present metropolitan county areas if the county councils for those areas are abolished.

Mr. Macfarlane: No. Minerals planning and waste disposal will become the responsibility of the metropolitan district councils following abolition of the metropolitan county councils. On land use planning (including minerals), regional strategic guidance may be issued after consultation with the district councils in each area and neighbouring county councils. On waste regulation and disposal, district councils are expected to establish joint arrangements for the co-ordinated discharge of these functions. The Secretary of State will take a reserve power to establish statutory joint arrangements if he is not satisfied that those made by district councils are adequate.

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to continue the present programmes of West Yorkshire metropolitan county council and the Greater Manchester county council to find alternative uses for disused mills in the event of the abolition of these authorities.

Sir George Young: The metropolitan districts already have access to the necessary resources, including derelict land grant and the urban programme, to develop alternative uses for disused mills. In the near future, European regional development fund non-quota grants will also be available. After abolition, the authorities will be free to take over any programmes being undertaken by West Yorkshire metropolitan county council or Greater Manchester county council, if they wish to do so.

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to introduce rates equalisation schemes between metropolitan district councils in each metropolitan county, in the event of the abolition of the councils of those counties.

Mr. Waldegrave: No. I am satisfied that after the proposed abolition of the metropolitan county councils the block grant system will continue to achieve equalisation of rateable resources in the metropolitan areas.

Unitary Development Plans

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will be represented at public local inquiries held to examine his strategic planning guidance on unitary development plans, in the event that the metropolitan counties are abolished.

Mr. Macfarlane: My right hon. Friend the Secretry of State is from time to time represented at public local inquiries into objections to local plans. He might similarly be represented at these proposed inquiries should the need arise.

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what additional staff provisions he has budgeted for in the regional offices of his Department to handle each of the aspects of the unitary development plan systems, should the metropolitan counties be abolished *(a)* preparation of commencement orders, *(b)* drafting of strategic planning guidance, *(c)* servicing the regional planning conferences, *(d)* organising public consultation of draft strategic planning guidance, *(e)* considering public response to guidance, *(f)* drafting revised guidance, *(g)* ensuring that guidance is not undermined by part II unitary development plan proposals, *(h)* servicing any increased number of examinations in public or private inquiries, *(i)* ensuring consistency between district councils' interpretation of guidance and part II proposals and *(j)* justifying guidance at examination in public or private local inquiries.

Mr. Macfarlane: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will publish his estimates of the overall costs and savings associated with abolition with the explanatory and financial memorandum to the main abolition Bill.

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he intends that his strategic planning guidance on unitary development plans, in the event that Cmnd. 9063 is implemented, will be challengeable at an examination in public.

Mr. Macfarlane: Where an examination in public is held in accordance with the proposals in the "Revised Proposals Paper: The Reallocation of Planning Functions in the Greater London Council and Metropolitan County Council Areas" (June 1984) to consider part of Part I of a unitary development plan, there will be an opportunity to discuss strategic guidance where this is relevant.

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for the Environment in what manner, and by what mechanism, he intends to conduct public consultation on the strategic planning guidance he intends issuing for each district council's unitary development plan if Cmnd. 9063 is implemented; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Macfarlane: The "Revised Proposals Paper: The Reallocation of Planning Functions in the Greater London Council and Metropolitan County Council Areas" (14 June 1984) explains that it is proposed that such guidance will be published in draft, and there will be an opportunity for comments to be made and considered before the guidance is finalised.

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will ensure that the general public are given the right of objection to strategic planning guidance in unitary development plans and that there will be a right of hearing for objections before guidance is issued in its final form.

Mr. Macfarlane: I refer my hon. Friend to my previous answer on the opportunity for comment on draft strategic guidance. The proposals for the adoption of unitary development plans include provision for a right of hearing at a public local inquiry for objectors to the plan.

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he intends to propose that, following the issue of a strategic planning guidance for a unitary development plan, an inspector at a subsequent public local inquiry will be empowered to make recommendations varying that guidance; and whether a district council will be empowered to make such variation irrespective of the inspector's recommendation.

Mr. Macfarlane: It is proposed that an inspector at any such public local inquiry would consider objections to the unitary development plan and make recommendations as appropriate for the modification of that plan. The powers of the local planning authority to consider the report of the inspector, to publish a statement of their decisions on each recommendations, with reasons, and to advertise proposed modifications would be the same as present powers in relation to local plans. As at present, inspectors and local planning authorities would have regard to any regional planning guidance and apply it as appropriate in the local circumstances.

Planning Appeals

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what additional staff provision he has budgeted for in the planning inspectorate to handle the increased number of planning appeals expected by the minerals and waste disposal industries, following the transfer of their responsibilities to district councils in the event of the implementation of Cmnd. 9063.

Mr. Macfarlane: I do not expect that there will be any increase in planning appeals arising from abolition in connection with minerals and waste disposal that would necessitate any increase in the staff employed in the planning inspectorate.

Local Authorities (Famine Relief Donations)

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will disregard for the purposes of penalties and rate-capping donations made by local authorities in aid of famine relief in Ethiopia and other similarly stricken countries; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Walgrave: My right hon. Friend will consider any representations to this effect from local authorities.

Merseyside

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if, in the event of the abolition of the metropolitan county councils, he will take steps to ensure that Merseyside is provided with the same type of overall authority, with strategic powers over planning and land use, highways and traffic management, fire services, passenger transport and waste disposal, as the Greater London area; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: We see no need for an overall authority in either Merseyside or Greater London.

Local Goverment Financing

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many external inquiries have been undertaken into local government financing since 1954.

Mr. Waldegrave: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend to the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) on 15 November at column *315*.

Right-to-buy

Mr. Brandon-Bravo asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will seek to bring mixed hereditaments, shops and related accommodation, currently in the ownership of local authorities, into the right-to-buy provisions.

Sir George Young: The Government have no proposals to extend the right-to-buy provisions to premises let for mixed commercial and residential use.

Nuclear Shelters

Mr. Roger King asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether Her Majesty's Government will provide sufficient nuclear shelters in all Government buildings under his control to accommodate the workers in them.

Sir George Young: My right hon. Friend has no such plans.

Performing Arts

Dr. John Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total grant aid to the support of the performing arts film activities in each of the two most recent years for which information is available.

Mr. Waldegrave: I have been asked to reply on behalf of the Minister for the Arts.

Information on total grant aid from local authority sources is not available. Central Government grant-aid for the support of film as an art form was £9·4 million in 1982-83 and £8·2 million in 1983-84.

The figures comprise support by the British Film Institute, Arts Council of Great Britain and Scottish Films Council, excluding Arts Council support through regional arts associations.

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total grant aid given to major performing arts bodies by the Greater London council and metropolitan counties in the two most recent years for which information is available.

Mr. Waldegrave: I have been asked to reply on behalf of the Minister for the Arts.

According to information made available, planned expenditure on major performing arts bodies in 1983-84 was as follows:

	Budget Estimates (Capital and Revenue) £
Greater London council	9,593,000
Metropolitan county councils	3,326,000

Information for 1984-85 has not yet been forthcoming in sufficient detail.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Higher Education (Tax Incentives)

Mr. Murphy asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether consideration will be given to the introduction of tax incentives to companies investing in establishments for higher education ; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Moore: Tax relief is already available for payments for technical education directly connected with the donor's trade and through the deed of covenant system. I have no plans to introduce special tax incentives.

Own Resources

Mr. Deakins asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate the European Commission has made about the growth in own resources over the next three years, on the assumption that the value added tax rate is increased to 1·4 per cent.

Mr. Ian Stewart: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 30 October at c. *946*. The Commission's detailed revenue and expenditure forecasts were published in June with their Preliminary Draft Buget for 1985. A copy of this has been placed in the Library of the House.

Scottish Banks (£1 Note)

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether Scottish banks will be able *(a)* to continue to produce their own £1 notes and *(b)* to make them available for circulation throughout the United Kingdom.

Mr. Ian Stewart: It is a matter for the Scotish note issuing banks whether they continue to produce their own £1 notes. Note issuing powers of Scottish banks under the Bank Notes (Scotland) Act 1845 are confined to Scotland. Section 1 of the Currency and Bank Notes Act 1954 together with section 11 of the Bank Charter Act 1844 grant exclusive rights of note-issue in England and Wales to the Bank of England.

Film Industry

Mr. Arnold asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has received about the tax treatment of the film industry.

Mr. Moore: No representations have been received recently about the tax treatment of the film industry.

Dentists (Taxation)

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the business expenses for dentists reorganised by the Inland Revenue as allowable against tax liability.

Mr. Moore: The basic rule on business expenses is that revenue expenditure incurred "wholly and exclusively" for the purposes of a trade profession or vocation is tax deductible. It would be impracticable to list all the expenses dentists could incur which might qualify.

(Customs Control)

Mr. Terlezki asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether, in view of the extent of illegal importation of drugs, he will seek powers to subject yachts that enter the United Kingdom to compulsory customs control.

Mr. Hayhoe: Yachts are already subject to compulsory customs control on entering the United Kingdom under the Pleasure Craft (Arrival and Report) Regulations 1979, Statutory Instrument 1979 No 564, made under Section 35(4), 42(1) and 81(2) of the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979.

Merchant Seamen

Mr. Wallace asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what he estimates the loss of revenue to the Exchequer would be if 25 per cent. tax relief on earnings of those engaged in work overseas for more than 30 days was restored in respect of merchant seamen.

Mr. Moore: About £10 million in 1984-85 when the rate of relief has been halved to 12½ per cent and £20 million in 1985-86 and later years when the relief will have been fully withdrawn.

£1 Note

Mr. Oakes asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what consultations he had before his decision to withdraw the £1 note.

Mr. Lawson: Prior to the introduction of the £1 coin the Royal Mint consulted some 80 organisations. These included bulk cash handlers such as Banks, Post Office, security companies, transport concerns, large and small retailers, and the service and vending industries.

Additionally, many Chambers of Commerce and local authorities were invited to give their views and, in recognition of the special problems of the disadvantaged, so were organisations representing the elderly, handicapped and blind.

During the last 12 months, whilst both note and coin have been in circulation, many of these organisations were consulted to assess the level of acceptance of the coin by the public.

Mr. Oakes asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will consult the Confederation of British Industry, the Trades Union Council, the English Tourist Board or the Federation of Old Age Pensioners as to the effects of his decision to withdraw the £1 note, with a view to reconsidering that decision before the note is withdrawn from circulation.

Mr. Lawson: No. I am satisfied that the public has grown accustomed to the coin and that an additional expenditure of at least £3 million per annum to keep the £1 banknote in circulation cannot be justified.

EEC (Budget Contributions)

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the United Kingdom's net contribution to the European Economic Community in 1986 in the light of the recent agreements on budget control and the increase in resources; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ian Stewart: A projection of our net payments to Community institutions for 1985-86 was published in the Autumn Statement. Figures for later years will be published in the next Public Expenditure White Paper.

Government Trading Funds

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing, for each central Government trading fund from the financial year of establishment *(a)* its historic cost financial results, *(b)* its current cost financial results, *(c)* its financial target and over or under achievement and *(d)* the level of financial performance in both historic and current cost, necessary to meet the statutory break-even requirements.

Mr. Peter Rees: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Block Grant Holdback

Dr. Cunningham asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assumption is made in table 1.9 of the autumn statement of 12 November about the level of local government block grant holdback to be incurred in 1985-86 by local authorities in *(a)* England and *(b)* Wales; and what are the respective figures.

Mr. Peter Rees: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Alcoholic Drinks (Taxation)

Mr. Bowen Wells asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he expects to receive the £4,000 million he estimated from taxes on alcoholic drinks in the current financial year.

Mr. Hayhoe: There is no reason to suppose that the revenue from excise duty on alcoholic drinks will differ significantly from the published estimate.

Mr. Bowen Wells asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much tax the Treasury has received in respect of alcoholic drinks to the latest date for which figures are available; and if he will list separately in his answer the tax received from wines, spirits and beer; and from which taxes the revenue has been derived.

Mr. Hayhoe: For the period April to September 1984, the revenues from excise duties on alcoholic drink and the estimated revenue from value added tax, derived from consumers expenditure on alcoholic drink, were as follows:

	£ million	
	Excise Duty	*Value Added Tax*
Wines (including made wines)	286	135
Spirits	351	185
Beer	945	480
Total Alcoholic Drinks (including cider and perry)	1,605	830

Mr. Bowen Wells asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer, in the light of receipts to date from tax on alcoholic drinks, how much he now estimates will be received by the end of the current financial year.

Mr. Hayhoe: It would be contrary to normal practice to publish a revised Budget estimate during the course of the financial year. The estimate of £4,000 million from excise duties on alcoholic drinks therefore remains unaltered. No separate estimate is made of the revenue from value added tax for particular goods or services.

Personal Incomes

Mr. Shersby asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of the population where the husband and wife are both working have a gross income in excess of £20,000 per year.

Mr. Moore: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

Local Authorities (Bank Interest)

Mr. John M. Taylor asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he is now in a position to make a statement about the implications for local authorities of the composite rate scheme for bank interest which was introduced by the Finance Act 1984.

Mr. Ian Stewart: Yes. It has been our intention from the outset that local authorities would be included in the scheme but, as was indicated in the Inland Revenue Press Release of 13 March 1984, it was decided to defer the implementation date for local authorities to 6 April 1986 to allow time for further consideration of how the scheme would apply in detail in their particular circumstances.

With effect from 6 April 1986 all local authorities, other than parish and community councils, will be brought into the composite rate scheme.

The consultations between the Inland Revenue and local authority representative bodies which were foreshadowed in the Inland Revenue Press Release of 13 March have identified one particular area of potential difficulty: the impact of the scheme on existing local authority non-negotiable bonds and mortgages. Because of the terms under which these bonds and mortgages are issued, the transitional arrangement in Finance Act 1984 which excludes from the scheme certain fixed-term deposits made before 6 July 1984 cannot apply to them. It would be inappropriate for composite rate to apply where people had tied up their money in this type of investment before the scheme was announced or before its detailed implications had become widely understood. We therefore propose to bring forward legislation in next year's Finance Bill which will exclude from the scheme all local authority non-negotiable bonds and mortgages issued or renewed before 19 November 1984.

Pound Sterling

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give the real and nominal exchange rate of the pound sterling and the percentage change in the last quarter of 1976 and the third quarter of 1984 against the *(a)* US dollar, *(b)* Japanese yen, *(c)* deutschemark, *(d)* French franc, *(e)* Italian lira, *(f)* Austrian schilling and *(g)* Dutch guilder.

Mr. Fletcher: I have been asked to reply.

Data for the third quarter of 1984 are incomplete. The latest comparable information is in the table.

	Nominal exchange rates per £ sterling		*Per cent. change*	**Real exchange rate 1980=100*		*Per cent. change*
	1976 (Oct.-Dec.)	*1984*		*1976 (Oct.-Dec.)*	*1984*	
US dollar	1·6513	1·3968*(d)*	−15·4	66·2	70·8*(d)*	+6·9
Japanese yen	484·83	322·82*(c)*	−33·4	73·0	81·9*(c)*	+12·1
Deutschemark	3·978	3·810*(b)*	−4·2	70·2	104·5*(b)*	+49·0
French franc	8·3306	11·6394*(c)*	+39·7	74·4	97·2*(c)*	+30·5
Italian lira	1423·91	2385·00*(a)*	+67·5	80·6	100·0*(a)*	+24·1
Austrian schilling	28·24	26·63*(c)*	−5·7	68·7	103·2*(c)*	+50·3
Dutch guilder	4·1570	4·3687*(a)*	+5·1	74·1	97·4*(a)*	+31·5

(a) January-March.
(b) February-April.
(c) March-May.
(d) April-June.
* Relative export prices in common currency terms.
Sources: UN Monthly Bulletin of Statistics.
CSO Financial Statistics.

Hard Riding Hats

Mr. Greenway asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the estimated value added tax yield on British Standard Institute approved standard of hard riding hats in the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Hayhoe [*pursuant to his reply*, 16 November 1984, c. *374*]: Traders are not required to make returns of the VAT charged on particular supplies of goods and services, and information of this kind is therefore not directly available. Nor is it possible in this case to provide an estimate, as the data on consumers' expenditure, on which such an estimate would be based, are not sufficiently detailed.

Book Seizures

Mr. Dobson asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what information he has as to which of the books seized from Gay's the Word bookshop and kept by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise are obtainable in other bookshops and public libraries.

Mr. Hayhoe [*pursuant to his reply*, 16 November 1984, c. *373*]: Such information based upon what is obtainable in bookshops and libraries throughout the country is not available.

Mr. Dobson asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many of the books seized from Gay's the Word bookshop and kept by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise have been the subject of prosecutions under the Obscene Publications Act.

Mr. Hayhoe [*pursuant to his reply*, 16 November 1984, c. *373*]: This information is not available. No comprehensive central records are kept of prosecutions under the Act by police forces throughout the country.

Mr. Dobson asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many officers of Her Majesty's Customs and Excise were involved in the raids connected with Gay's the Word bookshop; and how many have been involved in reading the books.

Mr. Hayhoe [*pursuant to his reply*, 16 November 1984, c. *373*]: Nine Customs officers were involved either in the so-called raid on Gay's the Word bookshop or in visits to premises connected with the bookshop. Up to 36 Customs officers have been involved from time to time in reading the books.

Mr. Dobson asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the books seized from the Gay's the Word bookshop; the numbers of copies of each book, together with the list of books returned; and the number of copies.

Mr. Hayhoe [*pursuant to his reply*, 16 November 1984, c. *374*]: As it will take a little time to collate this information, I shall write to the hon. Member.

TRANSPORT

London (Heavy Lorries)

Mr. Wheeler asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he has authority to order a public inquiry into the Greater London council's proposed ban on heavy lorries.

Mr. Ridley: As I said to my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, North (Mr. Eggar) on 12 November, at column 404, I have made clear my view that for a major London-wide proposal of this magnitude a properly constituted public inquiry would provide a well established, democratic method of assessment.

I understand that the GLC transport committee will be meeting on 21 November to consider the massive response to consultation and the many hundreds of calls for a public inquiry.

If the GLC decides not to hold an inquiry, I have powers under the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 to hold inquiries in connection with the exercise of my powers under the Act.

A1 (Hatfield)

Mr. Murphy asked the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received from local residents regarding the road works associated with the upgrading of the A1 to motorway status at Hatfield; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: Construction of this much-needed road scheme started last April. Good progress is being made and we are generally on target for completion in the spring of 1987. Inevitably, with a contract of this magnitude in an urban area, there have been a few representations from individuals affected by the roadworks, but not general body fo complaint. My Department is maintaining close links with local people to ensure that any problems are dealt with swiftly. Steps have also been taken to minimise disturbance from construction noise and to keep traffic flowing as smoothly and as safely as possible.

Greater London Council (Cycling Co-ordination Groups)

Mr. Cartwright asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether he intends to replace the Greater London council's cycling co-ordination group after the proposed abolition of the Greater London council.

Mr. Chalker: Under our proposals, traffic management, including catering for the safe movement of cyclists, will become a statutory duty on the London boroughs. We are continuing our discussions with them over the way in which these duties will be discharged. Whether they will wish to take on any of the existing GLC staff will be up to them in the light of the resources they already possess.

Tourist Facilities (Signposting)

Mr. Spence asked the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects the experiment in Kent and Nottinghamshire with regard to the signposting of local tourist facilities in rural areas will be completed and ready for implementation.

Mrs. Chalker: The tourist signposting experiment has already begun in Kent, with the first signs erected in east Kent in late summer this year. Further signs will be erected in the remainder of Kent in time for the next year's tourist season. Detailed proposals from Nottinghamshire are expected shortly and it is hoped that the first signs will be erected there next year. Public reaction to the signs will be monitored, and the results of this will have to be assessed before any conclusions can be reached. This is expected to be in 12 to 18 months' time. It will then be necessary to consult interested organisations before any tourist signs can be implemented on a national basis.

Mr. Spence asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he has any proposals for the signposting of local tourist facilities in national parks and areas of outstanding natural beauty.

Mrs. Chalker: I have no specific proposals relating to national parks and areas of outstanding natural beauty, but traffic signs for tourist attractions generally are prescribed in the Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions 1981. It is up to the local highway authority to decide, in conjuction with the appropriate tourist board, whether or not a particular tourist facility in any area should be

signed. My Department has already issued advice on ways of reducing the environmental impact of directional traffic signs.

Vehicle Excise Duty

Mr. Hill asked the Secretary of State for Transport what was the revenue collected in the recent campaign in Hampshire to combat vehicle excise duty evasion; and what were the costs of mounting the campaign.

Mr. Michael Spicer: It is too early to assess the results of the Hampshire campaign. To date, over 500 reports of apparently unlicensed vehicles have been received from the police, with more expected. It will be some months before action on all these, including prosecutions where appropriate, is completed. An assessment of the increase in voluntary relicensing as a result of the advance publicity will be available in the new year. I shall write to my hon. Friend when this information is to hand. The cost of the campaign is expected to be about £50,000 excluding police and court costs.

Manchester Airport

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he intends to seek a renegotiation of the US-UK air service agreement to allow American carriers rights of access to Manchester international airport; and if he is prepared to grant People's Express additional traffic rights on the basis of the service operating to Manchester.

Mr. Ridley: I refer the right hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale (Mr. Montgomery) on 31 October 1984, at column 1111.

Orange Badge

Mr. Hannam asked the Secretary of State for Transport what is the number of people currently in possession of an orange badge; and what this number was in March 1983.

Mrs. Chalker: Disabled persons' parking permits—orange badges—are issued by local authorities, and records are not maintained centrally on a continuing basis. At the time of a national census on 1 January 1983, there were 682,000 valid badges in Great Britain. I regret that up to date information could not be obtained without disproportionate cost. If my hon. Friend is concerned about the numbers of badges in a particular area, may I suggest that he approach the local authority concerned.

A31 (Dorset)

Mr. Adley asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the latest position apropos the commencement date of construction of the Ferndown bypass A31 trunk road scheme in Dorset.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Following the receipt of tenders, a contract for the construction of Ferndown bypass has been awarded, and we expect work to start early in the new year.

Dartford Relief Road

Mr. Evennett asked the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received concerning the Dartford northern relief road; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: Roads in the Dartford area other than the A2 and the M25 are not my responsibility, but that of Kent county council. Although my Department has contacted the council, it cannot identify a scheme of this name. It may be that the Dartford northern bypass is the scheme to which my hon. Friend refers. I am sure the county council would be pleased to provide the necessary details.

Blood Alcohol Levels

Mr. Best asked the Secretary of State for Transport what is his policy regarding the marketing of products designed to reduce blood alcohol levels in the context of matters for which he is responsible; and what assessment he has made of the effect of such products on road safety.

Mrs. Chalker: The rate at which alcohol is absorbed into the bloodstream is affected by a variety of factors. Whilst some products can slow down this process, I am not aware of any evidence which suggests that the elimination of alcohol from the body can be significantly speeded up. My general policy is to warn drivers of the risks involved in driving after drinking under any circumstances.

Mr. Best asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will mount an advertising campaign to warn motorists of the hazards of drinking and then driving after consuming products claimed to induce a drop in blood alcohol levels.

Mrs. Chalker: We shall shortly be launching our Christmas drink-drive publicity campaign warning drivers of the risks involved in driving after drinking under any circumstances.

Heavy Goods Vehicles

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Transport what considerations he intends to take into account in the United Kingdom's submission to the review of European Economic Community regulations on heavy goods vehicles drivers' hours of work.

Mrs. Chalker: I welcome the Commission's proposal to amend the regulation, while reserving my position on some of the details. I want to see greater clarity and flexibility in the regulation to meet the needs of the road freight and passenger transport industries, without lessening road safety.

Bypasses

Mr. Robert B. Jones asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will make a statement on the route and commencement date of the Berkhamsted, Bourne End and Hemel Hempstead bypass.

Mr. Richard Page asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether he is yet able to announce his decision on the proposed bypasses at Berkhamsted and King's Langley.

Mrs. Chalker: The decision letter is being issued today. My right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for the Environment and for Transport are satisfied that a clear case exists to create a better route in the A41 corridor between the M25 and the Tring bypass and to relieve the communities along the existing road. They have accepted in principle the routes put forward by the Department at the public inquiries last year for both the bypasses and the road connecting the Two Waters area of Hemel Hempstead to the King's Langley bypass. However, before they reach a formal decision they will consult interested parties about a proposal for a small northward movement at Bourne End of the route of the King's Langley bypass to minimise its effect on Boxmoor Trust land, about which the inspector expressed concern. Once the alignment at Bourne End has been fixed, the next step will be the publication of draft side roads and compulsory purchase orders and a further public local inquiry may be necessary. Work will begin as soon as the detailed design and statutory procedures have been completed.

M25 Motorway

Mr. Speed asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the delays occurring in the completion of the remaining sections of the M25 motorway; and who will carry the financial responsibility for these delays.

Mrs. Chalker: I shall answer this question shortly.

Roads and Traffic (London)

Mr. Chapman asked the Secretary of State for Transport what conclusions he has reached in the light of responses to his July consultation document about road and traffic responsibilities in London; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ridley: Boroughs generally have welcomed my proposals which will transfer to them the main responsibility for London's roads and traffic, while ensuring consistent policy in terms of traffic movement throughout London as a whole. The consultation process has confirmed the details of the proposed key network of roads to become the responsibility of my Department. It has also confirmed with one or two minor additions the wider strategic network of borough roads where traffic management measures will be considered on a wider basis than the individual boroughs concerned.

Useful progress has been made in discussions with boroughs about the various executive functions identified in the consultation document. The objective of the arrangement is to ensure that there is adequate data provision for boroughs to carry out their functions, that the urban traffic control system will be maintained and developed, and that a coherent approach is maintained to road safety. The discussions to work out the practical details for a smooth transition to the new arrangements will continue. Copies of a map have been placed in the Library.

EMPLOYMENT

Labour Statistics

Ms. Richardson asked the Secretary of State for Employment what is the average length of time women aged 16 to 25 years, 26 to 40 years, 41 to 55 years and over 55 years respectively, remain on the unemployment registers at the Barking and Dagenham unemployment benefit offices.

Mr. Alan Clark: The information is not available in the precise form requested. The following table gives the median length of unemployment spells, both completed and uncompleted, for claimants in the Barking and Dagenham jobcentre areas for the closest age groups available.

The length of unemployment spells for women are affected by their entitlement to benefit. Many women cease to claim after a year if they are not eligible for supplementary allowance.

Median length of unemployment spell (weeks) Females: Barking and Dagenham Jobcentre areas

Age Group	*Completed* spells of women ceasing to be unemployed between October 1983 and 1984*	*Uncompleted spells at 11 October 1984*
16-24	12	19
25-39	19	29
40-54	13	49
55 and over	*(22)	85
All	13	28

* Medians for completed spells relate to computerised records only. This is however only likely to affect the figures significantly for the oldest age group.

Note: The median length of unemployment spell is the length of time spent unemployed exceeded by 50 per cent. of the unemployed.

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Employment (1) if he will list the percentage of unemployment in the city of Birmingham on *(a)* a constituency basis and *(b)* a ward basis at the latest date;

(2) if he will list the level of unemployment in the city of Stoke on *(a)* a constituency basis and *(b)* a ward basis at the latest date; and if he will make a statement;

(3) if he will list the level of unemployment in the city of Sheffield on *(a)* a constituency basis and *(b)* a ward basis at the latest date;

(4) if he will list the percentage unemployed in the city of Leeds on *(a)* a constituency basis and *(b)* a ward basis at the latest date;

(5) if he will list the level of unemployment in the city of Newcastle on *(a)* a constituency basis and *(b)* a ward basis at the latest date; and if he will make a statement;

(6) if he will list in the *Official Report* the percentage level of unemployment in the city of Stoke on *(a)* a constituency basis and *(b)* a ward basis at the latest date;

(7) if he will list the level of unemployment in the city of Leeds on *(a)* a constituency basis and *(b)* a ward basis at the latest date;

(8) if he will list the level of unemployment in the city of Birmingham on *(a)* a constituency basis and *(b)* a ward basis at the latest date.

Mr. Alan Clark: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to him on 14 November at columns *262-63*.

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Employment (1) how he calculates the current employment figures for each travel-to-work area;

(2) on what basis he calculates the numbers in employment in the Dunfermline travel-to-work area; and whether he has taken into account the rundown in employment at the Mossmorran construction site;

(3) if he will conduct a survey to test the accuracy of his figures for employment numbers in the Dunfermline travel-to-work area.

Mr. Alan Clark: The numbers of employees in employment in September 1981 in each travel-to-work area are obtained from the census of employment. Estimates of the numbers in June 1983, for use in the calculation of travel-to-work area unemployment rates, have been obtained by adjusting the census figures to take account of regional trends between 1981 and 1983. As the data necessary to take account of detailed changes in the geographic pattern of employment, such as can result for example from the opening of a new establishment or the rundown of a particular construction site, are not available the estimates for June 1983 are considerably influenced by the employment patterns within each region as they were observed in 1981.

The estimates are, however, as up to date as possible and are consistent with the regional and national employment estimates. The 1984 census of employment, which is currently being conducted, will provide revised statistics of the number of employees employed in each travel-to-work area.

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list his latest estimate for the numbers of the employed population resident in the Dunfermlipe, East constituency.

Mr. Alan Clark: The latest available estimates come from the 1981 census of population. These were published on 19 May 1983 in the Parliamentary Constituency Monitor of census results for Scotland. A copy is available in the Library.

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list his latest estimate for the numbers who are working within the area of the Dunfermline, East constituency.

Mr. Alan Clark: The available estimates come from the census of employment for September 1981, which recorded 23,522 employees in employment whose place of work was in the present Dunfermline, East constituency.

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what proportion of *(a)* the employed population and *(b)* the unemployed population is in travel-to-work areas where the rate of unemployment in October was (i) above 24 per cent., (ii) above 20 per cent., (iii) above 17 per cent. and (iv) above 15 per cent;

(2) what proportion of *(a)* the employed population and *(b)* the unemployed population was in the old travel-to-work areas where the rate of unemployment in August was *(a)* above 24 per cent., *(b)* above 20 per cent., *(c)* above 17 per cent. and *(d)* above 15 per cent.

Mr. Alan Clark: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Employment (1) which firms in the Huddersfield travel-to-work area have shed a significant number of jobs since May 1979;

(2) which have been the main industries suffering redundancies in the Huddersfield travel-to-work area since May 1979.

Mr. Alan Clark: The main industries affected by redundancies in the Huddersfield travel-to-work area for May 1979 until September 1989 are the textile, mechanical engineering and vehicles industries. In that period 219 firms confirmed 10 or more redundancies as due to occur, but the names cannot be disclosed as they were provided to the Department in confidence.

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Employment what is the average wage level in the Huddersfield travel-to-work area; and how this compares with the national average.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Information on average earnings in the Huddersfield travel-to-work area is not available. Details on the average weekly earnings of full-time adult employees in the West Yorkshire metropolitan county, including Huddersfield, and in Great Britain are published in tables 12 and 13 of New Earnings Survey 1984, part A, a copy of which is in the Library.

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what was the level of long-term unemployment for the Huddersfield travel-to-work area in 1979; and what is the corresponding figure now;

(2) what was the level of unemployment of those under 25 years, in the Huddersfield travel-to-work area for 1979; and what is the corresponding figure now.

Mr. Alan Clark: The information requested for the old Huddersfield travel-to-work area is available in the House of Commons Library. However, the figures for 1984 are not directly comparable with those for 1979, mainly because of the change from the registrant-based to claimant-based unemployment count in October 1982.

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Employment what has been the record of strikes in the Huddersfield travel-to-work area since May 1979.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The information is not available.

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Employment how the present level of unemployment in the Huddersfield travel-to-work area compares in absolute and percentage terms, with the highest post-war unemployment level.

Mr. Alan Clark: On 11 October 1984 the total number of unemployed claimants in the new Huddersfield travel-to-work area was 11,367 or in percentage terms 13·5 per cent. Comparable figures since the second world war are not available. However, examination of claimant figures back to October 1982 and registrants up to October 1982 for the old Huddersfield travel-to-work area indicate that the previous highest level since the war is most likely to have occurred in September 1982 when there were 14,166 registered unemployed or in percentage terms 13·5 per cent.

Construction Industry Training Board

Mr. Weetch asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list in the *Official Report* the amount of levy paid to the Construction Industry training board by companies with an annual payroll of *(a)* £1 million to £10 million, *(b)* £11 million to £50 million, *(c)* £51 million to £100 million, *(d)* £101 million to £200

million, and *(e)* over £200 million; and what was the average training grant received back as a percentage of all levy by each payroll group.

Mr. Peter Morrison: I have asked the Construction Industry training board to provide the information in the form requested, and I will write to the hon. Member as soon as possible. I shall also place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Mr. Weetch asked the Secretary of State for Employment (1) if he will implement the proposals recommended by the Construction Industry training board working party for a levy system based on payroll rather than per capita; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will make it his policy that the Industrial Training Levy (Construction Board) Order 1984 is drafted in line with the recommendations of the Construction Industry training board working party and based on a payroll basis rather than a per capita basis; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Morrison: My right hon. Friend is required by the Industrial Training Act 1982 to consider levy proposals put forward by the Construction Industry training board and subsequently approved by the Manpower Services Commission, and, if he is satisfied that the proposals are necessary to encourage adequate training in the industry, to approve the making of a levy order. The proposals received in this manner for the current year include provision for a per-capita based occupational levy.

The proposals for an alternative form of levy put forward by the Construction Industry training board's working party have not subsequently been accepted as board policy. My right hon. Friend and I have consistently stressed that it is for the board itself to agree on these matters.

Construction Industry (Apprenticeships)

Mr. Weetch asked the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has to seek to encourage apprentices in the construction industry.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The Government clearly spelt out in the White Paper "Training for Jobs" (Cmnd. 9135) the need to modernise traditional training practices, including apprenticeships, in order to increase the supply of skills trainees. The Government continue to provide financial support for approved first year apprentice training through the youth training scheme. I am pleased to report that in 1983-84 the Construction Industry training board managed a scheme which provided around 18,000 places for craft and technician trainees, and some 90 per cent. of those who completed the course are now entering a second year of skills training.

Earnings

Mrs. Beckett asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will provide information showing the 50 geographical areas in Great Britain with the lowest levels of *(a)* lowest decile earnings and *(b)* median earnings on (i) a constituency basis or as close as possible thereto and (ii) the regional and sub-regional basis used in the "New Earnings Survey" in April, broken down between (1) men aged 18 years or over, (2) women aged 18 years of over and (3) workers aged under 18 years, and show the relevent earnings levels.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Details on the lowest decile and the median of weekly earnings and of hourly earnings for full-time adult men and adult women in the standard regions of Great Britain in April 1983 are published in New Earnings Survey 1983, part E, table 116. Further details on the lowest decile of weekly earnings for counties and London boroughs are published in tables 108 and 113 of the same volume. Later details on the lowest decile of weekly earnings for regions and sub-regions in April 1984 are published in New Earnings Survey 1984, part A, tables 12 and 13. Copies of these publications are available in the Library.

Details of the distribution of earnings at parliamentary constituency level are not available.

Job Promotion

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will take steps to ensure that the job promotion initiatives fostered by the metropolitan counties from local and European Economic Community resources will continue; and what mechanism will be available should the West Yorkshire county council be abolished to ensure that these initiatives continue in the Yorkshire coalfield and textile areas.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Successor authorities which mount eligible schemes will be able to apply for support from the European social fund. This Department will continue to give full support to eligible applications.

Jobcentres, Liverpool

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for Employment what his latest plans are for jobcentre provision in Liverpool; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The employment manager for the north west region of the Manpower Services Commission has prepared revised proposals for the development of the jobcentre network in his region, following widespread consultation with interested parties. Copies of these proposals, including details for Liverpool, have been sent to the hon. Member.

The Manpower Services Commission will be considering the proposals for the development of the jobcentre network nationally at its next meeting on 22 November.

Clothing Labels (Denton)

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for Employment why people working at the Denton skillcentre and employment rehabilitation centre are engaged in removing labels, saying "Made in Taiwan", from clothing.

Mr. Alan Clark: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Blood Alcohol Levels

Mr. Best asked the Secretary of State for Employment what is his policy regarding the marketing of products

designed to reduce blood alcohol levels in the context of his responsibilities for health and safety at work; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I am aware of the detrimental effects of excessive drinking at work. The Health and Safety Executive cooperated in the publication in 1981 of a guidance booklet on steps which could be taken jointly by managements and trade unions to assist the problem drinker at work. The guidance aims to reduce or eliminate problem drinking. It makes no recommendations about the use of products designed to mitigate the effects of alcohol already consumed.

THE ARTS

Great Western Railway (Anniversary)

33. **Mr. Adley** asked the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State answering in respect of the Arts, how he intends to participate in the 1985 celebration of the 150th anniversary of the Great Western railway.

Mr. Waldegrave: I do indeed intend to particpate in next year's celebrations and I look forward to meeting my hon. Friend at many of the events planned. I am particularly keen to hear the Pittsburg symphony orchestra in Brunel's great train shed in August. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate both Harveys of Bristol and London Life for supporting these celebrations so generously.

Museum Charges

34. **Mr. David Atkinson** asked the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State answering in respect of the Arts if he has any plans to recommend the introduction of museum charges.

Mr. Waldegrave: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave earlier to my hon. Friend the Member for Dorset, North (Mr. Baker).

National Heritage (Scotland) Bill

Mr. Faulds asked the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State answering in respect of the Arts, whether he will give the names of all the institutions which will be listed in schedule 1 to the National Gallery and Tate Gallery Act 1954 if the provisions relating to that schedule which appear in the National Heritage (Scotland) Bill are enacted.

Mr. Waldegrave: The following institutions will be listed in schedule 1 to the National Gallery and Tate Gallery Act 1954 if the provisions relating to that schedule which appear in the National Heritage (Scotland) Bill are enacted:

The Armouries
The British Library
The British Museum
The British Museum (Natural History)
The Imperial War Museum
The National Galleries of Scotland
The National Library of Scotland
The National Library of Wales
The National Maritime Museum
The National Museum of Wales
The National Museums of Scotland
The National Portrait Gallery
The Science Museum
The Ulster Museum
The Victoria and Albert Museum

The Ulster Museum was added to the original list of institutions in schedule 1 to the 1954 Act by statutory instrument in 1962.

Section 7(2) of the Museum of London Act 1965 removed the London Museum from the list, and specified that sections 3(1) and 5 of the 1954 Act should be construed as if any reference in them to an institution listed in schedule 1 to that Act included a reference to the board of governors of the Museum of London.

The National Heritage Act 1983 added the Armouries, the British Library and the British Museum (Natural History) to the list.

If the provisions relating to schedule 1 to the 1954 Act which appear in part I of schedule 2 to the National Heritage (Scotland) Bill are enacted, "The National Museums of Scotland" shall be substituted for "The National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland" and "The Royal Scottish Museum" shall be deleted.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Manufactured Trade

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what was the balance of manufactured trade with the rest of the world in 1976 and 1983;

(2) if he will give the deficit in manufactured trade with the EEC in 1976 and 1983 and his estimate for 1984.

Mr. Fletcher: The information for 1976 and 1983 is in the table. In the first nine months of 1984, the deficit on trade in manufactures with the European Community was £6·1 billion on the balance of payments basis.

*United Kingdom balance of trade in manufactures**
Balance of payments basis: £ million

	World	*†European Community*
1976	+4,917	−668
1983	−2,437	−7,129

* Standard International Trade Classification, sections 5 to 8.
† The present member countries of the Euroepan Community in both years.
Source: Department of Trade and Industry.

NRDC (Investment Policy)

Mr. Maclean asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what guidelines he has given to the National Research Development Corporation regarding investment policy.

Mr. Butcher: The Government have approved the corporate plan submitted earlier this year by the British Technology Group, of which the National Research Development Corporation is a part. Approval was given on the basis that the BTG would make equity investments only in those exceptional cases where this was the most appropriate means of translating research ideas into commercial products.

British Shipbuilders (Redundancy Scheme)

Mr. Nicholas Brown asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement about

British Shipbuilders' own redundancy scheme and the position regarding the eligibility for a payment under the scheme of those employees who are transferred to the private sector, following the implementation of the Government's announcement of the sale of the warship yards.

Mr. Butcher: The shipbuilding redundancy payments scheme is governed by the Shipbuilding (Redundancy Payments) Act 1978 which within Great Britain restricts payments to employees of British Shipbuilders and its wholly owned subsidiaries. Accordingly those employees who work for the warshipbuilding yards to be privatised will not be eligible for scheme benefits if they are made redundant after privatisation.

Mr. Nicholas Brown asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he intends to *(a)* retain British Shipbuilders' own redundancy scheme for the state-owned part of the industry and *(b)* extend the scheme so that it covers former British Shipbuilders' employees whose yards have been transferred to the private sector, in the event of them then being made redundant.

Mr. Butcher: The shipbuilding redundancy payments scheme will expire on 30 June 1985 under existing legislation. I am presently considering the prolongation of the scheme beyond that date.

I do not intend to extend the scheme to cover employees of those yards transferred to the private sector.

BS (Training, Education and Safety)

Mr. Warren asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he has been consulted by British Shipbuilders about its holding the controlling shares in British Shipbuilders (Training, Education and Safety).

Mr. Butcher: At present there has been no formal consultation about this shareholding but British Shipbuilders is keeping me informed about its plans for the future of British Shipbuilders (Training, Education and Safety) as they develop.

Mr. Warren asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will seek to arrange a meeting between his Department, British Shipbuilders and the Charity Commissioners to discuss the holding by British Shipbuilders of the controlling shares in British Shipbuilders (Training, Education and Safety).

Mr. Butcher: British Shipbuilders is already in touch with the Charity Commissioners about British Shipbuilders (Training, Education and Safety) and is keeping me informed about their plans for the future of the company.

Origin Labelling

Mr. Pawsey asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what action he intends to take to ensure that country of origin labelling regulations are fully observed;

(2) if he has any plans to strengthen country of origin regulations.

Mr. Fletcher: Enforcement of the Trade Descriptions Act 1972 and the Trade Descriptions (Origin Marking) (Miscellaneous Goods) Order 1981 is a matter for local authority trading standards departments. I have no plans to revise our origin marking requirements pending the European Court's ruling on the 1981 order in the case now before it.

Alvey Programme

Mr. Batise asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether intellectual property rights arising from projects under the Alvey programme and vesting in the non-academic participants can be exploited independently by each such participant.

Mr. Pattie: The ownership of intellectual property rights resulting from an Alvey project and any entitlement to licences to exploit them will be set out in the detailed collaboration agreement between the participants.

Assisted Areas

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the factors other than curerent unemployment rates that he will take into account when designating the new assisted areas.

Mr. Norman Lamont: In the White Paper "Regional Industrial Development" (Cmnd 9111) we invited views on the criteria for designating assisted areas. These have been taken into account in our review of the assisted areas map, which I intend to announce to the House shortly.

Mr.O'Brien asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the revised policy of regional assistance and the new assisted area map will be published.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I hope to make a statement to the House on our regional industrial policy changes in the near future.

Mr. O'Brien asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will estimate the effect on unemployment in *(a)* the Wakefield and *(b)* the West Yorkshire areas of the Government's revised regional assistance policy and the new assisted area map.

Mr. Trippier: I will reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Trade Statistics

Mr. Gould asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether there is any difference between the method of compiling the figures for United Kingdom trade given in the Eurostat Monthly External Trade Bulletin and those given in the Overseas Trade Statistics.

Mr. Fletcher: All statistics of United Kingdom trade are compiled from declarations made to HM Customs and Excise by importers and exporters, or their agents.

Figures included in the Overseas Trade Statistics refer to goods which have crossed the United Kingdom geographical frontier, and are on a "country whence consigned" basis.

Figures in the Eurostat Monthly External Trade Bulletin refer to goods which have entered into free circulation and/or home use, and are on a "country of origin" basis.

Bankruptcies (Huddersfield)

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many firms have gone bankrupt in the Huddersfield travel-to-work area since May 1979.

Mr. Fletcher: I regret that figures are not available for the exact period requested nor for the Huddersfield travel-to-work area. The nearest available is the number of bankruptcy cases handled by the Huddersfield county court, which totalled 75 in the 5 years 1979-83 plus a provisional figure of 18 in January/September 1984. Bankruptcy figures apply to all individuals and partnerships but, for England and Wales as a whole, between 75 and 80 per cent. relate to unincorporated businesses. Insolvent companies are subject to liquidation rather than bankruptcy proceedings and I regret that company liquidation figures are available only as totals for England and Wales.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Coal Industry Dispute

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Attorney-General if he will prosecute Mr. Arthur Scargill and other members of the National Union of Mineworkers Executive for the offence of sedition.

The Solicitor-General: The Attorney-General is always ready to consider with a view to prosecution, in the light of his published guidelines, any particulars of alleged criminal conduct referred to him for that purpose.

PRIME MINISTER

Falkland Islands

Mr. David Young asked the Prime Minister which airline she proposes to name as the United Kingdom national carrier to the Falkland Islands; what factors she took into account in reaching her decision; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: The new airport in the Falkland Islands is not yet in operation. I understand that Virgin Atlantic Airways submitted an application to the Civil Aviation Authority for a licence to operate services, but has not followed it up. No other airline has expressed interest in providing a scheduled service, but British Airways is negotiating with the Ministry of Defence a contract to carry service personnel between this country and the Falklands.

Chief Press Officer

Mr. Rhodes James asked the Prime Minister if she will list the duties of her chief press officer, Mr. Bernard Ingham, his grading in the Civil Service and the extent of his responsibilities.

The Prime Minister: My chief press secretary is responsible for explaining the Government's policies, measures and attitudes to current issues. His duties include briefing press, radio and television and co-ordinating at official level the presentation of Government policy and measures. His grade is under-secretary.

Public Bodies

Sir Philip Holland asked the Prime Minister whether it remains her policy to keep the numbers and spending of non-departmental public bodies under tight control; and whether she will ensure that the drive for increased efficiency and effectiveness in the Civil Service is followed through by similar action in public bodies.

The Prime Minister: Yes. We shall continue to keep all non-departmental public bodies under regular scrutiny to ensure that they and their programmes give value for money. We shall resist pressures for new bodies unless we are convinced that a non-departmental body is the most appropriate way to do a particular task. Substantial savings have already been made. Since 1979 we have wound up or substantially reduced the expenditure of nearly 700 such bodies, saving some £118 million a year. But there is more to be done. A recent report by the Cabinet Office/Treasury financial management unit, copies of which are being placed in the Library, shows that some bodies need better systems for defining their objectives, setting targets and assessing achievements.

Over the next two years, therefore, Departments will be looking, in collaboration with the management of their sponsored bodies, at the scope for improving management and control systems and practices, with the aim of producing progressive improvements in performance. The main programme of work should be completed by April 1987.

Emergency Powers

Mr. Nellist asked the Prime Minister how many proclamations have occurred under the Emergency Powers Act 1920 and the Emergency Powers Act 1964 since 1954; and if she will give details of each occasion.

The Prime Minister: Seven. The details are:

Date of proclamation	*Date state of emergency ended*	*Nature of dispute*
31 May 1955	21 June 1955	Rail strike
23 May 1966	5 July 1966	Seamen's strike
16 July 1970	4 August 1970	Dock strike
12 December 1970	17 December 1970	Electricity workers' strike
9 February 1972	8 March 1972	Coal miners' strike
3 August 1972	2 September 1972	Dock strike
13 November 1973	11 March 1974	Coal miners' and electricity power workers' disputes

Mr. Nellist asked the Prime Minister on how many occasions and in what industries, troops have intervened in disputes since 1954; and if she will give details.

The Prime Minister: Information relating to the involvement of Service personnel in industrial disputes since 1977-78 is contained in table 7.3 of volume 2 of the statements on the defence estimates from 1980 to 1984.

Comprehensive information on involement in disputes prior to 1977 is not immediately available and cannot be produced without considerable and disproportionate cost and effort. Records show, however, that Service personnel were involved in the following disputes at least:—

1960	Seamen's strike
1966	Seamen's strike
1970	London dustmen
1972	Docks
1973	Glasgow firemen
1975	Glasgow dustmen

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Open University

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will consider revising the financial base on which the Open University operates, in particular the capital base for its professional and industrial updating programme.

Mr. Brooke: My right hon. Friend will be receiving advice from the Open University visiting committee on all aspects of the University's activities, including its PICKUP programme, later in the year. Any recommendations on this front, as on others, will be carefully considered.

Student Travel Awards

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) if he will make arrangements to monitor the effects of recent changes made to student travel awards on the pattern of application to institutions of higher education;

(2) if he will make arrangements to monitor the effects of the recent changes made to student travel awards on the housing situation in towns and cities with institutions of higher education.

Mr. Brooke: No.

Student Grants

Mr. Lawrence asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether, following the reduction of the allocation of funds for student grants, he will now reconsider introducing loans to students in higher education.

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he has any plans to introduce a partial student loan system to protect those students whose parents are unable to meet their new levels of contribution.

Mr. Brooke: No. The Government's policy remains that announced by my right hon. Friend on 10 May 1983 when he said that we have no intention at present of replacing any part of the student grant by a loan; but that we remain interested in finding means of widening access to higher education without excessive cost to the taxpayer, and in this context will continue to keep the whole system of student support under review.

Parental Contributions

Mr. Marlow asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what proportion of residual income will be deemed for parental contribution for each £1,000 slice between £10,000 and £30,000 for parents with none, one, two or three other dependent children; and what proportion of after-tax income that will amount to for parents at each tax level possible within each slice.

Mr. Brooke: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to his question of 16 November 1984 at column *376*.

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on how couples with more than one child in higher education will be affected by his proposals on parental contributions.

Mr. Brooke: I refer my hon. Friend to my answer to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) on Wednesday 14 November at columns *238-39*.

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether divorced couples are assessed on the basis of joint incomes in calculating parental contributions for student awards.

Mr. Brooke: No.

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has had concerning the payment of parental contributions on student grants; and if he will make a statement on the effect of his new proposals for student awards.

Mr. Brooke: In the last year, the Department has received around 700 representations direct from members of the public and through right hon. and hon. Members concerning the payment of parental contributions. Our proposals for student awards in 1985-86 were set out in an answer to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) on 14 November at columns *238-39*. Those proposals will protect the position of families earning around average incomes or less, but will require increased contributions in real terms from those earning higher incomes.

Education Vouchers

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he has plans to issue vouchers for the purpose of allowing school leavers to purchase various types of education and training; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Keith Joseph: I have no plans to introduce a voucher system for students in further or higher education.

School Leaving Age

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he has any plans to abolish the compulsory school leaving age; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dunn: My right hon. Friend has no such plans.

Boarding School Allowance Scheme

Mr. Freud asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many representations he has received concerning the financial implications for parents in Her Majesty's forces of a child educated under the boarding school allowance scheme changing schools at a point other than that of the completion of a stage of education; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Dunn: Any such representations received in this Department would be transferred to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence who deals with these matters.

St. George's School, Finborough

Mr. Freud asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools last visited St. George's school, Great Finborough, Stowmarket; what were their findings; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dunn: This school was the subject of a full inspection by Her Majesty's inspectors in November 1982. Their report, which was published on 8 March 1983, found overall standards of provision to be reasonably satisfactory. A further visit by Her Majesty's Inspectors in June 1984 confirmed their general impression.

Mr. Freud asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many representations have been received by his Department in respect of St. George's school, Great Finborough, Suffolk, in the last five years.

Mr. Dunn: 45 from various sources, though no complaints from parents of pupils.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Secure Psychiatric Units

Mr. Kilroy-Silk asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a full statement on progress made so far by *(a)* North East Thames regional health authority and *(b)* South East Thames regional health authority in establishing regional secure psychiatric units; what are their future plans; what agreement they have made for the one to use the facilities of the other; and whether he has approved this agreement.

Mr. John Patten: As regards the North East Thames region, I refer the hon. Member to my reply to him on 22 October, at column *519*. In the South East Thames region progress on a 30-bed central unit at the Bethlem royal hospital and four 15-bed units at Cane hill, Bexley, Oakwood and Hellingly hospitals is well advanced. These permanent units are scheduled to open at different times during the next 12 months. The first patients are due to be admitted to the Cane hill unit later this month and to the Bethlem unit in February 1985.

Negotiations are currently taking place between the authorities concerned about the possibility of some of the places at the Bethlem unit being made available to North East Thames regional health authority. Health authorities do not require any approval to make places in secure units available to other health authorities. The terms of such arrangements between authorities are a matter for the authorities concerned.

Mentally Ill and Mentally Handicapped Persons

Mr. Kilroy-Silk asked the Secretary of State for Social Services with which hospitals and other institutions the Mersey regional health authority has contractual arrangements for the care and treatment of *(a)* mentally ill and *(b)* mentally handicapped patients; and what is the annual cost.

Mr. John Patten: During 1983, the latest year for which information is available centrally, Mersey regional health authority had contractual arrangements with the following two institutions outside the National Health Service for the care and treatment of mentally handicapped patients:

Brothers of Charity, Thingwall Hall, Residential Training Centre, Broadgreen, Liverpool

St. Joseph's Children's Hospital, Freshfield, Formby, Liverpool.

No mentally ill patients were treated under contractual arrangements in Mersey regional health authority during 1983. We do not collect centrally information on the annual cost to the NHS of these services.

Mr. Kilroy-Silk asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many *(a)* mentally ill and *(b)* mentally handicapped patients from the Oxford regional health authority area are currently in private psychiatric institutions under contractual arrangement with the regional health authority; and what is the annual cost of such arrangements.

Mr. John Patten: On 31 December 1983, the latest date for which provisional information is available centrally, there were 31 beds occupied by patients in the specialty of mental illness and two beds occupied by patients in the specialty of mental handicap under contractual arrangements with institutions outside the National Health Service in Oxford regional health authority. We do not collect centrally information on the annual cost to the NHS of these arrangements.

Special Hospitals (Transfers)

Mr. Kilroy-Silk asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women were awaiting transfer from each of the special hospitals in June of each year since 1974.

Mr. John Patten: The information requested is as follows:

Year	*Broadmoor hospital*		*Rampton hospital*		*Moss Side hospital*		*Park Lane hospital*		*Total*	
	Male	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*
1974	22	4	55	9	9	10	—	—	86	23
1975	24	5	61	12	16	13	3	—	104	30
1976	26	—	94	26	17	8	4	—	141	34
1977	24	3	112	28	21	5	6	—	163	36
1978	25	3	105	32	22	7	5	—	157	42
1979	24	2	96	39	22	6	7	—	149	47
1980	20	4	94	39	38	6	6	—	158	49
1981	20	6	100	35	30	9	5	—	155	50
1982	16	3	78	32	28	7	7	—	129	42
1983	27	6	84	30	42	12	17	—	170	48
1984	40	6	87	34	41	9	26	—	194	49

Notes:

(i) All figures given as at 30 June each year.

(ii) There are no female patients in Park Lane hospital.

(iii) Of the patients awaiting transfer as at June 1984, 26 were on leave of absence in NHS hospitals with a view to possible transfer.

Health Care and Social Security

Mr. Skinner asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list the amount of social protection (health care and social security) expenditure as a percentage of gross domestic product in the following countries for 1981, 1982 and 1983: the Netherlands, West Germany, Denmark, Belgium, Luxembourg, France, Italy and the United Kingdom.

Mr. Whitney: Definitions of health care and social security differ from one country to another. However, using the definition of "social protection" described in the "European system of integrated social protection statistics: Methodology—Part I" (Eurostat, 1981), which includes employers' sick pay and private pension schemes, social protection expenditure as a percentage of gross domestic product in 1981 was as follows:

	per cent.
Netherlands	31·7
West Germany	29·4
Denmark	30·7
Belgium	29·4
Luxembourg	28·8
France	27·4
Italy	25·3
United Kingdom	23·4

Information for 1982 and 1983 is not yet available.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Skinner asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many jobs have been lost in his Department since May 1979.

Mr. Fowler: On 1 May 1979 the number of staff in DHSS was 98,021½. On 1 July 1984 this number had fallen to 90,065½, a reduction of 7,956.

Mentally Handicapped Persons

Mr. Skinner asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the estimated cost to an average family of looking after a mentally handicapped person from the age of two years to 40 years.

Mr. John Patten: Information on which to base or verify such an estimate is not collected centrally. An estimate of £119,880 has been made in a recent study* published by the Disablement Income Group. This was based on a very small sample, not claimed by it to be representative, which included a wide range of severity of handicap and of dependency.

*"Mental Handicap Costs More" by Judith Buckle, published by the Disablement Income Group, 1984; Price £3·50.

Cervical Cancer

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what information his Department has on the incidence of cervical cancer in the past three years.

Mr. John Patten: The latest available figures for England and Wales for newly diagnosed cases of cervical cancer are as follows:

	Malignant neoplasm of cervix uteri, excluding in situ	*Carcinoma in situ of cervix uteri*
1979	3,898	4,321
1980	3,980	4,715
1981	4,024	5,568

The considerable rise in new registrations of carcinoma in situ may reflect increasing ascertainment resulting from an increase in screening.

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table giving such information as he has about the trend in the incidence of cervical cancer in other countries.

Mr. John Patten: International statistics relating to trends in the incidence of cervical cancer are not collated in any concise form. Some data are published in "Cancer Incidence in Five Continents" which can be obtained, on request, by the Library.

Single-parent Families

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the number of single-parent families in the United Kingdom in 1979, 1980, 1981, 1982, 1983 and 1984, showing in each case the total numbers of persons who belong to single-parent families.

Mr. John Patten: Information is available only in respect of Great Britain.

Taking account of results from the 1981 census and information from the general household survey, the best estimates at present available of numbers of one-parent families with dependent children are as follows:

	Number
1979	840,000
1980	870,000
1981	900,000
1982	930,000

The number of persons belonging to a one-parent family is estimated to have remained at around 2·4 million over the period, as a result of a slight decline in the average number of persons per family. Estimates for later years are not yet available.

Further work relating to one-parent families is being carried out and will be published in the near future.

Housing Benefit Scheme

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will estimate the full year cost to the housing benefit scheme if *(a)* November 1983 and *(b)* April 1984 tapers and minima were to apply from November 1984; and how many people would be affected in each case.

Mr. Whitney: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on the report of the National Audit Office on the housing benefits scheme.

Mr. Fowler: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Joint Advisory Committee on Nutrition Education

Mr. Coombs asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what are the terms of reference for the Joint Advisory Committee on Nutrition Education; and to whom it will report.

Mr. John Patten: The Joint Advisory Committee on Nutrition Education has been set up by the British Nutrition Foundation (BNF) and the Health Education Council (HEC) and it reports to those bodies. I understand that its terms of reference are:

1. To advise the Councils of the British Nutrition Foundation and the Health Education Council on all matters relating to nutrition education;
2. To consider proposals on nutrition education referred to it by the BNF or the HEC, and to report back to their Councils;
3. Specifically, the Committee will:
   (a) make recommendations to the Councils of the BNF and the HEC for the translation of appropriate scientific papers, surveys and reports on nutrition into educational material for use by suitable bodies;
   (b) consider and advise on how nutrition education for the public, the educators (including paramedical professionals) and the agricultural, food and allied industries could be furthered and improved.

Heart Disease

Mr. Coombs asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what are the estimated costs for the latest available year for *(a)* hospital inpatient care, *(b)* hospital outpatient care, *(c)* general practitioner consultations and *(d)* general practitioner drug prescriptions, resulting from coronary heart disease.

Mr. John Patten: The best estimate of the annual cost of hospital inpatient care in England resulting from coronary heart disease is £145 million in 1983-84 prices. This figure is derived from 1982 data; it rests on the assumption that the costs in any particular type of hospital do not vary with the type of patient, and it must therefore be regarded as approximate.

The latest available complete analysis of outpatient care and general practitioner consultations relates to the year 1971-72; it does not therefore yield a figure which we could with confidence assume to be true in 1984.

The cost of general practitioner drug prescriptions resulting from coronary heart disease is not available centrally.

Mr. Coombs asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will establish a sub-committee of COMA to review the effect of sugars such as sucrose, glucose, maltose, fructose and caramel, on health and to make recommendations on desirable levels of intake for the whole United Kingdom population.

Mr. John Patten: The Chief Medical Officer's committee on the medical aspects of food policy (COMA) is an independent body established to give disinterested scientific advice on nutritional matters to the Secretary of State. My right hon. Friend does not have it in mind to request the committee to consider the question of sugar intake.

Dental Care

Mr. Evennett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what steps his Department is taking to encourage preventive dental care.

Mr. John Patten: Special grants were made available in 1983-84 to regional health authorities to stimulate local dental health education programmes and surveys and the Health Education Council is to launch a national dental health campaign in 1985. A new school of dental hygiene has been created at Sheffield and additional hygenist training places have been funded at King's college, London. An experimental capitation remuneration scheme for the dental treatment of children has been initiated which it is hoped will develop continuity of care and the promotion of prevention for the individual patients.

Miss Doris E. Welch

Mr. Body asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when a decision will be made on the redundancy and pension arrangements awarded to Miss Doris E. Welch, formerly a telephonist at the East Hertfordshire hospital who has taken voluntary early retirement.

Mr. John Patten: A decision has just been made, and I shall write to my hon. Friend about this as soon as possible.

Housing Benefit Review

Mr. Murphy asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he expects the conclusions of the housing benefit review to be announced; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Whitney: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Leominster (Mr. Temple-Morris) on 15 November, at column *361*.

Benefits (Scotland)

7. **Mr. Wilson** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list for Scotland for each of the years 1981-82, 1982-83 and 1983-84 *(a)* the amount paid out in social security benefits, broken down by benefit type and *(b)* the percentage of the Scottish population in receipt of each type of benefit; and if he will estimate the value of unclaimed supplementary benefit in Scotland in 1983.

Mr. Whitney: Information is not available in the form requested. However, some indications of social security expenditure in Scotland, together with population, unemployment and sickness statistics, are given in "Regional Trends", published annually by HMSO. Certain other information about numbers of beneficiaries in Scotland is given in "Social Security Statistics", also published annually by HMSO.

Information about supplementary benefit take-up for 1983 is not yet available. However, it is estimated that in 1981 the annual amount of unclaimed supplementary benefit in Scotland was about £50 million.

Private Patients (St. Thomas's Hospital)

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether, in the event of limited demand from private patients for treatment with the lithotripter at St. Thomas's hospital, there will be any contractual restrictions on the use of the machine by National Health Service patients; and whether his Department has undertaken to meet any extra costs incurred in treating National Health Service patients.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The contract between the British United Provident Association and West Lambeth health authority provides that lithotripsy facilities not taken up by private patients shall be made available to NHS patients. No specific arrangement has been made for additional funds to be made available to the authority by our Department in the event of such a situation arising. It would be for the authority to make a request for additional funds.

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) whether inpatient charges for patients using the lithotripter at St. Thomas's hospital will be payable by the British United Provident Association or by the patients themselves;

(2) whether private patients using the lithotripter at St. Thomas's hospital will face any charges to the British United Provident Association.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The British United Provident Association will pay West Lambeth health authority the full cost of the lithotripsy service provided by the authority for private patients, both inpatients and day-patients. The association will be able to charge private patients or their sponsors to recover its costs. The level of charges will be subject to agreement with West Lambeth health authority. The association, which owns the lithotripter, will be able to make differential charges between its own subscribers and other patients.

I am sorry if my reply of 29 October, at column *850*, to the hon. Member did not make the procedures entirely clear.

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether the paybed authorisations at St. Thomas's hospital refer to beds which are used by National Health Service patients when not occupied by private patients.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Yes. it is our policy for pay-beds in the NHS to be available for use by NHS patients when not occupied by private patients.

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) whether the consultants treating private patients with the lithotripter at St. Thomas's hospital will all be employees of South-East Thames regional health authority some of whose National Health Service work is within the West Lambeth health district;

(2) whether the approval of West Lambeth health authority will be needed before consultants not normally employed within St. Thomas's hospital are entitled to treat private patients with the lithotripter.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The consultants treating private lithotripter patients at St Thomas's hospital will all be employees of West Lambeth health authority.

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether consultants wishing to treat private patients with the lithotripter at St. Thomas's hospital will face any charge to the British United Provident Association.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: No.

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether the British United Provident Association will have any say in the choice of private patients admitted to St. Thomas's hospital for treatment using the lithotripter.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Both private and NHS patients will be selected for lithotripsy treatment by a medical panel according to the suitability of the condition for this treatment, clinical need, and the urgency of the case.

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will seek to revise the six principles agreed with the medical profession to ensure the equitable operation of private practice in the light of the recent use of equipment *(a)* donated by public fund-raising or private companies or *(b)* owned by private companies.

Mr. John Patten: No, there is no need for a revision.

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether, in assessing the benefits of accepting the lithotripter machine at St. Thomas's hospital, he took into account the fees receivable by consultants treating private patients.

Mr. John Patten: The fees receivable by consultants treating private lithotripter patients will be a matter between the consultants and their patients, as is always the case where such fees are payable.

Prescription Charges

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he has any plans to extend eligibility for exemption from paying prescription charges.

Mr. John Patten: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Prochlorperazine

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what representations he has received claiming a relationship between Parkinson's disease and the prescribing of prochlorperazine; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: No such representations have been received, but we are aware of a recent article in the medical press on this matter. Extra pyramidal disorders including Parkinson's disease, are a recognised side effect of products containing prochlorperazine. These side effects are mentioned in the product data sheet, which also mentions that the rate of metabolism and elimination of the drug decreases in old age. The data sheet is available to all doctors in the United Kingdom.

All companies have been asked to include specific prescribing advice for the elderly in the data sheets of all products likely to be used in the elderly. The data sheet regulations will be amended to require the inclusion of this prescribing information in data sheets.

Kidney Bartering

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will ensure that the practice of kidney bartering does not take place in the National Health Service; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: If by "kidney bartering" the hon. Member means the payment of a person to donate one of his kidneys for transplantation, I can assure him that we are totally opposed to such a practice. It has been condemned by the Transplantation Society, and is contrary to a Council of Europe resolution to which this country is signatory.

Health Services (Bolton)

Mr. David Young asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many representations he has received in each of the last five years from *(a)* the North West regional health committee, *(b)* Bolton regional district health committee and *(c)* Bolton community health council, about the level of health service provision in Bolton.

Mr. John Patten: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Sick Pay

Mr. Sean Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what will be the net effect on expenditure for sickness provision, through the statutory sick pay scheme and sickness benefit, resulting from the decision to extend coverage of statutory sick pay by a further 20 weeks, both in the first year of the change and in a full year.

Mr. Newton: We estimate that there will be a net increase in statutory provision for sickness of about £90 million in the first full year at average 1984-85 benefit rates. This figure does not take account of extra taxation and employee's national insurance contributions payable on statutory sick pay. The effect will be reduced in the year April 1986 to April 1987 by transitional effects following the extension of statutory sick pay.

Mr. Sean Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will show the amount of sickness provision currently provided, both through sickness benefit and statutory sick pay, for a person who falls sick for 28 weeks in one 12-month period, who has satisfied the National Insurance contribution conditions, whose normal earnings are £60 gross per week and who has a dependent spouse; and if he will show the amount of combined sick pay and benefit they will receive, at equivalent prices, following the extension of statutory sick pay for 28 weeks.

Mr. Newton: At present such a person would first receive eight weeks of statutory sick pay—SSP—from his employer at £35·45 per week; he would then transfer to state sickness benefit at £44·05 per week—from the week commencing 26 November 1984 — for the remainder of the period. When SSP liability is extended to 28 weeks there will be entitlement to SSP for the whole period. There is no entitlement to Department of Health and Social Security sickness benefit for any period for which there is entitlement to SSP, but if the employer has an occupational sick pay scheme the employee might be entitled to additional payments in that respect.

In the circumstances the hon. Member postulates, which in practice we think are likely to be rare, the claimant would of course be eligible—unless he had capital over £3,000—for supplementary benefit—subject to the normal rules—to increase his income to £45·55 a week—at the rate of benefit from 26 November 1984—plus help to cover his housing costs.

Nurse Training

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services why his Department is no longer able to obtain and publish details of nurse training in the private sector.

Mr. John Patten: In the past such information was obtainable from the General Nursing Council for England and Wales.

Responsibility for the provision of nurse training was taken over by the English National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting in July 1983. Since then the board has been developing a computer system for record keeping and this information has not been readily available.

I understand that statistical information—including details of nurse training in the private sector—from the new system will be produced annually from March 1985.

Single Payments

Mr. Foster asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what information he has about the proportion of single payments for furniture made to young single people moving from their parents' home.

Mr. Whitney: This information is not available.

Heating Addition

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will backdate the estates rate heating addition to those tenants who live in council estates which have been designated as disproportionately expensive to heat to the date of application, September 1983.

Mr. Whitney: Estate rate heating additions are payable in respect of particular heating systems on estates which my right hon. Friend has recognised as having disproportionately high running costs. This condition is not satisfied until inquiries have been completed and the systems have been designated. The independent adjudicating authorities may backdate estate rate heating additions for up to 52 weeks in respect of the period after the systems have been designated.

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will authorise a 52-week backdate of the exceptionally difficult to heat addition for tenants on estates which have been designated disproportionately expensive to heat.

Mr. Whitney: The heating additions to which the hon. Member refers are awarded in respect of homes which, having regard in particular to whether the rooms are draughty or damp or exceptionally large, are exceptionally difficult to heat adequately; for example, because they are very old or in a very exposed position. It is for the indepedendent adjudicating authorities to decide whether the necessary criteria are fulfilled in individual cases and, if so, whether to backdate the awards for up to 52 weeks.

Hepatitis B

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if he will consult the Royal College of Dental Surgeons as to the advisibility of offering immunisation to all dental surgeons against hepatitis B;

(2) if he will implement a comprehensive immunisation programme by recommending vaccination to the six classifications of persons at risk of contracting or carrying hepatitis B set out in the first leading article of the *British Medical Journal* dated Saturday 10 November.

Mr. John Patten: The Department's policy on immunisation against Hepatitis B is based on guidance

issued by the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation in the light of recommendations made by the advisory group on hepatitis. This guidance is contained in a letter CMO(82)13/CNO(82)11 dated 15 October 1982 and in our Department's memorandum "Immunisation against Infectious Disease" issued in April this year, copies of which are in the Library. The policy recommends that immunisation against Hepatitis B should be restricted to high risk groups, although the decision to vaccinate in any particular case is a matter for the individual doctor concerned. The categories of people for whom immunisation against Hepatitis B is recommended are kept under constant review. Any dental practitioner who feels himself at risk from Hepatitis B should consult his doctor about the possibility of immunisation. We have no plans to consult on this matter, although we should be happy to consider any representations the Royal College of Surgeons may wish to make.

Prescriptions

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what could be the saving per year to the National Health Service budget if generic prescribing were extended to all drugs.

Mr. John Patten: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Abortions

Ms. Richardson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will set out the number of abortions performed in England and Wales to resident girls aged 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15 years for each of the years from 1969 to 1983; and if he will also show the rate of abortions performed on these age groups per 1,000 girls.

Mr. John Patten: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Blood Alcohol Levels

Mr. Best asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is his policy regarding the marketing of products designed to reduce blood alcohol levels on matters within his responsibility; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: If a product were marketed explicitly for the purpose of interfering with the normal operation of a physiological function, it would probably require a licence under the Medicines Act. If any such product appeared on the market consideration would be given to enforcing the requirements of the Act.

Mental Health Act Commission

Mr. Thorne asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he has been able to assess the value of the work of the north west region Mental Health Act Commission following its first year of operation.

Mr. John Patten [*pursuant to his reply*, 12 November 1984, c. *144*]: No. We are aware of the regional division of the commission's work, but we have not had cause to consider the performance of the separate regional teams. We have regular contact with the chairman, and we are well satisfied with the way the commission as a whole has undertaken its work in its first year of operation.

Mr. Thorne asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if it is his intention to centralise the secretariat of the Mental Health Act Commission;

(2) whether he proposes to change the existing administrative arrangements for the Mental Health Act Commission regarding the maintenance of an adequately staffed regional office in the north-west.

Mr. John Patten [*pursuant to his reply*, 12 November 1984, c. *144*]: A recent inspection of the staff serving the commission, which was concerned with the most efficient way of using those staffing resources, proposed that the secretariat be centralised. That proposal and others have been discussed with representatives of the commission and officers of our Department. The final report on this staff inspection is expected soon.

Mr. Thorne asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will consider extending the role of the Mental Health Act Commission to include the investigation of complaints from informal patients, particularly those who are effectively detained though still informal and those who complain about alleged coercive or restrictive practices.

Mr. John Patten [*pursuant to his reply*, 12 November 1984, c. *144*]: We have no present intention of extending the existing remit of the Mental Health Act Commission.

Mr. Proctor asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on the preparation of the code of practice by the Mental Health Act Commission; and when he intends to publish it.

Mr. John Patten [*pursuant to his reply*, 12 November 1984, c. *145*]: Following extensive discussion and detailed work by sub-groups, the commission is making good progress with its drafting of the code of practice on admissions and treatment required by section 118 of the Mental Health Act 1983. I understand the commission's timetable provides for the submission of a comprehensive draft document to my right hon. Friend by March 1985. Before the code is laid before Parliament, the consultation required by the Act must be undertaken.

Departmental Staff (Retirements)

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether any staff of his Department at or above the level of assistant secretary have retired early; and whether any such staff have been re-engaged either permanently or to carry out a specific task.

Mr. Fowler [*pursuant to his reply*, 12 November 1984, c. *149*]: Since the beginning of 1983, seven officers at or above the level of assistant secretary have taken early retirement from my Department. Three of these have been engaged as consultants for limited periods to undertake specific tasks in specialist areas.

Social Security Statistics

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will update table 34.45 of the "Social Security Statistics" to the latest date for which figures are available.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 16 November 1984, c. *386*]: The table is based on provisional estimates of the number of recipients of regular weekly payments of

supplementary benefit at December 1983 who had additions to their benefit for special needs (additional requirements).

	All Supplementary Benefits	All Supplementary Pension	All Retirement Pension Cases and Widows aged 60 or over	Over Pension Age without NI Benefit	All Allowances	Sick and Disabled with and without NI Benefit	One Parent Families (not included in other groups)	Men aged 60-64	Unemployed With Unemployment Benefit	Unemployed Without Unemployment Benefit	Others (including widows under 60)
Total number of items of special expense	3,646	2,279	2,194	86	1,367	201	329	88	143	555	51
Number of cases with additional requirement added in assessment	2,694	1,496	1,438	59	1,198	146	303	74	134	501	40
1. Heating Addition (£2·05)	567	438	421	18	128	28	22	15	7	48	9
2. Heating Addition (£5·05)	379	336	322	14	43	21	5	5	1	8	4
3. Central Heating Addition (£2·05)	454	204	198	7	249	19	56	20	30	118	7
4. Central Heating Addition (£4·10)	565	134	131	3	431	23	121	25	64	187	12
5. Age related Heating Additions (£2·05)	480	268	260	8	213	3	86	1	24	97	1
6. Disabled Person's Heating Addition (£5·05)	116	53	49	4	63	41	4	3	2	9	6
7. Estate Rate Heating Addition (£4·10)	15	7	7	—	8	1	2	1	1	4	*
8. Estate Rate Heating Addition (£8·20)	4	*	*	—	4	*	2	*	*	2	*
9. Specified Heating Addition	2	1	1	*	1	*	*	—	—	*	—
10. Other Heating Addition	3	2	1	*	1	—	*	*	*	1	—
Special diet:—											
11. (£1·45)	224	166	160	6	58	19	9	6	3	17	5
12. (£3·35)	217	140	133	7	77	20	6	9	6	31	5
13. (£9·60)	2	1	1	—	1	1	—	*	—	*	—
14. Others	1	*	*	—	*	—	*	*	—	*	—
Aged addition:—											
15. (25p)	397	397	384	12	1	*	—	*	—	*	*
16. (50p)	16	16	16	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Blind addition:—											
17. Claimant or Spouse (£1·25)	35	29	27	1	7	3	*	1	*	2	1
18. Both Blind (£2·50)	*	*	*	—	*	—	—	—	—	*	—
19. Dependant Blind (£1·25)	*	—	—	—	*	—	*	—	—	—	—
20. Laundry	119	72	69	3	47	10	10	2	3	21	1
21. Domestic Help (Private)	2	2	2	—	*	*	*	—	—	—	—
22. Hot Water for Extra Bath	13	2	2	*	10	3	3	*	*	4	*
23. Attendance Expenses	*	—	—	—	*	*	—	—	—	—	—
24. Clothing and Footwear	22	6	5	1	16	8	2	*	1	5	1
25. Furniture and Storage Charges	1	*	*	—	*	—	*	—	—	*	—
26. Hire Purchase	2	—	—	—	2	*	*	*	*	1	*
27. Fares to visit Patients	*	*	*	—	2	*	*	*	—	1	—
28. Child Fostered	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
29. Addition given at 1982—Uprating to maintain earlier Assessment	*	*	*	—	*	*	—	*	—	*	—
31. Others	1	3	3	*	5	1	1	*	1	2	*

* Less than 500.

Note: (a) Special expenses other than heating additions, age additions and blindness additions and those given to maintain an earlier assessment may have been met in part or in full by the available scale margin for certain special expenses included in the long term scale rate (50p).

Source: Annual Statistical Enquiries 1983 (provisional estimates).

Phenylketonuria

Mrs. Peacock asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will introduce a positive labelling requirement warning sufferers of phenylketonuria of the presence of aspartame in all products containing this sweetener.

Mrs. Fenner: I have been asked to reply.

The Food Labelling Regulations require that the presence of this sweetener must be indicated in the ingredients list on food labels as "artificial sweetener—aspertame".

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Grants

Mr. Home Robertson asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish a table showing expenditure by and through his Department on each category of capital grant on buildings, drainage, fixed plant, machinery and other improvements, respectively, for each of the last five years and also showing the total value of grant-aided improvements in each of those categories for the years in question.

Mrs. Fenner: The table shows for England the amount of grant paid and the investment on which it was paid in respect of the present capital grant schemes and the schemes they replaced in October 1980. Grant payments to co-operatives under the agriculture and horticulture co-operation scheme (AHCS) are shown separately, but the details of the investment on which grant was claimed under this scheme are not available.

Grant paid and eligible cost—England
Calendar years

£ million

	1979		1980		1981		1982		1983	
	(a)	(b)	(a)	(b)	(a)	(b)	(a)	(b)	(a)	(b)
Buildings and Works	41·6	140·1	60·1	202·9	51·8	181·4	53·5	193·7	53·2	193·0
Drainage	17·1	31·7	27·0	51·4	25·3	52·9	32·3	70·0	29·9	66·2
Fixed equipment and machinery	10·0	74·7	13·3	98·6	9·2	73·7	9·2	80·5	8·9	80·7
Field works and improvements	6·2	19·9	9·0	29·1	9·3	30·1	12·6	40·1	14·3	45·6
Glasshouses—warework—orchards	1·3	6·8	1·4	7·5	1·1	5·5	0·9	4·5	1·2	4·4
Livestock Purchases	0·7	6·7	0·7	6·6	0·5	4·5	0·5	4·5	0·4	3·9
Total	76·9	279·9	111·5	396·1	97·2	348·1	109·0	393·3	107·9	393·8
AHCS	0·7	n/a	0·8	n/a	2·1	n/a	1·6	n/a	3·1	n/a

(a) Grant paid.
(b) Investment eligible for grant.
n/a not available.

Rape Seed

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the current subsidy to the production and crushing of rape seed in terms of *(a)* rape seed and *(b)* rape seed oil; how the subsidy compares with the market price of seed and oil; and what other vegetable oils have been displaced by the increased output of rape seed oil.

Mr. MacGregor: A single subsidy is paid to crushers equal to the difference between the Community target price for rape seed and the world price. The subsidy as at 15 November of £68·17 per tonne for rape seed of 40 per cent. oil content covered the difference between the target price of £302·04 per tonne and the world price of £233·87 per tonne.

Rape seed oil can substitute for a number of other oils, the most important of which is soya oil.

Cereals and Oilseeds

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his latest estimate of United Kingdom production of the various cereal crops and oilseeds in the current year; and how much of this is likely to be surplus to requirements.

Mr. MacGregor: United Kingdom production of cereals in 1984 is estimated at 26·5 million tonnes, of which some 9 million tonnes is forecast to be surplus to domestic requirements in 1984-85. Export requirements will depend on the world market, but in 1983-84, for example, were some 4·9 million tonnes.

Production of rape seed, the only oil seed of any significance grown in the United Kingdom, is estimated at 923,000 tonnes, all of which is expected under present conditions to find a commercial outlet.

Farming Industry

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing the total amount paid in 1983-84 and his estimate for the current financial year in respect of disbursements to the farming industry out of moneys provided by Parliament together with the principal items of expenditure and the balance of expenditure by his Department under other headings, including administration.

Mr. Jopling: Total voted expenditure, net of receipts, by my Department and the Intervention Board for Agricultural Produce in 1983-84 was £795 million. The Supply Estimates for 1984-85 provide for net expenditure of £884 million, but Winter Supplementary Estimates are to be presented to Parliament shortly seeking an increase of £31 million in the present provision. Details of expenditure in 1983-84 are set out in the Appropriation Accounts (Volume 3: Class III: HC 614-111 of 1983-84 published on 29 October 1984); details of the current year provision are in the Supply Estimates 1984-85 (Class III: HC 292-111, published on 13 March 1984 and HC 470 and 471 published on 14 June 1984).

Milk

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement outlining the progress made by other EEC countries towards reducing the level of milk production.

Mr. MacGregor: The most recent published data available on deliveries to dairies in all member states indicate that most member states have cut back milk production. Producers or dairies will be liable to pay supplementary levy if deliveries have been made in excess of their quotas when the calculation of levy liability falls due. The information on trends in deliveries is summarised as follows:

	Cutback on 1983-84 deliveries required to stay within 1984-85 wholesale quotas per cent.	*Cutback achieved April to August 1984 against same period in 1983 per cent.*
France	−2·5	+0·85
Netherlands	−6·8	−4·36
Ireland	+1·7	+4·11
Denmark	−6·6	−5·32
Greece	+10·0	†+0·66
Germany	−7·8	−3·68
Italy	−2·6	*+0·57
Belgium	−4·0	†−1·96
Luxembourg	+3·7	−3·48
United Kingdom	−6·2	‡−8·80

* April to June.
† April to July.
‡ April to September.
Source: Eurostat.
The figures are subject to revision.

EC Surplus Foods (Storage)

Mr. Nellist asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if, in relation to the storage of surplus European Economic Community foodstuffs in Coventry and Warwickshire, he will indicate the location of the store and for each location *(a)* the nature of the commodity, *(b)* the quantity of the commodity and *(c)* the value of the commodity at the latest available date.

Mr. Jopling: At 30 September 1984 the position was as follows:

Location	*Commodity*	*Stock*	*Value (at current Intervention Price)*
		tonnes	*£*
Coventry	Breadwheat	1,191	149,744
Coventry	Barley	6,409	755,108
Warwick	Butter	1,504	2,902,089
Nuneaton	Skimmed Milk Powder	48	49,259

Pesticides

Mr. John asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) whether he intends to introduce regulations under the food and environment protection Bill to control the equipment and methods used in applying pesticides;

(2) whether he intends to introduce regulations under the food and environmental protection Bill to control aerial spraying.

Mrs. Fenner: The regulations to be introduced under the Bill will be the subject of a detailed consultation and will be laid before the House for adoption by affirmative resolution. I do not wish to prejudge the outcome of that process, but I anticipate that the regulations will require the safe and efficient use of pesticides, and will therefore control the equipment and methods used in their application—including aerial application—in so far as these affect safety and efficiency.

Mr. John asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether the proposed extension of screening for efficacy to all pesticides will entail less rigorous tests of efficacy than are currently applied in the agricultural chemicals approval scheme.

Mrs. Fenner: We intend that the requirement to submit data on efficacy under the statutory scheme should be obligatory, and will for the first time allow the Government to ensure that no pesticide is released in the environment unless its use has been demonstrated to be beneficial. As such, the requirement will be a major improvement in principle to the Government's arrangements for the scrutiny of pesticides, and cannot be compared directly with a voluntary scheme designed to give approval to a limited range of products at the request of manufacturers.

Mr. John asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he intends to grant automatic approval under the new pesticides scheme to products which have been cleared under the pesticides safety precautions scheme but have not been approved for efficacy under the agricultural chemicals approved scheme; and whether approval of a product under the new scheme will entitle the manufacturer to use the mark of the agricultural chemicals approved scheme and to be included in the list of approved products for farmers and growers.

Mrs. Fenner: Both the points raised relate to the detail of the new arrangements rather than to the principles and procedures outlined in the Bill. They will be the subject of a further consultation with industry and other interests before a regulation outlining the Government's proposals is submitted to Parliament for approval.

Mr. John asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many pesticides have been *(a)* approved under the agricultural chemicals approved scheme and *(b)* cleared under the pesticides safety precautions scheme; in each case how many are (i) restricted to commercial use and (ii) available to ordinary members of the public for home and garden use; and how many are included in the Poisons List.

Mrs. Fenner: The agricultural chemicals approval scheme—ACAS—is available only to agricultural crop protection products, while the pesticides safety precautions scheme — PSPS — covers all pesticide formulations marketed in the United Kingdom for use in agriculture, horticulture, food storage, industrial pest control, public health and wood preservation. Approximately 4,400 pesticide products are cleared for safe use in the United Kingdom under the PSPS, and around 700 agrochemical pesticides are also approved under ACAS. I will write with the further detailed figures requested.

Mr. John asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he proposes to make any changes in the role of the Advisory Committee on Pesticides.

Mrs. Fenner: No. I am confident that the committee will adapt to the situation created by legislation, as it has to a variety of developments over the years.

Mr. John asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he proposes to extend efficacy testing to garden chemicals under the new pesticides scheme.

Mrs. Fenner: Yes.

Aerial Spraying

Mr. John asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether it is his intention to provide that advance warning of aerial spraying to occupiers of adjacent land shall be mandatory.

Mrs. Fenner: This is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport.

Food and Environment Protection Legislation

Mr. John asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish either a draft of the regulations he intends to make under the food and environment

protection Bill or a detailed statement of the proposed content of those regulations before the Bill receives its Second Reading in the House.

Mrs. Fenner: No. I am concerned that either the publication of draft regulations or a detailed statement of their proposed content would prejudge the outcome of further consultation. However, Ministers expect to give an indication of the nature of the intended regulations in relation to points of concern to hon. Members during the course of debate in Parliament.

Lamb Premium (Report)

Mr. John Townend asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when the Government will reply to the recommendations of the report of the House of Lords Select Committee on the European Communities on the variable premium on lambs.

Mr. MacGregor: The Government are considering the recommendations of the report on the sheepmeat regime and we shall be making our views known as appropriate in due course.

Milk Deliveries

Mr. Nicholson asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what percentage reduction on 1983 milk deliveries was applied in each region in determining the regional or provincial regional wholesale quotas published in the *London Gazette* on 25 July.

Mr. MacGregor: In England and Wales the percentage reduction applied to 1983 milk deliveries to dairies to calculate the quota available for the two quota regions—the MMB area and the Isles of Scilly—taken together is 6·25 per cent. The equivalent figure in Scotland for the six Scottish quota regions taken together is 6·39 per cent. In Northern Ireland the corresponding figure is 10·35 per cent., but this figure falls to 5·83 per cent. when the 65,000 tonne allocation for Northern Ireland from the Community reserve is added into the Northern Ireland wholesale quota allocation.

Wholesale Milk Producers (Levy)

Mr. Gale asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he makes of the prospects that wholesale milk producers in England and Wales may have to pay supplementary levy in 1984-85; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jopling: We have opted to use formula B—the dairy quota system—in England and Wales. This means that, to the extent that some wholesale producers undershoot their quotas, it is possible for others to overshoot without being penalised. No one will lose quota because they undershoot this year, but equally others who may want to overshoot can thereby benefit.

In the period April-September 1984 deliveries to the Milk Marketing Board in England and Wales were 9·4 per cent. down on the same period of last year. For 1984-85 as a whole we need to be only 6·1 below 1983-84 in order to avoid any levy being payable. This means that so long as production in the period October 1984 to March 1985 is at least 2·6 per cent. lower than in the same six months of 1983-84, no levy will be payable at the end of the marketing year in respect of deliveries to the Milk Marketing Board.

Potato Support Arrangements (Northern Ireland)

Mr. Gale asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the progress of the review of Northern Ireland potato support arrangements.

Mr. MacGregor: The Government have reviewed the potato support arrangements applying to Northern Ireland and have agreed with the Ulster Farmers' Union on a revision of the existing agreement which was drawn up in 1972. The revised agreement will apply with effect from the 1984 crop. I am arranging for copies of the agreement to be available in the Library of the House.

The new arrangements reflect two factors. First, in introducing the 1982 stockfeed scheme the Government announced that the level of their future commitment to support the Northern Ireland potato market would have to be linked more closely to how the overall level of production matched the available market.

Second, the revised arrangements aim to provide support for producers in Northern Ireland at an appropriate level in relation to support measures in Great Britain, taking into account that Northern Ireland growers do not have their individual areas controlled or contribute towards the cost of support measures, as do their counterparts in Great Britain. The Government will review annually the target prices, target area and tonnage limitation on intervention included in the agreement in the same way that the figures governing support in Great Britain are reviewed.

The new agreement with the Ulster Farmers' Union terminates at the end of the 1989 crop year and it will be reviewed before then. This agreement does not preclude any initiative in the interim from the United Kingdom or Northern Ireland growers for a marketing scheme to apply in Northern Ireland.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 20 November 1984

DEFENCE

Territorial Army

Mr. Terlezki asked the Secretary of State for Defence to what he attributes the high turnover of men in the Territorial Army; and what are the implications of this for the effectiveness of the force.

Mr. Stanley: High turnover of personnel tends to be a feature of any wholly volunteer military force. The Territorial Army is no exception. The main reasons why people leave are conflicting social, domestic or employment pressures. The high turnover does not prevent the Territorial Army from being able to carry out its operational role effectively, as was recently demonstrated in Exercise Lionheart. None the less, we are currently examining the matter to see if there are any steps we can take to alleviate the problem.

Mr. Terlezki asked the Secretary of State for Defence what are the implications for defence policy of the fact that only two thirds of the Territorial Army have completed minimum training at any point in time.

Mr. Stanley: At any given time more than 70 per cent. of the Territorial Army's strength has completed basic training. On mobilisation there are plans to meet any shortfall in the trained strength of the Territorial Army with Regular Army reservists. There are therefore no significant implications for our defence plans.

Mr. Terlezki asked the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of the membership of the Territorial Army is composed of former regular soldiers; and whether he has any plans for measures to increase this figure.

Mr. Stanley: As at the end of October 1984 the proportion of Territorial Army members with former regular service was 21·2 per cent. We already encourage ex-regulars to join the Territorial Army and are currently giving further consideration to this.

Mr. Terlezki asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will consider introducing measures to make it more advantageous to employers to give leave to employees for Territorial Army summer camps and other training sessions.

Mr. Stanley: We are already considering measures to improve employer support for the volunteer forces and are setting up a national committee on the lines of those which work well in the USA and Australia, which will be reflected at a local level throughout the United Kingdom. This will act as a focal point and serve to emphasise that the qualities of leadership, self-discipline and initiative developed by Territorial Army training are as important to the community and beneficial to the employer as they are to the armed forces.

Submarine Base, Faslane

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will ensure that no person without the appropriate protective equipment enters the submarine base at Faslane, Dumbarton, in view of the large asbestos dump discovered there.

Mr. Stanley: The asbestos dump is on an area of land which is fenced off and separate from the main operating part of the Faslane submarine base. All access to this land and work associated with its decontamination is, and will be, controlled in accordance with the Health and Safety Executive's requirements.

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for Defence on what date asbestos was discovered at the submarine base at Faslane, Dumbarton; how many people without protective equipment have entered the site since the discovery; when *(a)* the Health and Safety Executive and *(b)* the local authority was informed of its presence; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stanley: Ships have been broken up on the Gareloch by commercial firms, involving the removal of asbestos, since the 1940s. I understand that the company concerned, Shipbreaking Industries Limited, informed Dumbartonshire county council and the Factories Inspectorate in 1973 of the disposal of asbestos on the site. Work processes on the site were monitored by Her Majesty's Factory Inspectorate prior to January 1975 and have been since that date when the Factory Inspectorate was absorbed into the Health and Safety Executive.

It is not known how many people have entered the site since asbestos removal from ships started in the 1940s.

I have placed a copy of the Ministry of Defence (Navy) press statement relating to this asbestos dump which was issued on 30 October 1984 in the Library.

RAF Molesworth

Mr. Michie asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will give the starting date for the construction of the perimeter fence at RAF Molesworth;

(2) when work on the perimeter fence at RAF Molesworth is scheduled to be completed.

Mr. Stanley: The construction timetable will be dependent on a number of factors including consultations with the local planning authority, which have not been completed.

Mr. Michie asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether the perimeter fence at RAF Molesworth will be required *(a)* for the 46 acres of the ground-launched cruise missile facility and *(b)* around the entire area owned by his Department.

Mr. Stanley: Security at RAF Molesworth will include both a perimeter fence and further fencing around the ground-launched cruise missile facility.

"Keep the Army in the Public Eye"

Mr. Henderson asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the annual cost of "Keep the Army in the Public Eye" tours.

Mr. Stanley: The cost (excluding military salaries) of "Keep the Army in the Public Eye" team tours in 1983-84 was £123,000.

Cruise Missiles

Mr. Michie asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether Her Majesty's Government have at any time proposed to the United States Government that each of the 10 flights of cruise missiles be based at separate locations.

Mr. Stanley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Central (Mr. Caborn) on 29 October 1984, at column 854.

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for Defence what reports and representations he has received about the use of cruise missiles with conventional warheads; if he is considering a battle strategy with such weapons; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stanley: There is no change in NATO's strategy of deterrence based on flexible response and forward defence. In the context of that strategy the Government have been considering within NATO the setting up of collaborative feasibility studies for a conventionally armed long range stand-off missile. As my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement said in his answer of 29 October, at column 855, a memorandum of understanding has been agreed for this missile with the United States of America and the Federal Republic of Germany. Cruise missile technology is under examination for this missile. Studies are also being carried out on a national basis in relation to the same requirement. I am not aware of any representations received by my right hon. Friend on this matter. The reports that my Department has received relating to this requirement are classified.

Mr. Michie asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether a decision has been reached by NATO on the location of the European repair facility for ground-launched cruise missiles.

Mr. Stanley: This is a matter for the United States Government and the host nation concerned rather than the NATO Alliance as a whole.

Greenham Common

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many United States personnel have been disciplined for alcohol-related offences at the Greenham common airbase.

Mr. Stanley: This is a matter for the United States air force, but I understand that so far this year there have been no instances of USAF personnel being disciplined for alcohol-related offences whilst on duty at RAF Greenham common.

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) when he expects the third, fourth, fifth and sixth flights of ground-launched cruise missiles to become operational at Greenham common;

(2) whether he will make a statement each time an additional flight of ground-launched cruise missiles becomes operational at Greenham common;

(3) whether a second flight of ground-launched cruise missiles is now operational at Greenham common.

Mr. Stanley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) on 13 November, at columns 224-25.

HMS Conqueror

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Defence, why the board of inquiry was not set up immediately after the discovery of the disappearance of the navigator's log of HMS Conqueror; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heseltine: I have nothing yet to add to my answers to the hon. Member on 13 November, at columns 227-28.

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he proposes to classify the report of the board of inquiry into the loss of the navigator's log of HMS Conqueror.

Mr. Heseltine: The board of inquiry has already classified its report.

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Defence on what dates the debriefing of the crew of HMS Conqueror took place following the return of the submarine to the United Kingdom.

Mr. Heseltine: There is no formal debriefing of the crew of a submarine on return from patrol to the United Kingdom. I understand that senior officers met HMS Conqueror on her return to the United Kingdom on 3 July 1982.

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether the signals log of HMS Conqueror has been retained.

Mr. Heseltine: As I explained to the hon. Member on 15 November, signal logs are not retained permanently. I have subsequently confirmed that records available to my Department indicate that the signals log of HMS Conqueror during the Falklands campaign has been destroyed.

Service Children (Education)

Mr. Freud asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many schools formerly recommended by the Service Children's Education Authority to parents in the armed forces who are considering educating their child under the boarding school allowance scheme have ceased to be so recommended in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Stanley: The Service Children's Education Authority does not have a recommended list of schools. The boarding school allowance is payable to parents for any school they choose which has suitable boarding facilities and which is registered with the Department of Education and Science. Parents do not have to consult the Service Children's Education Authority before choosing a school, but those who do receive personal advice based on the parents' individual needs and wishes.

Mr. Freud asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the cost of the boarding school allowance for the academic years 1983-84 and 1984-85.

Mr. Stanley: The actual expenditure on boarding school allowance for 1983-84 was £76·5 million. The estimated expenditure for 1984-85 is £77·7 million.

Mr. Freud asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many pupils educated under the boarding school allowance at St. George's school, Great Finborough, Stowmarket, have changed their school from St. George's at a point in their education which was not the completion of a stage in their education in each of the last five years;

and in respect of how many of these children the boarding school allowance was *(a)* no longer paid by his Department, *(b)* reduced and *(c)* repaid in full or part by the parents as a result of the change of school;

(2) how many pupils educated under the boarding school allowance scheme have changed their school at a point in their education which was not the completion of a stage of education in each of the last five years; and in respect of how many of these children the boarding school allowance was *(a)* no longer paid by his Department, *(b)* reduced and *(c)* repaid in full or part by the parents as a result of the change in school;

(3) on how many occasions in the last five years officers of the Service Children's Education Authority has visited St. George's school, Great Finborough;

(4) when officers of the Service Children's Education Authority last visited St. George's school, Great Finborough, Stowmarket; what were their findings; and if he will make a statement;

(5) how many representations have been received by his Department concerning St. George's school, Great Finborough, Stowmarket during the last five years.

Mr. Stanley: My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the armed forces will write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Freud asked the Secretary of State for Defence in respect of how many schools investigated by the Service Children's Education Authority following complaints from parents in the last 10 years a referral has been made to the Department of Education and Science; and if he will name the schools so referred in each of those years.

Mr. Stanley: Formal referrals to the Department of Education and Science are not made by the Service Children's Education Authority. Instead, advice on standards is sought on individual schools from Her Majesty's inspectors. It is not the practice of Her Majesty's inspectors to publish the names of individual schools in respect of which they give advice.

Mr. Freud asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many schools have been investigated by the Service Children's Education Authority as a result of reports from parents in Her Majesty's Forces of children at those schools of dissatisfaction with the school in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Stanley: Complaints from parents are one possible reason for a visit by the Service Children's Education Authority, but there are many others, such as the recent opening of a school, large numbers of service children, and requests from headmasters. In the past 13 months the officer responsible for giving boarding school advice has visited 81 schools. This represents a typical visits programme for the officer in this post. We have no record of the visits arising from complaints over the last 10 years.

Mr. Freud asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether he is satisfied with the arrangemens that exist for children educated under the boarding school allowance scheme to change schools at a point other than the completion of a stage in their education.

Mr. Stanley: These arrangements are reviewed from time to time and a review is in progress at present. It is too early to forecast the outcome.

Mrs. Ann Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the total number of each type of school catering for the children of armed forces' personnel in Germany in each of the last five years for which figures are available.

Mr. Stanley: The total number of each type of school catering for the children of armed forces personnel in British Forces Germany is given in the following table:

	Schools		
	Primary	*Middle*	*Secondary*
1980	84	6	9
1981	82	6	8
1982	83	5	9
1983	81	5	8
1984	80	5	8

Mrs. Ann Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the rate of GCE O-level and A-level passes per 100 of the appropriate age group in each of the last five years for which figures are available in *(a)* state schools in England and Wales and *(b)* British forces' schools in Germany.

Mr. Stanley: My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces will be writing to my hon. Friend.

Mrs. Ann Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many children have been attending British forces' schools in Germany in each of the last five years for which figures are available.

Mr. Stanley: The autumn term figures for each year are as follows:

	Number
1980	28,563
1981	28,298
1982	27,636
1983	26,376
1984	24,845

Mrs. Ann Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many teachers have been employed in British forces' schools in Germany in each of the last five years for which figures are available.

Mr. Stanley: The number of teachers employed in British Forces schools in Germany in the last five years are as follows:

	Teachers
1980	1,666
1981	1,647
1982	1,564
1983	1,521
1984	1,430

Note: These figures include the full-time equivalents of a number of part-time locally employed teachers.

Mrs. Ann Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the average expenditure per pupil in each of the last five years for which figures are available in state schools in England and Wales and in British forces' schools in Germany on *(a)* books, *(b)* other equipment and *(c)* staff salaries.

Mr. Stanley: I am able to answer this question only in respect of British forces' schools in Germany; state schools in England and Wales are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science.

Average Expenditure (£) per Pupil in British Forces Schools in Germany

	Books	Equipment	Staff salaries and wages	
			Teachers	Others
1980-81	4·72	19·47	1,027	423
1981-82	5·30	19·96	1,080	289
1982-83	8·32	17·55	1,028	172
1983-84	11·89	28·29	1,084	194

Note: Comparable figures are not available for 1979-80.

Mrs. Ann Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of school leavers have gone on to university or polytechnic education in each of the last five years for which figures are available in *(a)* state schools in England and Wales and *(b)* British forces' schools in Germany.

Mr. Stanley: I am able to answer this question only in respect of British forces' schools in Germany; state schools in England and Wales are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science.

For the period 1979-83 an average of between 10 per cent. and 12 per cent. of school leavers from service children's schools in Germany have gone on to university or polytechnic education.

Mrs. Ann Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the average period of time spent by pupils in any given school by children of armed forces' personnel.

Mr. Stanley: I regret that the information requested is not available. The inevitable turbulence of service life is undoubtedly a potential problem where children's education is concerned, and it is for that reason that various measures, including boarding school allowance, are available to assist stability of education.

Lieutenant Colonel Wolverson

Mr. Pavitt asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current posting of Lieutenant Colonel Wolverson, Kings Own Border Regiment; what postings he has held in each of the last three years; where outside the United Kingdom he has served or visited in this period in the course of his official duties; on what dates; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stanley: During 1981-82 Lieutenant Colonel Wolverson served as a member of the British Military Assistance Team in Zimbabwe. Since January 1983 he has been the commanding officer of 1 Kings Own Border Regiment. We do not publish details of individual's movements in the course of their duties.

Nuclear Tests (Australia)

Mr. Andrew Bowden asked the Secretary of State for Defence if the Government are to seek leave to be represented before the Australian Royal Commission which is concerned with British nuclear weapon tests in Australia; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Butler: The president of the Royal Commission has already indicated that he would welcome United Kingdom representation.

It is the intention of Her Majesty's Government to seek leave to be represented and to give evidence.

Her Majesty's Government have also agreed in principle to the request from Senator Walsh, Australian Minister for Resources and Energy, for the Royal Commission to visit the United Kingdom in January to hear evidence.

Simulated Nuclear Accident

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether a simulated nuclear accident took place as part of the recent field exercise by the 501st Tactical Missile Wing.

Mr. Stanley: We do not give details of the training exercises conducted by nuclear missile units.

British Nuclear Fuels Ltd.

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what was the cost to his Department of work carried out by British Nuclear Fuels Ltd. in each year since 1979;

(2) what work is carried out by British Nuclear Fuels Ltd. for his Department.

Mr. Butler: British Nuclear Fuels plc produces and processes special nuclear materials for the Ministry of Defence, but, for security reasons and in accordance with the practice of successive Governments, details and costs of the programmes undertaken by the company cannot be disclosed.

Equipment Reliability

Mr. Warren asked the Secretary of State for Defence if, in the light of the recent British Telecom study on military printed circuit boards, he will review urgently the reliability of defence equipment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Butler: No evidence of risk of short-circuiting in printed circuit boards found in this unpublished study has been reported in the defence field. The study was concerned with the PCBs which are left unprotected in the open air in places like roadside cabinets or manholes. This is not the case with the PCBs in military equipment. When the detailed results of the study are available the possibility of a read-across to military equipment will be considered.

Training Courses (Power Stations)

Mr. Nellist asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many training courses, involving what numbers of personnel, have been organised in each of the last 10 years within the armed services to train personnel in the operation of power stations.

Mr. Stanley: Certain training is carried out annually on certain types of power generation and distribution in the context of particular war roles. This training is not relevant to, or suitable for, the operation of the types of power stations run by the CEGB.

Falkland Islands.

Mr. Spearing asked the Secretary of State for Defence what requests have been made to individual owner-occupied farms in the Falkland Islands for leases of land for military training purposes; what is the basis of rent or

compensation offered; and what similar requests or arrangements have been entered into with the Falkland Islands Company.

Mr. Stanley [*pursuant to his reply*, 15 November 1984, c. *344*]: A number of approaches have been made to individual owner-occupiers of farms in the Falkland Islands to rent or lease land for military training purposes such as firing ranges and training areas.

In all cases, the maximum rent offered would be the market rent, reduced as appropriate to take account of the ability of farmers to continue their farming operation during military use of the land. The precise level of rental is of course a matter of negotiation in each case.

The same principles are adopted whether negotiation is with individual owner-occupiers or with larger concerns such as the Falkland Islands Company. Agreement has been reached with the Falkland Islands Company to rent five areas of land for use as firing ranges.

ENERGY

Combined Heat and Power

Mr. Hardy asked the Secretary of State for Energy what is the present position in regard to the development of combined heat and power; and if he will list the proposals which have been made to his Department concerning such development in the nine lead cities which have been studied.

Mr. David Hunt: Ten proposals have now been received, including two for London, covering all the nine towns recommended for further study by the Atkins report. These are being evaluated by my Department and a statement will be made in due course.

European Coal and Steel Community

Mr. Orme asked the Secretary of State for Energy what was the total deep-mined production in European Coal and Steel Community coal industries in 1979, 1980, 1981, 1982 and 1983.

Mr. David Hunt: The Community does not produce separate figures for deep-mined coal production.

Coal Industry Dispute

Mr. Mason asked the Secretary of State for Energy what information he has as to the latest negotiating positions of the National Coal Board and the National Union of Mineworkers and as to the full agreement reached between the National Association of Colliery Overmen, Deputies and Shotfirers and the National Coal Board, covering the main issues of the five main pits threatened with imminent closure, the pit closure programme, the arbitration procedures for pit colliery closures and on the list of financial offers that have been made to the National Union of Mineworkers and the National Association of Colliery Overmen, Deputies and Shotfirers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: The National Union of Mineworkers has made it clear that its position has not changed since March. The National Coal Board, in discussions with the National Association of Colliery Overmen, Deputies and Shotfirers, reached a sensible and constructive outcome. The same agreement is available to the National Union of Mineworkers.

Mr. Dormand asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the latest position in the dispute in the mining industry.

Mr. David Hunt: Since 5 November more than 10,000 miners have returned to work. The national executive of the NUM, at its meeting last week, again refused to ballot its members. Those 70,000 miners who have held a ballot decided by an enormous margin not to strike.

Coal Stocks

Mr. Mason asked the Secretary of State for Energy what is the latest position as to coal stocks, covering stocks within the power station perimeters and elsewhere, giving separate figures for stocks of opencast coal; and what are his Department's estimates of how long these stocks will adequately satisfy power station and domestic consumer demand.

Mr. Goodlad: Figures on coal stocks are published in table 5 of *Energy Trends*, the latest edition of which appeared at the end of October. Stocks held by merchants and the industrial sector are not included as these figures are not available.

With coal stocks at power stations higher than they were at the end of August, there are no problems of satisfying the demand for electricity.

Power Stations

Mr. Mason asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list the power stations that are operating at present, specifying the power stations burning coal, oil, dual-fired oil and coal and nuclear stations.

Mr. Goodlad: The pattern of power station operations varies constantly in response to the level of demand and this is a matter for the Central Electricity Generating Board.

WALES

Employment and Training Measures

Mr. Terlezki asked the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total number of people benefiting from special employment and training measures at the latest available date *(a)* in the constituency of Cardiff West and *(b)* in Cardiff; and what is the average cost per person supported under each measure.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: Comprehensive information on all schemes cannot be provided for an area exactly corresponding to my hon. Friend's constituency.

The latest information on individual schemes in each case for the smallest area included in my hon. Friend's constituency is as follows:

		Total
Community Programme	South Glamorgan	1,009
Enterprise Allowance Scheme	Mid and South Glamorgan	742
Job Release Scheme	Cardiff	508
Job Splitting Scheme	Cardiff	1
Young Workers Scheme	Cardiff	529
Youth Training Scheme	Cardiff	1,738
		4,527

The following costs are national averages based on the latest information and estimates and where appropriate include assumptions about periods of participation on schemes and the number of supervisors employed. They do not take into account savings in the payments of benefits or flow-backs to the Exchequer from tax and national insurance. The cost in any particular area for a particular scheme may vary from the national average.

Estimated average cost per person supported under the measure

Measure	£
Community Programme	2,840
Enterprise Allowance Scheme	1,934
Job Release Schemes	3,250
Job Splitting Scheme	750
Young Workers Scheme	560
Youth Training Scheme	1,800

Fishing Industry

Mr. Geraint Howells asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he is satisfied with the state of the fishing industry in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: The Welsh fishing industry is experiencing a period of adjustment to change following agreement on the common fisheries policy. The industry has been able to benefit from a programme of grants which includes financial support for aquaculture, exploratory voyages, and decommissioning, laying up, modernisation and construction of vessels. In addition, it has access to other schemes providing financial assistance for projects to improve harbour and shore based facilities. The Welsh industry has also been involved directly in advising on the management of quotas which apply to certain fish stocks in its traditional waters in the Irish sea, Bristol channel and south west approaches.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Loan Guarantee Scheme

Mr. Evennett asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the future of the loan guarantee scheme for small businesses.

Mr. Trippier: I hope to be able to make an announcement shortly.

Steel Industry

Mr. Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the total employment in the steel industry in Scotland in *(a)* 1982, *(b)* 1983 and *(c)* at the latest available date; what was the steelmaking capacity for these dates; and what was the steel production for the same dates.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The following is the available information:

Steel Industry in Scotland

	*Total Labour force Engaged on ECSC Activities**	*Crude Steel*	
	'000 (average for year)	*Capacity† million tonnes*	*Production‡ million tonnes*
1982	8·7	3·2	1·7
1983	6·6	3·2	1·8
1984	‖6·0	3·2	¶1·6

* Employment figures for establishments classified to the iron and steel and steel tubes industries are not available for 1982 and 1983 because no census of employment was carried out for these years. The figures supplied relate to employment on ECSC activities, compiled by the Iron and Steel Statistics Bureau, and which are published in "Eurostat" for the United Kingdom as a whole.

† Source: European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC).

‡ Source: Iron and Steel Statistics Bureau.

‖ June.

¶ January to October.

Imported Ferrous Scrap

Mr. Crowther asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether Her Majesty's Government have made representations to the European Economic Community Commission concerning the proposal by the Italian Government to subsidise imported ferrous scrap.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Yes. The Government have registered strong concern to the Commission about the proposed Italian measure. My right. hon. Friend the Secretary of State also raised the issue with the Italian Industry Minister last month.

Telecommunications (General Licences)

Mr. Michael Marshall asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will publish notes for guidance on the interpretation of the branch systems general licence issued under the Telecommunications Act 1984; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Butcher: The Department is preparing notes for guidance on the branch systems general licence in consultation with the Director General of Telecommunications. These notes and further editions will be published by the director, not by the Department, and will be his responsibility under section 48 of the Telecommunications Act.

Mr. Michael Marshall asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the Government intend to issue a new value added services general licence under the

Telecommunications Act 1984; and when the Government expects that the draft licence will be available for public consultation.

Mr. Butcher: The terms of the new licence for value added network services will depend on the outcome of current discussions on licences for managed data network services on which our plans were announced on 15 October and on the outcome of discussions on the consultation document the Department plans to circulate shortly. The new licence will not be granted until the new year, but in the interim the VANS general licence granted under the British Telecommunications Act 1981 continues in force.

Assisted Areas

Mr. O'Brien asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will estimate the effect on unemployment in *(a)* Wakefield and *(b)* the west Yorkshire areas of the Government's revised regional assistance policy and the new assisted area map.

Mr. Trippier [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 November 1984, c. *56*]: As stated in the White Paper "Regional Industrial Development" (Cmnd. 9111) the aim of the policy is the reduction, on a stable long-term basis, of regional imbalances in employment opportunities. These imbalances are manifested in economic activity and migration rates as well as in unemployment. It is not possible to forecast the impact on unemployment in particular areas.

TRANSPORT

M62 Motorway

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for Transport what consultations he has recently had with North Yorkshire and Humberside county councils concerning maintenance of the M62 motorway; and which sections of the motorway were discussed.

Mrs. Chalker: My Department has regular consultations with Humberside county council about the length of M62 motorway east of junction 34, for which it is maintaining agent. In addition, some discussions took place at a technical level earlier this year with officers of a number of local authorities, including North Yorkshire and Humberside county councils, about possible future arrangements for the maintenance of motorways, including M62 motorway in West Yorkshire, following abolition of the metropolitan county councils.

Local Government Reform

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for Transport what estimates have been made of capital requirements of the metropolitan districts for public transport purposes in the event that the metropolitan counties are abolished and the transport function becomes a district responsibility.

Mrs. Chalker: It is proposed that, following abolition, public transport will become the responsibility of a joint board representing all the districts of a metropolitan county. Subsequently any proposals from an individual district to take over responsibility for its own services will be considered on their merits and if the transfer were agreed appropriate financial and other adjustments would be made.

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he has made any estimates of the effects of the withdrawing of support for rail transport in metropolitan areas should the metropolitan counties be abolished.

Mr. David Mitchell: Decisions on support for local passenger rail services in the metropolitan counties are the responsibility of the passenger transport authorities and their passenger transport executives. Under the Government's proposals for the abolition of the metropolitan county councils the passenger transport authorities will be differently constituted, but their powers to support passenger rail services under the Transport Act 1968 will continue.

North Devon Link Road

Mr. Speller asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he has received the inspector's report for the north Devon link road, stage 2A, following the local public inquiry held earlier in 1984.

Mrs. Chalker: I can confirm that we have now received the inspector's report of the north Devon link stage 2A inquiry, which is being considered. The decision of my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Transport and for the Environment will be announced as soon as possible.

M25 Motorway

Mr. Speed asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the delays occurring in the completion of the remaining sections of the M25 motorway; and who will carry the financial responsibility for these delays.

Mrs. Chalker [*pursuant to her reply*, 19 November 1984, c. *47*]: Some formal extensions of contract completion dates have been granted by the independent engineers to the various contracts. None of these prejudices our target of completing the entire M25 by the end of 1986. Any delays over and above those formally approved would render the contractor(s) concerned liable to liquidated damages.

Pilotage

Mr. Thornton asked the Secretary of State for Transport on how many occasions in the last 25 years he has used his powers under section 78 of the Merchant Shipping Act 1906 to grant a dispensation from compulsory pilotage; and what were the circumstances on each occasion.

Mr. David Mitchell [*pursuant to his reply*, 15 November 1984, c. *337*]: On one occasion only in respect of Sealink as operator of the MV Stena Normandica whose officers already hold pilotage certificates for the Milford Haven pilotage district. In my view this dispensation does not give rise to any risk to the safety of the vessel.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Blind Persons (Tax Allowance)

Mr. Butterfill asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the total cost in each of the last five years of the blind person's tax allowance.

Mr. Moore: It is estimated that the cost of the blind person's tax allowance was about £1·5 million in 1980-81 and about £3 million in each of the years fom 1981-82 to the current financial year.

VAT (Take-away Food and Drink)

Mr. Corbett asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will now require Her Majesty's Customs and Excise to publish under separate heading the amount of value added tax paid in respect of hot take-away food and drink.

Mr. Hayhoe: No.

Imports and Exports

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will publish in the *Official Report* details of the changes made since 1975 in the Treasury model for *(a)* price elasticities for imports and exports of manufactures and *(b)* domestic growth elasticities in the demand for imports and exports of (i) manufactures, (ii) oil and (iii) other goods.

Mr. Peter Rees: Details of the Treasury model, including the elasticities used in the imports and exports equations have been published periodically: the last occasion was in June 1984 in "H.M. Treasury Macroeconomic Model: Supplement to the 1982 Technical Manual". Previous editions of the model manual were published in May 1980 and November 1982. The equations in the model, including those for imports and exports, are updated from time to time in the light of recent data and research.

Heroin

Mr. Terlezki asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimates are available to him of the amount of heroin seized by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise as a percentage of the total imported.

Mr. Hayhoe: Any estimates of the total amount of heroin entering the country can only be speculative. The range of those estimates which I have seen is wide and little, if any, reliance can be placed upon them. It follows, therefore, that estimating the percentage seized by customs would be unrealistic.

Building Societies

Mr. Weetch asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will introduce legislation to establish an ombudsman for the building societies movement.

Mr. Ian Stewart: I have taken note of the hon. Member's suggestion, which will be considered alongside the responses to the proposals for new building society legislation in the Green Paper "Building Societies: a New Framework" (Cmnd. 9316).

MIRAS (Abuse)

Mr. Craigen asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what evidence he has received from building societies regarding possible abuse of the mortgage interest relief at source scheme by applicants for a mortgage attempting to obtain tax relief on more than one property.

Mr. Moore: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Mortgages

Mr. Craigen asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table showing the estimated number of mortgagors with mortgages of £15,000, £20,000, £25,000 and £30,000, respectively, in 1984-85 in each tax band.

Mr. Moore: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Civil Service

Mr. Richard Page asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the number of staff in post in central Government Departments at 1 October.

Mr. Peter Rees: At 1 October 1984 there were 617,200 staff in post — 500,200 non-industrial and 117,000 industrial; that is a reduction of 2,000 since 1 July 1984. The number of civil servants has fallen by 115,100 or 15·7 per cent. since the beginning of the last Parliament.

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the present size of the Civil Service; by how many the establishment has been reduced since April 1979; and what categories of staff have suffered the biggest reductions.

Mr. Hayhoe [*pursuant to his reply*, 9 November 1984, c.*18*]: There were 617,200 staff in post in central Government Departments on 1 October 1984 (the latest date for which figures are available) compared with 732,300 on 1 April 1979. This reflects a reduction in the size of the Civil Service of more than 115,000, or 15·7 per cent. since the beginning of the last Parliament. The largest percentage reduction was in the industrial grades, which fell by 29·7 per cent. I would refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon (Mr. Proctor) on 11 July 1984, at column 443, for details of the percentage reductions in non-industrial grades.

Block Grant Holdback

Dr. Cunningham asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assumption is made in table 1.9 of the autumn statement of 12 November about the level of local government block grant holdback to be incurred in 1985-86 by local authorities in *(a)* England and *(b)* Wales; and what are the respective figures.

Mr. Peter Rees [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 November 1984, c. *40*]: It is not our practice to detail the individual assumptions underlying the forecasts of public finances in the autumn statement. The amount of grant holdback to be incurred in 1985-86 depends on the spending decisions of individual local authorities, which are not yet available.

Personal Incomes

Mr. Shersby asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of the population where the husband and wife are both working have a gross income in excess of £20,000 per year.

Mr. Moore [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 November 1984, c.*41*]: A provisional estimate for 1984-85 based on

projections from the 1982-83 survey of personal incomes is that about 11 per cent. of married couples where both husband and wife are earning have a gross income in excess of £20,000. Gross income is taken to include only those forms of income liable to income tax.

Government Trading Funds

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing, for each central Government trading fund from the financial year of establishment, *(a)* its historic cost financial results, *(b)* its current cost financial results, *(c)* its financial target and over or under-achievement and *(d)* the level of financial performance, in both historic and current cost, necessary to meet the statutory break-even requirements.

Mr. Peter Rees [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 November 1984, c. *40*]: The information requested is given in the following table on an historic cost basis for each trading fund from its year of establishment and on a current cost basis for the years for which current cost accounts have been prepared.

	(a) Historic cost results £ million (Note 1)	*(b)* Current cost results £ million (Note 1)	*(c)* Financial target per cent. return on net assets	Over/(Under) achievement per cent.	*(d)* Break-even performance required Historic cost per cent. (Note 2)	Current cost per cent. (Note 2)
Royal Ordnance Factories						
1974-75	0·6	—	(Note 3)	(Note 3)	3·4	—
1975-76	8·6	—	(Note 3)	(Note 3)	4·4	—
1976-77	37·6	—	(Note 3)	(Note 3)	3·1	—
1977-78	40·0	—	(Note 3)	(Note 3)	2·3	—
1978-79	38·2	—	(Note 3)	(Note 3)	1·7	—
1979-80	18·2	2·9	5	(2·7)	1·0	0·7
1980-81	0·9	(11·2)	5	(9·7)	0·9	0·5
1981-82	12·1	(1·9)	5	(5·5)	1·4	0·8
1982-83	87·7	74·5	5	11·5	0·3	0·2
1983-84	65·3	52·6	5	8·7	0·1	0·1
Royal Mint						
1975-76	0·9	—	15	(4·5)	6·3	—
1976-77	7·1	—	15	17·3	5·2	—
1977-78	3·9	—	15	4·6	4·8	—
1978-79	6·2	—	15	6·9	3·5	—
1979-80	7·2	—	15	7·9	2·8	—
1980-81	9·1	9·5	12	16·0	2·0	1·8
1981-82	8·4	9·2	11	13·2	1·7	1·4
1982-83	5·2	3·3	11	(3·2)	1·4	1·1
1983-84	7·5	6·6	11	4·4	1·0	0·8
The Crown Suppliers						
1976-77	3·9	—	(Note 4)	(Note 4)	10·8	—
1977-78	5·2	—	(Note 4)	(Note 4)	9·5	—
1978-79	2·6	—	(Note 4)	(Note 4)	8·2	—
1979-80	1·7	—	(Note 4)	(Note 4)	6·8	—
1980-81	1·4	0·6	(Note 4)	(Note 4)	6·9	6·6
1981-82	2·2	1·5	5	5·4	6·6	6·5
1982-83	10·9	9·4	5	22·4	5·1	5·1
1983-84	(Note 5)					
Her Majesty's Stationery Office						
1980-81	7·1	2·8	5	17·4	18·0	17·8
1981-82	0·2	(5·5)	5	2·3	14·8	14·5
1982-83	4·5	1·6	5	11·4	14·5	14·3
1983-84	7·1	3·3	5	12·6	13·4	13·2

Notes

1. Columns *(a)* and *(b)* give the surplus/(deficit) for the year after interest.
2. The entries under column *(d)* give the return required on net assets employed to meet the interest on long-term borrowing.
3. For the period 1 July 1974 to 31 March 1979 the Royal Ordnance Factories were required to earn an excess of revenue over outgoings sufficient to permit the payment of an average dividend of 10 per cent. per annum. This was achieved.
4. For the period 1 April 1976 to 31 March 1981 the Crown Suppliers were required to earn an excess of revenue over outgoings sufficient to provide for a return of 10 per cent. on average net assets or interest due on long-term borrowing. This was achieved.
5. The 1983-84 accounts of the Crown Suppliers have not yet been laid.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Potato Marketing Scheme

Mr. Gale asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he has received the report of the public inquiry into the objection made to the proposed amendments to the potato marketing scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jopling: My right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and Wales and I have received the report of Mr. Brian Capstick, QC, who conducted the public inquiry into objections to the proposed amendments to the potato marketing scheme. The main effects of the amendments are to:

(i) increase the formula rate, on which the level of producers' contributions is based, to £75 per hectare in 1985;
(ii) change the basis for calculating the formula rate for future years;
(iii) give the board more flexibility in the adjustment of electoral districts;
(iv) reduce the minimum number of producers, and the respective potato area, required to demand a poll of all registered producers;
(v) increase the charges for supplying copies of the Register of producers and the board's balance sheet; and
(vi) change certain voting procedures.

The report recommends that, subject to certain modifications, the amendments should be adopted and that they will conduce to the more efficient operation of the scheme. Ministers have accepted these recommendations and have given notice of the modifications to the Potato Marketing Board. These refer to a change in the definition of "average price" and "potato area" and a lowering of the minimum number of producers required to demand a poll from 500, as proposed by the board, to 400. The conditions under which the board may alter electoral boundaries are revised and there is one further minor change. The board has now accepted all these modifications and a draft order will be laid before Parliament shortly.

The report of the inquiry is being published today and I have arranged for a copy to be placed in the Library of the House. I have written to Mr. Capstick on behalf of the other Agricultural Ministers thanking him for a comprehensive report and the speed with which he has completed his findings.

Intervention Board for Agricultural Produce (Derby Premises)

Mrs. Beckett asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish in the *Official Report* *(a)* the location of the store used by the Intervention Board for Agricultural Produce in Derby, *(b)* the nature of its contents and *(c)* the quantities in store.

Mr. Jopling: On 30 September the intervention store in Derby contained 672 tonnes of butter. The address of the store is not given, on grounds of commercial confidentiality.

Whirling Disease

Mr. Mason asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many fish farms are still affected by whirling disease and in which areas of England and Wales; and if he will make a statement on the progress made toward the elimination of this disease.

Mr. MacGregor: There are at present 44 fish farms in England and Wales on which there are grounds for believing that the causative agent of whirling disease, (Myxosoma cerebralis), may be found. However, there may be other sites on which Myosoma cerebralis is also present at sub-clinical levels and has not been identified.

The known 44 sites are 42 of the 43 sites in England and Wales which I listed in my reply to the right hon. Member of 26 March 1984, at column 24, (excluding Mill Leat trout farm in Devon, where sufficient measures have been taken to eradicate the disease) and two additional sites in Clwyd, Wales and north Yorkshire.

My fish disease scientists are currently monitoring the occurrence of whirling disease in accordance with the policies announced in the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Wantage (Mr. Jackson) on 27 February 1984, at column 2.

Salmon

Mr. Mason asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what discussions have taken place between his Ministry and interested parties on a salmon tagging scheme to offset salmon poaching; and if he will make a statement on the prospects for his Ministry of sponsoring legislation on this matter.

Mr. MacGregor: The examination by officials of the issues raised by the report of the salmon sales group of the former National Water Council has identified the main areas of concern in any scheme to control salmon sales and is looking urgently into the practical difficulties of establishing effective control. These problems are still under examination with interested parties. We are anxious to clear these issues as speedily as possible, and I hope that conclusions can be reached soon. But no decisions about legislation can be taken until we have the measure of the practical implications of a scheme of the kind proposed by the sales group.

Mr. Mason asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what discussions have taken place between his Ministry and the Atlantic Salmon Trust on salmon preservation and an improvement in salmon spawning stocks next season; and whether he has consulted the water authorities on how improvements can be made in spawning stocks of multi-sea winter salmon in 1985.

Mr. MacGregor: I have exchanged correspondence with the chairman of the Atlantic Salmon Trust about the numbers of multi-sea winter salmon returning to this country and about steps that might be taken to improve salmon spawning stocks. He recently put a number of suggestions to me which I am considering. My officials have also been in touch with representatives of the water authorities, which are fully seized of the need to conserve spawning stocks but have no specific suggestions for Government action in respect of multi-sea winter salmon.

Mr. Onslow asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what were the terms of reference of the departmental inquiry which he commissioned earlier in the current year into the effects of the north-east coast salmon fishery; when he expects to receive his scientists' report; and if he will undertake to publish it in full as soon as possible.

Mr. MacGregor: The results of the further examination by officials of the effects of the north east coast salmon fishery have been reported to me. Scientists of my Department and of the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland were asked to examine the present state of the salmon fisheries which are dependent on salmon passing through the English north-east coast fishery, to consider objections which have been raised to that fishery and to consider possible management arrangements to take account of significant problems. Their report was an internal one based, in part, on information provided in confidence and will not be published. My right hon. and noble Friend the Minister of

State, Scottish Office and I are considering the report and will announce our conclusions when we have completed that consideration.

Vegetable Oils

Mr. Ashley asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the level of subsidy on domestically produced, or tariff on imported, vegetable oils and on vegetable oils high in polyunsaturates.

Mr. MacGregor: No subsidies are paid on oils and I assume, therefore, that the right hon. Member's question relates to the subsidies which are paid to oilseed crushers to encourage them to purchase Community produce rape seed and sunflower seed and which cover the gap between Community and world prices for these oilseeds. Only rape seed is grown in the United Kingdom and the rate of subsidy on 15 November was £68·17 per tonne for rape seed with an oil content of 40 per cent.

The tariffs on oilseeds are nil. The general rates of tariff for most vegetable oils for human consumption supplied in bulk are 10 per cent. for crude oil and 15 per cent. for refined oil. Further details may be found in Her Majesty's Customs and Excise "Tariff and Overseas Trade Classification in the United Kingdom", volume II, a copy of which is available in the Library of the House. Of the main oils of interest in the United Kingdom, corn, groundnut, rape, soya and sunflower are relatively high in polyunsaturate and coconut, palm and palm kernel are relatively low.

Saturated Fats

Mr. Ashley asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which products high in saturated fat receive subsidies; and what is the level of subsidies on butter and red meat carcases.

Mr. Jopling: In the absence of an objective definition of what constitutes a high saturated fat content, a detailed reply is not possible. It is, however, possible to give specific informations on the levels of subsidy relating to butter and redmeat carcases as requested.

A consumer subsidy is paid on butter at the rate of 8p per kilogram; additionally a special sale of a limited quantity of 39,200 tonnes of butter will be made at a price to packers further reduced by 92p per kilogram. A range of aids is also paid on the use of butter by non-profit-making organisations, such as schools, hospitals, old people's homes; use of butter by the armed forces; use in food manufacture, including use as concentrated butter, and in the manufacture of pastry, sugar confectioner prepared fish dishes and ice-cream.

Under the beef variable premium a payment is made to the producer to make up any difference between the market price and the target price, up to a maximum of 8·74p per kilogram liveweight, 16·25p per kilogram deadweight.

Under the sheep variable premium a payment is made to the producer for each carcase to make up any difference between the market price and the guide price, which in the marketing year 1984-85 averages £2·25 per kilogram carcase weight.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Milk Quotas

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the estimated cost to public funds of work done in 1984-85 under the dairy produce quota regulations.

Dr. Boyson: It is estimated that in 1984-85 £220,000 will be required to meet the fees and expenses of members of the Northern Ireland dairy produce quota tribunal and panels and £150,000 to recoup the Milk Marketing Board for Northern Ireland for work done on behalf of the Department of Agriculture. This expenditure will be sought through an Autumn Supplementary Estimate and pending parliamentary approval payments are being met by way of repayable advances from the Northern Ireland Civil Contingencies Fund.

Social Security Commissioners

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether administrative responsibility for the office of the Social Security Commissioners in Northern Ireland is to be transferred to the Lord Chancellor.

Mr. Chris Patten: Yes, in due course, when a suitable opportunity arises to amend the relevant legislation.

CIVIL SERVICE

Northern Region

Mr. Dormand asked the Minister for the Civil Service how many Civil Service posts have been transferred to the northern region since May 1979.

Mr. Hayhoe: The dispersal programme announced on 26 July 1979 did not include any transfer of posts to the northern region. Details of posts that may have been transferred by Departments for management reasons are not held centrally.

PRIME MINISTER

Norfolk

Q29. **Mr. Nigel Spearing** asked the Prime Minister when she next plans to make an official visit to Norfolk.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

Denton

Q51. **Mr. Andrew F. Bennett** asked the Prime Minister if she will pay an official visit to Denton.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

Wales

Q70. **Mr. Wigley** asked the Prime Minister when she next plans to pay an official visit to Wales.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

St. Helena

Q74. **Dr. Marek** asked the Prime Minister if she has any plans to visit St. Helena.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

UNESCO

Q99. **Mr. Jessel** asked the Prime Minister when Her Majesty's Government expect to announce a decision on whether British membership of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation shall continue.

The Prime Minister: The Government will announce their decision by the end of this year.

HMS Conqueror (Log Book)

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Prime Minister who has been appointed to the board of inquiry into the alleged loss of the control room log of HMS Conqueror, and when and to whom they are to report.

The Prime Minister: The board of inquiry was composed of a captain and two commanders RN on the staff of the Commander-in-Chief Fleet to whom they reported on 16 November.

Isle of Man

Mr. Skeet asked the Prime Minister whether she will transfer responsibility for the affairs of the Isle of Man from the Home Office to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

The Prime Minister: No. The Royal Commission on the constitution (1969-73), which looked at the constitutional position of the Isle of Man—and the Channel Islands—and their relationship with the United Kingdom, made no recommendations touching on the Home Secretary's role. The Isle of Man itself has not asked for the handling of its affairs to be transferred to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Engagements

Mr. Greenway asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 20 November.

Mr. Pike asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 20 November.

Mr. Parry asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 20 November.

Mr. Straw asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for 20 November.

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today. This evening I hope to have an audience of Her Majesty the Queen.

Assisted Areas

Mr. Latham asked the Prime Minister whether she is satisfied that the published unemployment statistics for the newly-designated travel-to-work areas will be sufficiently homogeneous or localised to assist Ministers to detect unemployment black spots when they are framing decisions about the designation of assisted areas; and whether she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: Yes. The Department of Employment's travel-to-work areas are the closest available approximations to self-contained labour markets covering the whole country. This makes them the best building blocks for the assisted areas map. It would not be cost effective to use regional industrial policy to solve problems of unemployment black spots in the midst of areas of relatively low unemployment. Regional industrial policy is not well suited to tackle such localised problems.

My hon. Friend the Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry intends to make a statement to the House shortly on regional industrial policy.

RAF (Trainer Aircraft)

Mr. Best asked the Prime Minister what is the policy of Her Majesty's Government towards support for companies in which Her Majesty's Government have shareholdings such as British Aerospace and Short Bros., in their attempts to sell foreign training aircraft to the Royal Air Force.

The Prime Minister: The Government's prime consideration is to obtain a cost-effective aircraft which meets the performance requirements of the Royal Air Force. A full, impartial evaluation of the four tenders is now being carried out. No distinction is being made between any of the companies on grounds of Government shareholdings.

Cardinal Hume

Mr. Parry asked the Prime Minister if she will make a statement on her recent meeting with Cardinal Hume.

The Prime Minister: This was a private meeting at which Cardinal Hume told me about his recent visit to Ethiopia.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Metropolitan Police

Mr. Wheeler asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis has completed his review of the management and organisation of the force.

Mr. Brittan: The Commissioner has today announced his intention to make far-reaching changes in the organisation and management of the Metropolitan police. He has discussed his plans with me and I have told him that I endorse his approach and objectives.

The object of the changes will be to provide the managerial and organisational structure which will best support the force's strategy and will ensure that its resources are used in the most efficient and effective way. The present structure of 75 divisions, 24 districts, four areas and headquarters will be streamlined; the present areas and districts will be replaced by eight new areas, thus cutting out one level of command. In accordance with the Commissioner's strategy, the focus of policing will be the divisions, whose boundaries will be unchanged.

Headquarters will be reorganised and substantially reduced in size, mainly by devolving functions to divisions or the new areas.

These changes are well designed to improve the quality of service the force is able to offer Londoners, by placing the emphasis firmly on operational policing, responsive to local needs. I believe that they will also provide better value for money.

As police authority, I shall be fully consulted as the plans are progessively implemented.

Picketing

61. **Mr. Favell** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will introduce legislation to provide for unions encouraging mass picketing to bear the cost of policing it.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The question whether the organisers of demonstrations, of which picketing is one form, should contribute towards the cost of policing those demonstrations is being considered in the review of the Public Order Act 1936 and related legislation which my right hon. and learned Friend is conducting.

Home Defence Exercise

Mr. Michael Brown asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he expects local authority emergency planning teams to be involved with a Ministry of Defence home defence exercise in 1985.

Mr. Giles Shaw: No. These exercises are normally directed to specific wartime duties of the armed forces and are therefore inappropriate for local authority involvement.

Chemical Warfare

Mr. Patrick Thompson asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans exist in the event of a chemical attack on a military establishment in the United Kingdom for warning the local authorities in the area of the threat to the local population.

Mr. Giles Shaw: We are playing a leading part at the conference on disarmament at Geneva to achieve a comprehensive verifiable ban on the production, stockpiling and use of chemical weapons. In the absence of a chemical weapons ban we are actively considering how the present warning arrangements could be used for the detection and warning of the danger presented by chemical weapons and what protective measures may be taken.

We will keep the House informed of progress.

Television Licence Fees

Mr. Maclean asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received from the British Broadcasting Corporation for an increase in television licence fees.

Mr. Giles Shaw: My right hon. and learned Friend has now received an application by the BBC for increased television licence fees from April of next year. This will be carefully considered.

Coal Industry Dispute

Mr. Maude asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the estimated total cost to date of policing the mining dispute.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Information on the total costs of policing the dispute to date is not available. Up to 8 November the Home Office had paid advances of police grant and of the special payment my right hon. and learned Friend is making available to police authorities, on expenditure totalling some £89 million.

Mr. Soley asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will publish in the *Official Report* the following information on the mining dispute *(a)* the number of persons convicted and the offences they committed for each police force area and *(b)* the number of persons remanded in custody for each police force area.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The information available centrally about the number of convictions for offences committed in connection with the miners' dispute relates to the period from 13 March to 13 November and is as follows:

Police force area	*Number of convictions*
Cleveland	43
Cumbria	5
Derbyshire	341
Durham	122
Dyfed-Powys	2
Essex	28
Greater Manchester	57
Gwent	60
Humberside	25
Kent	45
Lancashire	2
Leicestershire	34
Merseyside	77
Metropolitan	53
Northumbria	116
North Wales	23
North Yorkshire	85
Nottinghamshire	580
South Wales	114
South Yorkshire	304
Staffordshire	211
Warwickshire	52
West Yorkshire	25
Total:	2404

It is not possible from the information available centrally to provide details of the offences which resulted in these convictions. On 13 November the number of those remanded in custody was as follows:

Police force areas	*Number of remands in custody*
Derbyshire	5
Merseyside	1
Northumbria	1
Nottinghamshire	2
South Yorkshire	2

Entrapment

Mr. Soley asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidelines are given in the Metropolitan police force on entrapment; and where these guidelines are published.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Metropolitan police general orders reflect guidance given in paragraph 1·92 of the Home Office "Consolidated Circular on Crime and Kindred Matters" that no police officer should counsel, incite or procure the commission of a crime. A copy of the consolidated circular is in the Library of the House. However, as my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State has explained to the House, the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis has recently issued a further police order to give this principle greater prominence in the context of orders covering the deployment of uniformed branch officers on plain clothes observation duties. The new order provides that officers selected for these duties must be briefed by a senior officer to ensure that they avoid behaviour which they could give rise to legimitate accusations that they had acted as agents provocateurs, and explains that the term agent provocateur was defined by the Royal Commission on police powers in 1928 as a person who entices another to commmit an express breach of the law which he would not otherwise have committed and then proceeds or informs against him in respect of such an offence. Metropolitan police general orders are not published.

Probation and After-care Service

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will estimate the effect on the numbers of those awaiting trial and those awaiting parole should the finance available for the probation and after-care service within an authority be reduced due to the effects of rate-capping by any whole percentage point up to 10 per cent.; and what effect this might have on the cost of the prison service.

Mr. Mellor: The information needed to answer this hypothetical question is not readily available, and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what amendments he considers necessary to paragraph 6(2) of schedule 3 to the Powers of Criminal Courts Act 1973 in the light of the Government's proposals for the probation and after-care service in the event of the abolition of the metropolitan county councils.

Mr. Mellor: Paragraph 6(2) of schedule 3 to the Powers of Criminal Courts Act 1973 provides that the total number of persons co-opted to a probation committee is not to exceed one-third of the number of members of the committee, and prohibits the co-option of justices of the peace for any area covered by the probation area. In relation to probation committees in areas affected by the abolition of the Greater London council and metropolitan county councils, the Local Government Bill will provide for co-option of elected members of local authorities, and will allow elected members of local authorities who are also justices of the peace to be co-opted under this provision. It will retain the limit of one-third on all co-opted members.

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consultations he has had with the National Association of Probation Officers on the effects on the probation service of rate-capping legislation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: None. I do not accept that the operation of the Rates Act 1984 need affect the capability of the probation service to discharge its functions.

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimates have been made of any changes in manpower levels in the probation and after-care service which may be required to support the recommendation for more community measures for offenders in place of prison sentences; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: The Standing Committee on Probation Manpower Needs, which includes members from the three organisations representing the probation service, has forecast from work load projections that an additional 100 probation officers (with supporting staff) will be needed for the service as a whole in 1985-86. That forecast has been taken into account in consideration of the Government's expenditure plans.

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make arrangements to ensure that probation authorities continue to provide the required level of service in the event that they are subject to the rate-capping legislation.

Mr. Mellor: The level of staffing necessary for area probation services to provide appropriate levels of service is primarily a matter for individual probation committees. County councils are statutorily required to defray the cost of these staff. In the event of disagreement on the cost of staff other than probation officer grades, a committee or council has the right to seek my right hon. and learned Friend's determination.

Poor Box

Mr. David Atkinson asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about the use of the poor box by magistrates.

Mr. Mellor: It is the custom of some magistrates' courts to keep a poor box, financed by donations from private and charitable sources, from which to make small grants in deserving cases. The decision whether to maintain a poor box and what payments to make from it and to whom rests entirely with the individual court.

Police Car Pursuits (Public Safety)

Mrs. Rumbold asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the Metropolitan police will take steps to ensure that police cars in the pursuit of car thieves do not thereby endanger the lives of other people.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis tells me that both the Metropolitan Police regulations covering the conduct of drivers of police cars and the force's driver training programmes stress the need for police drivers to exercise extreme caution, particularly in the pursuit of suspects.

Animals (Experiments)

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he proposes to publish the Bill on animal experiments; if he will be publishing any supplements to the White Paper, "Scientific Procedures on Living Animals", Cmnd. 8883; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: New legislation will be introduced as soon as parliamentary time permits. We are considering issuing a supplementary document to the White Paper.

Shotguns

Mr. Cartwright asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many shotgun licences have been *(a)* applied for and *(b)* issued in (i) the Metropolitan Police district and (ii) England and Wales during each of the most recent 10 years for which figures are available.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Information on the total number of applications made for shotgun certificates in the Metropolitan Police district and England and Wales during the last 10 years is not available.

The numbers of shotgun certificates issued in the Metropolitan Police district over the last 10 years is as follows:

Year	*Number of shotgun certificates issued*
1974	3,948
1975	3,466
1976	3,756
1977	3,269
1978	2,923
1979	2,908
1980	3,246
1981	3,348
1982	2,504
1983	3,378

The information in respect of England and Wales was collected centrally for the first time in 1983 when the total number of shotgun certificates issued was 46,612.

Mr. Cartwright asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his estimate of the number of shotguns currently in use *(a)* legally and *(b)* illegally.

Mr. Giles Shaw: It is not possible to estimate the total number of shotguns currently in use legally, because a shotgun certificate does not record the number of shotguns held. However, the number of shotgun certificates in force in England and Wales on 31 December 1983, the latest date for which figures are available, was 783,378. We have no reliable information on which to base an estimate of the number of shotguns held illegally.

Mr. Cartwright asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have been killed by the deliberate use of shotguns in *(a)* the Metropolitan police district and *(b)* England and Wales during each of the most recent 10 years for which figures are available.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The available information relates to offences initially recorded as homicide and is given in the following table. The figure for England and Wales is now published annually in "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales" (table 3.3 of the issue for 1983, Cmnd. 9349).

Offences initially recorded by the police as homicide in which shotguns were reported to have been used†*

Number

	England and Wales	*Metropolitan Police District*
1973	18	2
1974	35	4
1975	29	4
1976	34	4
1977	15	1
1978	28	5
1979	42	4
1980	12	—
1981	21	3
1982	35	9
1983	32	8

*Includes offences subsequently decided by the courts or the police not to be homicide.

†Includes cases where the shotgun was used as a blunt instrument.

Mr. Cartwright asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many shotgun licences were in force in *(a)* the Metropolitan Police district and *(b)* England and Wales at the end of each of the most recent 10 years for which figures are available.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The information in respect of England and Wales was not regularly collected centrally before 1979. The available information is as follows:

Number of Shotgun Certificates in force on 31 December

Year	*(a) Metropolitan Police*	*(b) England and Wales*
1974	41,281	766,952
1975	30,531	—
1976	31,353	—
1977	31,850	—
1978	32,308	—
1979	30,259	782,074
1980	28,990	781,854
1981	29,528	785,225
1982	28,504	780,629
1983	29,747	783,378

Mr. Cartwright asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department in how many cases shotguns have been used in the course of robberies in *(a)* the Metropolitan Police district and *(b)* England and Wales during each of the most recent 10 years for which figures are available.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Information on the numbers of robberies recorded by the police in England and Wales in which firearms were reported to have been used is published annually by type of weapon in "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales". (Table 3.4 of the latest issue for 1983, Cmnd. 9349). Information for the Metropolitan Police district is given in the following table:

Offences of robbery recorded by the police in the Metropolitan police district in which shotguns were reported to have been used

Year	*Number of offences*
1973	*149
1974	*140
1975	*222
1976	*276
1977	*360
1978	*323
1979	291
1980	196
1981	387
1982	491
1983	361

* Including a small number of offences in the City of London.

Segregated Prisoners

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners held in Her Majesty's prisons are segregated under rule 43; at which prisons; and, of these, how many are aged under 17 years.

Mr. Mellor: The number of male convicted prisoners segregated under prison rule 43, either at their own request or for the maintenance of good order and discipline, on the latest date for which information is available is as follows:

Number of inmates segregated under prison rule 43 on 30 June 1984

Her Majesty's prisons	*Own request*	*Good order and discipline*	*Total*
Acklington	5	—	5
Albany	3	6	9
Bedford	5	—	5
Birmingham	1	7	8
Blundeston	2	1	3
Bristol	6	3	9
Camp Hill	9	3	12
Canterbury	13	—	13
Cardiff	4	—	4
Channings Wood	2	—	2
Dartmoor	28	9	37
Dorchester	1	—	1
Durham	21	3	24
Exeter	5	—	5
Featherstone	1	—	1
Frankland	13	—	13
Gartree	15	2	17
Gloucester	3	—	3
Hull	12	7	19
Leeds	55	4	59
Leicester	8	2	10
Lewes	1	3	4
Lincoln	26	2	28
Liverpool	62	4	66
Long Lartin	4	7	11
Maidstone	4	1	5
Manchester	35	2	37
Norwich	20	—	20
Nottingham	1	1	2
Oxford	4	—	4
Parkhurst	15	4	19
Pentonville	7	—	7
Preston	5	1	6
Ranby	1	1	2
Reading	1	1	2
Shrewsbury	2	1	3
Stafford	19	2	21
Swansea	6	—	6
The Verne	3	4	7
Wakefield	26	10	36
Wandsworth	80	8	88
Winchester	12	3	15
Wormwood Scrubs	27	2	29
	573	104	677

I regret that information is not kept centrally on the segregation of women and unconvicted prisoners nor on the ages of male convicted prisoners segregated under prison rule 43.

Police (Firearms)

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has for 1984 to date as to the number of occasions in each police force when firearms were *(a)* used or *(b)* drawn (i) in cases of crime and (ii) in other cases; and if he has the same figures for the previous five years.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The figures for the number of occasions on which firearms were drawn from holsters are not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Statistics on the issue and use of firearms by the police are collated centrally on an annual basis and figures for 1984 are therefore not yet available. The other information requested is given in the following table:

Number of occasions on which police officers used (ie fired) firearms 1979-1983 in England and Wales (excluding use for training purposes)

Force	*1979*		*1980*		*1981*		*1982*		*1983*	
	In cases of crime	*In other cases**	*In cases of crime*	*In other cases†*	*In cases of crime*	*In other cases†*	*In cases of crime*	*In other cases†*	*In cases of crime*	*In other cases†*
Avon and Somerset	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	—
Cheshire	—	—	—	—	—	2	—	—	—	1
Cleveland	—	—	—	2	—	—	—	—	—	—
Cumbria	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2
Derbyshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—
Devon and Cornwall	—	—	—	2	—	2	—	1	—	1
Dorset	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
Durham	—	—	—	2	—	—	—	—	—	3
Essex	1	—	—	1	—	1	—	—	—	1
Greater Manchester	—	—	—	—	—	1	1	1	—	—
Hampshire	—	—	—	1	—	1	—	—	—	—
Hertfordshire	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	2	—	1
Humberside	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	3
Kent	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
Lancashire	—	—	—	3	—	6	—	3	—	2
Lincolnshire	—	—	—	2	—	4	—	3	—	3
Merseyside	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—
Metropolitan Police	1	—	7	—	3	—	6	1	1	3
Norfolk	—	—	—	1	—	2	—	4	—	2
Northamptonshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	1	—	—
Northumbria	—	—	—	2	—	2	—	1	—	3
North Yorkshire	—	—	—	4	—	1	1	—	—	3
Nottinghamshire	—	—	—	1	—	1	—	1	—	2

Force	1979		1980		1981		1982		1983	
	In cases of crime	*In other cases**	*In cases of crime*	*In other cases†*	*In cases of crime*	*In other cases†*	*In cases of crime*	*In other cases†*	*In cases of crime*	*In other cases†*
South Yorkshire	—	—	—	3	—	1	—	—	—	4
Staffordshire	—	—	—	2	—	1	—	—	—	—
Suffolk	—	—	—	—	—	2	—	—	—	1
Sussex	—	—	—	—	—	2	1	—	—	3
Warwickshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
West Mercia	—	—	1	1	—	1	—	—	—	5
West Midlands	1	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
West Yorkshire	—	—	1	6	—	—	1	—	—	1
Wiltshire	—	—	—	—	—	3	—	1	—	1
Dyfed Powys	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—
South Wales	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	2

* Firearms were used on a number of occasions in 1979 to destroy injured or dangerous animals, but statistics for individual police forces are not available.

† Mainly for destruction of animals.

Juvenile Prisoners

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many juveniles are currently held in Her Majesty's prisons; if he will give a breakdown of their ages and the locations of the prisons involved; and if he will give the comparable figures for each of the past five years where applicable.

Mr. Mellor: The latest information readily available is given in the following table:

Population aged under 17 of prisons and remand centres in England and Wales on 31 August: by establishment and age of prisoner, 1980-84*

Number

	1980			1981			1982			1983			1984		
	Age of prisoner			*Age of prisoner*			*Age of prisoner*			*Age of prisoner*			*Age of prisoner*		
	14	*15*	*16*	*14*	*15*	*16*	*14*	*15*	*16*	*14*	*15*	*16*	*14*	*15*	*16*
Ashford remand centre	—	1	2	—	2	9	—	2	3	—	—	—	—	1	1
Aylesbury	—	—	1	—	—	1	—	—	2	—	—	—	—	—	—
Bedford	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	1	—	—	—	1	—	1	1
Birmingham	—	—	5	—	—	4	—	—	7	—	1	10	—	—	1
Bristol	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	1	—	—	—
Brixton	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	1	—	—	2	—	—	—
Brockhill remand centre	1	12	26	—	12	21	—	7	17	—	4	12	—	5	13
Canterbury	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	1	—	—	1	—	—	—
Cardiff remand centre	—	4	4	—	1	6	—	2	3	—	—	—	—	—	3
Chelmsford remand centre	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	3	—	—	1	—	—	2
Durham	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—
Exeter	—	1	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2
Exeter remand centre	—	1	6	—	—	6	—	—	1	—	—	2	—	1	2
Glen Parva remand centre	—	—	—	1	4	5	—	6	4	—	2	4	—	5	9
Gloucester	—	—	—	—	—	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Holloway	—	1	5	—	1	1	—	1	2	—	—	1	—	—	—
Latchmere House remand centre	3	24	45	—	18	59	—	17	41	—	6	38	—	5	25
Leeds	—	3	5	—	1	3	—	1	3	—	1	—	—	—	1
Leicester	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	1	—	—	1	—	1	2
Lincoln	—	1	1	—	—	4	—	1	3	—	—	—	—	—	1
Liverpool	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	1	17	—	—	7
Low Newton remand centre	—	14	16	—	17	31	—	8	18	—	10	11	—	7	15
Manchester	—	11	15	—	7	20	—	8	18	—	7	26	—	1	12
Manchester remand centre	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	3	—	2	5
Oxford	—	—	2	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
Pucklechurch remand centre	1	5	7	—	2	6	—	3	3	—	—	3	—	1	2
Reading	—	—	—	—	2	1	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—
Risley remand centre	1	14	38	—	10	21	—	11	26	—	2	9	—	5	10
Shrewsbury	—	—	1	—	2	—	—	2	—	—	—	2	—	—	—
Styal	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Swinfen Hall	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Swansea remand centre	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	—	—	1
Thorp Arch	2	14	17	—	11	24	—	16	27	—	11	21	—	2	16
Winchester	—	2	11	—	2	5	—	1	3	—	—	—	—	1	2
Wormwood Scrubs	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Total	8	110	218	1	96	243	—	92	193	—	47	173	—	39	139

* The figures are those recorded centrally and are approximate; detailed checking of individual cases would involve disproportionate cost.

Voluntary Organisations

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what is the deadline for responses

to his consultation paper of 20 September on local authority support for the voluntary sector in the event of the Greater London council being abolished; and after which date responses will cease to be considered;

(2) if his consultation document of 20 September on the Government's proposals for local authority support for the voluntary sector in the event of the Greater London council being abolished has been sent to the Association of London Authorities;

(3) what action he intends to take if the London boroughs do not meet together prior to replying to his consultation document of 20 September on local authority support for the voluntary sector in the event of the Greater London council being abolished.

Mr. Waddington: No deadline was set for responses to the consultation paper issued by the Department on 20 September. The document was not sent to the Association of London Authorities, but copies went to the Greater London council and to the councils of all London boroughs, that is to all the members of this association. The Department would welcome a response from the association to the document or a request for a meeting about it. I understand that representatives of all the London boroughs and the City will be meeting on 12 December in the normal way to consider grants to be made collectively to voluntary organisations in 1985-86 and other matters. Their comments on the consultation paper would also be welcome.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Victoria and Hammersmith and Fulham Health Authorities

Mr. Martin Stevens asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether a decision has been made on the proposals put forward by the North-West Thames health authority to amalgamate Victoria and Hammersmith and Fulham health authorities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Following a number of meetings with groups representing local interests and careful consideration of all aspects of the proposals, we have decided to approve in principle the proposal put forward by the North-West Thames regional health authority that these two health authorities should be amalgamated to form a new district health authority to be known as Riverside.

In taking this step we have been above all concerned for the interests of patients. The rapidly reducing population and comparatively high levels of provision of acute hospital services in this part of London mean that significant changes are needed in the pattern of health care provision. We are convinced that the best way to safeguard patients' interests while the necessary changes are made is to create a single health authority to look at the problems of the area as a whole. The new authority will be able to liaise more effectively with the recently created Charing Cross and Westminster medical school. This will ensure that high quality and innovative medical care continues to be provided together with the provision of effective medical education. At the same time we will expect the new authority to strengthen the management of joint planning with the local authorities and family practitioner committees responsible for other aspects of care and treatment.

Even after this amalgamation the new authority will be smaller than many in terms of population and geographical area. The necessary legislative changes will be laid before the House shortly for consideration. I am confident that the creation of a new single authority to manage the health services currently managed by Victoria and Hammersmith and Fulham health authorities offers considerable opportunities for improving the quality and planning of these services in the years ahead.

COMA (Official Secrets Act)

Mr. Coombs asked the Secretary of State for Social Services on what date and for what reason members of the COMA and of its sub-committees, were asked to sign the Official Secrets Act.

Mr. John Patten: Members of the Chief Medical Officer's Committee on the Medical Aspects of Food Policy have been asked to sign the Official Secrets Act since the inception of the committee in 1957. When a panel or sub-committee is formed its members are also asked to do so. Members of COMA and its panels and sub-committees are required to provide disinterested scientific advice to the Government on issues, some connected with commercial matters, on which it may be appropriate to preserve confidentiality.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Squire asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the reason for the increase of over 7 per cent. in housing benefit non-dependant deductions between April and November 1984; and how much revenue he expects to raise by this increase in 1984-85 and in a full year.

Mr. Whitney: The non-dependant deductions in the housing benefit and supplementary benefit schemes are being increased this month in line with the annual movement to May of the housing sub-component of the retail price index. There will be a corresponding increase in the supplementary benefit non-householder's contribution. These changes reflect normal uprating arrangements rather than cost saving measures.

The broad estimate of the net cost of not uprating the non-dependant deductions and non-householder contribution is approximately £5 million in 1984-85; approximately £15 million in a full year.

Health Authorities (Appointees)

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for the Social Services if he will place in the Library the biographical details held by his Department of appointees to regional and district health authorities.

Mr. John Patten: No. I shall write to the hon. Gentleman.

Pharmaceuticals (Patent Life)

Mr. Murphy asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what representations he has received from the pharmaceutical industry regarding the possibility of extending the patent life of products; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: This matter has been raised with me by the Association of the British Pharmaceutical

Industry. We are considering the suggestion in consultation with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry.

Drugs (Generic Substitution)

Mr. Murphy asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what representations he has received from the pharmaceutical industry regarding the Government proposal for generic substitution of tranquilizers and sedatives; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Individual companies are in touch with us and are meeting our officials. I expect to meet the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry next month.

Spinal Muscular Atrophy

Ms. Clare Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what evidence he has of the causes, and number of cases, of the group of diseases known as spinal muscular atrophy; what research is being conducted, and where, into its causes; and how much money is being spent on research into the disease.

Mr. John Patten: The conditions known collectively as spinal muscular atrophy appear to be genetic in origin. The incidence is thought to be in the region of one in 5,000 to 6,000 births. I understand that clinical research into spinal muscular atrophy is being undertaken at the Hammersmith hospital. We do not have details of other research specifically into these conditions or of expenditure. Much fundamental research is, however, being conducted into factors determining normal nerve cell maturation and this is expected to lead to a better understanding of the mechanisms involved in spinal muscular atrophy.

Hospital Beds

Ms. Clare Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will publish a table showing for each health authority the number of hospital beds temporarily closed and the number which have been closed for a period exceeding three months, and also a list of temporary closures which have been outstanding for more than 12 months.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We do not collect this information centrally.

Ms. Clare Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will issue instructions to health authorities defining a maximum period for temporary closure of hospital beds, after which the full procedure set out in health circular HSC(IS)207 must be followed if the temporary closure is to continue.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We have no plans to do so. We expect authorities to follow the full consultation procedures once there is a possibility of their wishing to make a temporary closure permanent.

Community Health Councils

Ms. Clare Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing for each district health authority the number of occasions during an appropriate period on which it has had recourse to the provision for urgent action set out in paragraph 20 of the National Health Service (Community Health Councils) Regulations 1973;

(2) whether, on any occasion, an urgent situation has arisen within the terms of the National Health Service (Councils) Community Health Regulations 1973, as a result of reckless or negligent failure of a health authority to consult a community health council at an earlier time; and what action he intends to take to seek to ensure that no such circumstances occur in future.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We do not collect information on urgent closures centrally. We have advised health authorities that no permanent closures should take place without full consultation.

Women Patients (Vaginal Examinations)

Ms. Richardson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether women patients who have given their consent to an operation are made aware that medical students on gynaecology attachments may conduct vaginal examinations whilst women are unconscious.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to her on 23 October, at column *835*. As with any examination or treatment, medical students should conduct vaginal examinations on women who are unconscious only if the patient had earlier consented to their involvement.

Air Call plc

Mr. Garrett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if he is satisfied with the service provided to the National Health Service by the doctors' deputising service, Air Call plc;

(2) if he is satisfied with the qualifications of the staff employed by Air Call plc.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: It is for each family practitioner committee, on the advice of its deputising services sub-committee, to satisfy itself as to the standard of care provided by general practitioner deputising services operating in its locality.

Doctors (North Tyneside)

Mr. Garrett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many doctors in north Tyneside have the maximum number of National Health Service patients on their lists.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: One.

Mr. Garrett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many people in north Tyneside are unable to be placed on a doctors' panel.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: None, so far as I am aware. Any persons experiencing difficulties in gaining acceptance on a general medical practitioner's list may seek the assistance of the local family practitioner committee who will allocate them to a doctor.

Mr. Garrett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what arrangements are being made to recruit more doctors in north Tyneside.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We are not aware of any particular difficulties over recruitment of doctors in north

Tyneside. So far as general medical practitioners are concerned, this is a matter for the medical practices committee, which considers north Tyneside to be adequately doctored.

Opticians

Mr. Pavitt asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will introduce legislation to further protect the title of optician by making it illegal to use the title of "qualified optician (unregistered)".

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: No. The protection afforded to the title "optician" by section 3 of the Health and Social Security Act 1984 only came into effect on 1 November and should be quite adequate.

Cervical Screening

Mr. Caborn asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how much the National Health Service spent on mobile cervical screening in each year from 1980 to 1983; and what is the projected figure for 1984.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We do not collect information centrally about health authorities' expenditure on this service. At national level, we make an annual grant towards the central administration expenses of the Women's National Cancer Control Campaign, a voluntary organisation which runs five mobile cervical screening units.

Publications (Departmental Expenditure)

Mr. Crouch asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how much money is spent by his Department on each of the following publications: the "British National Formulary", the "Drug and Therapeutics Bulletin", the "Adverse Reactions Bulletin" and the "Prescribers Journal".

Mr. John Patten: The "Prescribers Journal" is a departmental publication: the estimated costs of production and distribution are some £100,000 in the current year. Expenditure on the other publications is expected to amount to about £1,300,000 in 1984-85.

Supplementary Benefit

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list the offices of his Department in which his Policy Inspectorate's inquiry into single payments for furniture was carried out.

Mr. Whitney: The following offices were visited during the course of the inquiry into single payments for furniture:

Chelsea ILO
Bloomsbury ILO
Wandsworth ILO
Stevenage ILO
Peterborough ILO
Southampton ILO
Weston Super Mare ILO
Nottingham (Station Street) ILO
Barnsley (East) ILO
Leeds (North) ILO
Sunderland (South) ILO
Liverpool (Huyton) ILO
Rochdale ILO
Glasgow (Anniesland) ILO
Inverness ILO
Newport (Gwent) ILO
Manchester (Cheetham) ILO
Coatbridge ILO

Information was also obtained from a further 15 offices which were not visited.

Mrs. Clwyd asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on the changes to heating addition paid to pensioners on supplementary benefit which will take effect from 29 November.

Mr. Whitney: I refer the hon. Member to the statement made by my right hon. Friend on 18 June, at columns 20-22.

Mrs. Beckett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what information is available on the numbers of young supplementary benefit claimants moving into accommodation where they are treated as boarders.

Mr. Newton: The available information on numbers of people claiming supplementary benefit as boarders is as follows:

	December 1982	*December 1983*
16-17	4,300	6,700
18-20	8,500	13,300
21-25	10,400	17,200
26 and over	61,200	72,300

Source: Annual Statistical Enquiry: 1983 figures are provisional.

Mrs. Beckett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what savings he expects to make as a result of *(a)* changes in the way supplementary benefit board and lodging ceilings are set, *(b)* restrictions on local and lodging payments to young supplementary benefit claimants and *(c)* changes in the way supplementary benefit residential care and nursing home ceilings are set.

Mr. Newton: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Dentists

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he intends to review his Department's definition of over-prescribing by dentists.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We are concerned that a small minority of dentists may be overprescribing and are considering urgently what steps to take to deal with the matter.

NHS (Private Contractors)

Mr. Maude asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) how many district health authorities used private contractors for *(a)* domestic cleaning, *(b)* catering and *(c)* laundry services in 1983-84;

(2) what proportion of total expenditure was spent by the National Health Service on contracted out services for *(a)* domestic cleaning, *(b)* catering and *(c)* laundry services in 1983-84;

(3) how much has been spent on contracted-out services in the National Health Service during 1983-84.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The annual accounts of health authorities in England — excluding the Prescription Pricing Authority, Dental Estimates Board and special health authorities providing NHS central services — submitted to the Department for 1983-84 give the following provisional figures:

(a) total expenditure on all contracted-out services was £207·3 million;
(b) 2 per cent., 0·2 per cent. and 9·7 per cent. of total expenditure on domestic cleaning, catering and laundry services respectively was incurred under external contracts;
(c) all the 192 district health authorities used private contractors to some extent for domestic cleaning, 38 for catering and 179 for laundry.

Operations (Basildon and Thurrock)

Mr. Amess asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many operations were performed in the Basildon and Thurrock health authority area, in each of the last five years for which figures are available.

Mr. John Patten: Figures on numbers of operations performed are not collected centrally. My hon. Friend may wish to approach the district health authority direct for this information.

Vaccine Damage

Mr. Andrew Bowden asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what further payments he intends making under the terms of the Vaccine Damage Payments Act 1979 to *(a)* whooping cough vaccine damage of children and *(b)* other victims of vaccine damage.

Mr. John Patten: We have no plans to alter the terms of the Vaccine Damage Payments Act.

NHS (Treatment Costs)

Mr. Soley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is *(a)* the weekly basic cost of treating a patient in a National Health Service hospital and *(b)* the weekly basic cost of treatment in a National Health Service specialist alcoholism treatment unit.

Mr. John Patten: Information on the cost of specialist alcoholism treatment units is not collected centrally. In 1982-83 the average cost per inpatient week of psychiatric (mental illness) hospitals in England, in which such units are usually situated, was £217·00. The 1982-83 weekly inpatient costs in other types of hospital were as follows:

	£
Acute (over 300 beds)	603·05
Acute (101-300 beds)	553·07
Acute (51-100 beds)	466·20
Acute (1-50 beds)	332·64
Mainly Acute	474·60
Partly Acute	407·68
Mainly Long Stay	310·24
Long Stay	247·80
Geriatric	238·07
Pre-Convalescent	224·07
Convalescent	205·10
Rehabilitation	234·15
Maternity	612·78
Psychiatric (Mental Handicap)	191·73
Orthopaedic	510·72
Tuberculosis and Chest	421·68
Tuberculosis, Chest and Isolation	385·49
Children's Acute	708·64
Eye	575·96

Chiropody

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how the number of graduates from the state approved schools of chiropody compares with the target figures listed in the answers of 23 May 1980, *Official Report*, column *464*, and 3 June 1980, *Official Report*, column *621*.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The answers to which my hon. Friend refers looked forward to a target increase of 50 per cent. over the 1978 output level. This was reached in 1983 when the United Kingdom output of chiropody students was 52 per cent. higher than in 1978.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many students graduated from each of the state approved schools of chiropody in 1982 and 1983.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The number of students who graduated from each school was as follows:

	1982	*1983*
ENGLAND		
Chelsea School of Chiropody	44	51
London Foot Hospital	24	26
Birmingham School of Chiropody	23	25
School of Chiropody, Durham	16	19
School of Chiropody, Huddersfield	15	16
School of Chiropody, Plymouth	—	15
Northern College of Chiropody	61	66
The Sussex School of Chiropody	—	—
SCOTLAND		
Edinburgh Foot Clinic and School of Chiropody	15	18
Glasgow School of Chiropody	40	34
WALES		
Cardiff School of Chiropody	27	25
NORTHERN IRELAND		
School of Chiropody, Belfast	11	19
Total	276	314

The first intake of the Plymouth school took its final examination in 1983 and that of the Sussex School in 1984.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what were the average numbers of patients awaiting chiropody treatment through the National Health Service in each of the last four years; and what was the average time of waiting in each of those years.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We do not collect this information centrally. However, we know that the number of patients treated by chiropodists through the National Health Service in England rose by about 11 per cent. between 1980 and 1983.

Carers

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is his estimate of the total number of people who regularly care for a disabled, sick or frail relative at home; and how many of them receive the invalid care allowance.

Mr. Newton: At 30 September 1984, the latest date for which figures are available, 9,510 men and single women were in receipt of invalid care allowance for caring for a severely disabled person in receipt of attendance allowance for 35 hours or more a week. We have no information on which to base a reliable estimate of the

numbers of relatives who are caring for people but who do not satisfy the conditions for invalid care allowance, or who might qualify and do not claim.

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is his estimate of the number of children under the age of 18 years who regularly care for a disabled, sick or frail relative at home.

Mr. Newton: We are not aware of any information which would enable a reliable estimate to be made.

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is his estimate of the saving to the state by people who care for *(a)* elderly, *(b)* disabled, *(c)* sick and *(d)* frail relatives at home; and what is the total paid each year since its inception of the invalid care allowance.

Mr. Newton: The cost of caring for an elderly, sick, disabled or frail person in the community varies considerably according to the extent of the services which may be required. It is not possible therefore to say whether, in general, the cost of community care as opposed to hospital or residential care is more or less expensive. The benefit cost of invalid care allowance in each year since it was introduced is as follows:

Year	*Cost £ million*
1976-77	2
1977-78	3
1978-79	4
1979-80	4
1980-81	5
1981-82	6
1982-83	8
1983-84	10
1984-85	*11

* Estimate.

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what financial assistance his Department gives to the Association of Carers.

Mr. John Patten: The Department has made grants to the association under section 64 of the Health Services and Public Health Act 1968 since 1982-83. £14,500 was paid last year and a grant of £20,000 has been approved for this financial year. Although this year's grant was not approved until November, interim payments of £5,000 were made in June and October.

Home Helps

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many health and social service departments provide home helps on a 24-hour a day basis; and if he will list their names in the *Official Report*.

Mr. John Patten: Local authorities are responsible for providing home help services. These are not normally provided on a 24-hour a day basis, but authorities are increasingly recognising that some extended home help outside normal hours is needed by some people at periods of particular stress or at certain key times of the day. There are a growing number of special schemes to provide such a service. The information I have about them is not comprehensive and there are many different types of scheme, some of which are of an experimental nature. I am, therefore, writing to the right hon. Member to indicate where the available information is published.

Chrysoidine Dye

Mr. Mason asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if his review of the possible cancerous effects on humans using chrysoidine dye has been completed; if he has examined the report "Maggots Dyed with Chrysoidine; a Possible Risk to Anglers", in the October 1984 edition of the *British Medical Journal*, volume 289, a copy of which has been sent to him; if he will take this report into account in view of the suggested link between the use of chrysoidine dye by anglers and cases of bladder cancer; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: The Committee on Carcinogenicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment has advised on the likelihood of harmful effects from chrysoidine on a number of occasions. It continues to look at all reports about the effects on human health. The report that the right hon. Member refers to will be drawn to the committee's attention at its meeting next month.

Retirement

Sir David Price asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will review the position of a male employee accepting retirement before 65 years in respect of his national insurance contributions and his entitlements.

Mr. Whitney: We have already made provision to protect a man's contribution record for retirement pension and other benefits should he retire early and stop working. With effect from 6 April 1983, a man gets automatic credits for the tax year in which he reaches age 60 and for the subsequent four years, providing he is normally resident in this country.

The national insurance contributions and entitlements of male employees accepting retirement before 65 years will be considered in the light of the findings of the inquiry into provision for retirement.

Sir David Price asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what steps he is taking to facilitate earlier retirement in the public and private sectors, respectively.

Mr. Newton: Policy on this matter is among the issues currently under consideration by the inquiry into provision for retirement, whose conclusions will be taken into account in formulating Government proposals for social security as a whole.

Heart Disease

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what additional funding has been made available to the Health Education Council for the prevention of heart disease; what voluntary organisations are involved in the prevention of heart disease; what funding the voluntary organisations receive; and what increase has been made available following the Coma report.

Mr. John Patten: A major programme attacking the problem of cardiovascular disease through concerted local action is being undertaken in Wales by the Health Education Council within resources available (£9·1 million in 1984-85). This is intended as a pilot for future programmes in the rest of the country.

A number of voluntary organisations are concerned directly or indirectly with the prevention of cardiovascular

disease and many do not seek funding from the Department. Our current grant of £136,000 to Action on Smoking and Health represents an increase of 12 per cent. over 1983-84. Our grant to the coronary prevention group of £5,000 this year represents a 43 per cent. increase.

Milk

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list the reasons why whole fat milk and not semi-skimmed or skimmed milk is being recommended for children by his Department.

Mr. John Patten: The only recommendation on this subject of which we are aware relates to children under the age of five, and is contained in the recent report on diet and cardiovascular disease from the committee on medical aspects of food policy. The report advises families who elect to switch to semi-skimmed or skimmed milk to continue to provide whole cows' milk for children under five, since in the light of current scientific evidence such children usually obtain a substantial proportion of dietary energy from this source. I understand this advice is based on the consideration that that well-established benefits of whole cows' milk to children under five outweigh possible future hazards.

Staphylococcus Aureus

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what action is being taken to control multi-resistant staphylococcus aureus in British hospitals; how many deaths were caused by this organism in each of the past four years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: The division of hospital infection of the public health laboratory service, and other interested parties in the NHS, are taking a close interest in this area and are monitoring the situation with care. Deaths caused by multi-resistant staphylococcus aureus are not notifiable and precise figures are not available. However, there is no evidence that the number of deaths caused by this organism is large.

Severe Disablement Allowance

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if there are likely to be any delays in the payment of severe disablement allowance to all entitled to receive it; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: All those already drawing non-contributory invalidity pension or housewives' non-contributory invalidity pension will automatically transfer to severe disablement allowance from 29 November, so there will be no break in payment. For others, the timing of the start of payments will depend on how far in advance of the 29th week of incapacity the disabled person makes his claim, especially where a medical examination is required. For this reason the explanatory leaflet on severe disablement allowance encourages claimants to make their application after they have been incapable of work for 15 weeks.

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many additional staff are being employed by his Department to deal with the extra work involved in introducing the severe disablement allowance; what the full cost of this staffing is likely to be; how many officers have been transferred from other sections; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Food Additives

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what action he intends to take *(a)* to inform the public of the extent to which damage to health may be caused by certain food additives and *(b)* to introduce further legislation to prevent the use of additives that are toxic to humans, carcinogenic or otherwise damaging;

(2) what study he is making of the effect on health of food additives, including preservatives applied to meat, fish and cheese products and colourings and flavourings.

Mr. John Patten: All food sold or offered for sale in England and Wales is subject to the provisions of the Food Act 1984, which requires, amongst other things, that no substances shall be added to food so as to render it harmful to the health of the general consumer. In addition, regulations which apply under the Act control particular classes of additive or the composition of particular foodstuffs and list the substances which are permitted, specifying where appropriate the conditions under which they may be used and maximum levels of use. The Government are advised on matters relating to additives in food by the food advisory committee. The FAC seeks the advice of the committee on toxicity of chemicals in food, consumer products and the environment regarding potential health hazards. In making its recommendations to the FAC, the COT takes account of all the available toxicological evidence, including the fact that some people may suffer adverse reaction from the ingestion of a particular substance.

The use of permitted additives is kept under continuous review and the Government maintain a close watch on new reports of animal toxicity or of ill-effects in people attributed to food additives which have been approved for use. Where appropriate, such reports are referred to our independent expert advisory committees for their views. Certain additives may adversely affect some individuals with metabolic disorders or those who are particularly sensitive. These individuals constitute only a very small proportion of the population and are usually aware of their sensitivity. Under the Food Labelling Regulations 1984, all additives, except flavourings which present special labelling problems, must be specifically identified by name or serial number in the ingredients list on pre-packaged foods by 1 July 1986. Thus people will be able to avoid foods containing additives that they know will affect them adversely.

Infectious Diseases Units

Mr. Stern asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he is satisfied with the current provision of secure infectious diseases units within the National Health Service; and whether he has any plans to vary their number.

Mr. John Patten: We are satisfied with the current level of provision. We have no plans to vary the number of units and would expect to be consulted on any proposals for change.

Children (Health Services)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what progress has been made in the departmental study of health services for children announced in Cmnd. 9298; by whom the study is being conducted; and when the final report is expected.

Mr. John Patten: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to her on 9 November at columns *47-48*.

Kidneys

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) how many National Health Service patients have received transplants of kidneys imported from the United States of America; and at what costs these were supplied;

(2) what new initiatives he has to encourage more United Kingdom citizens to become kidney donors.

Mr. John Patten: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Dental Fees

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how long the experimental dental capitation fee system will continue before he expects to make an assessment of it and recommendations arising from it.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The dental capitation experiment is being carried out in two stages. A small pilot study lasting 12 months began on 1 October this year and will pave the way for a major controlled trial lasting two years. It is not yet possible to estimate accurately when the final evaluation of the experiment will have been completed.

Smoking-related Diseases

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many people have died each year from 1974 to 1984 due to smoking-related diseases.

Mr. John Patten: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Children (Smoking)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what proposals he has to discourage children from smoking.

Mr. John Patten: The Government are already actively attacking the problem. Earlier this year our grant to the Health Education Council was increased by £½ million in order to finance additional anti-smoking campaigns aimed particularly at young people. A new television campaign aimed at families is planned for the new year. The maximum fine for illegally selling cigarettes to children has recently been increased, and we have provided guidelines to retailers aimed at ensuring that the law is properly observed. Earlier this year a leaflet drawing attention to the health hazards of smoking was sent to schools throughout the country. We shall remain alert to future opportunities for Government action in this area.

Alcohol

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what action he intends to take to curb alcohol consumption.

Mr. John Patten: The Department is not primarily concerned with the overall level of alcohol consumption but with problems arising from and the prevention of alcohol misuse. In regard to the latter I refer the hon. Member to my reply on 31 October to the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) at column *1085*.

Nicorette

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will permit doctors to prescribe Nicorette for patients who wish to give up smoking.

Mr. John Patten: Medical opinion on the value of Nicorette in general practice remains very divided. The advisory committee on borderline substances considers all anti-smoking remedies. It has advised the Government and the medical profession that the value of Nicorette in the normal circumstances of general practice is unproven and has recommended that it should not be prescribed.

Civil Defence Planning

Mr. Stern asked the Secretary of State for Social Services to what extent current civil defence planning allows for the existence of isolation hospitals and secure infectious disease units in each region of the United Kingdom to cope with the possible outbreak of infectious disease following the use of chemical or biological weapons.

Mr. John Patten: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

Abortions

Ms. Richardson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will set out the number of abortions performed in England and Wales to resident girls aged 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15 years for each of the years from 1969 to 1983; and if he will also show the rate of abortions performed on these age groups per 1,000 girls.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke [*pursuant to the reply*, 19 November 1984, c. *71*]: The information requested is in the table.

Legal abortions: Numbers and rates per 1,000 population, girls aged 11-15, 1969-83, England and Wales residents

Year	*Numbers and Age*				
	11	*12*	*13*	*14*	*15*
1969	2	7	38	279	848
1970	3	20	85	391	1,233
1971	3	16	77	529	1,671
1972	—	7	98	586	2,113
1973	4	14	108	693	2,270
1974	1	9	117	718	2,490
1975	—	12	120	747	2,691
1976	6	14	122	738	2,545
1977	1	13	105	804	2,701
1978	3	20	113	708	2,454
1979	9	18	116	698	2,693
1980	5	17	141	770	2,717
1981	7	13	98	710	2,701

Year	Numbers and Age				
	11	12	13	14	15
1982	—	15	138	778	2,921
1983	—	9	127	892	3,058
	Rates per 1,000 population				
1969	0·01	0·02	0·12	0·89	2·63
1970	0·01	0·06	0·26	1·22	3·88
1971	0·01	0·05	0·22	1·58	5·09
1972	—	0·02	0·28	1·70	6·29
1973	0·01	0·04	0·3·	1·96	6·56
1974	0·00	0·02	0·31	1·97	7·00
1975	—	0·03	0·31	1·97	7·36
1976	0·01	0·03	0·31	1·9·	6·68
1977	0·00	0·03	0·26	2·04	6·93
1978	0·01	0·05	0·28	1·75	6·22
1979	0·02	0·05	0·29	1·72	6·65
1980	0·01	0·04	0·36	1·93	6·67
1981	0·02	0·03	0·26	1·81	6·76
1982	—	0·04	0·36	2·04	7·44
1983*	—	0·02	0·35	2·35	8·03

* Provisional.

Doctors (Prescriptions)

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will conduct a survey into the reasons why items prescribed by doctors are not dispensed by chemists.

Mr. John Patten [*pursuant to his reply*, 16 November 1984, c. *386*]: The survey suggested would serve no useful purpose, since the arrangements for prescription charge exemption ensure no one need be deprived of necessary medication on financial grounds.

EMPLOYMENT

Jobcentre Network

10. **Mr. Alexander** asked the Secretary of State for Employment whether he expects any changes in the size of the jobcentre network to occur.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Yes. If the proposals for the employment service, shortly to be considered by the Manpower Services Commission, are accepted, the number of jobcentres will increase to 1,065—the largest number there has ever been.

Long-term Unemployment

12. **Mr. Home Robertson** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what action the Government are taking to tackle the problem of long-term unemployment.

37. **Mr. Bell** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has to tackle long-term unemployment.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The community programme is funded to provide 130,000 places for the long-term unemployed on temporary job opportunities which improve their employment prospects and provide practical benefits for the community. In addition, up to 50,000 entrants annually are to receive some training as part of the Government's adult training strategy.

Adult Training

14. **Mr. Wolfson** asked the Secretary of State for Employment when he expects the adult training campaign to be launched.

32. **Mr. Lester** asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the adult training campaign.

Mr. Tom King: This morning I joined other ministerial colleagues, the chairman of the Manpower Services Commission and the director-general of the CBI to launch the adult training campaign.

The purpose of the campaign is to achieve a real change in attitudes to the importance of training at all levels.

31. **Mr. Baldrey** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what initiatives the Government are taking to stimulate adult training.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The Government's adult training strategy encompasses a number of initiatives to stimulate adult training. In his reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Wolfson) earlier, my right hon. Friend referred to this morning's launch of the adult training campaign. Action is being taken to ensure that resources available to the Manpower Services Commission are redirected to support training more closely related to employer's needs and to stimulate employer's own training efforts. Changes are being introduced into our adult training programmes to test new approaches to job-related training and provide further help for unemployed people who need training at a more basic level. Encouraging progress is also being made with another new programme, run jointly by the Manpower Services Commission and the Education Departments, which supports local collaboration between employers and training providers to define training needs and explore possible ways of meeting them. To date, nearly 90 individual projects have been approved. We have also recently issued a consultation paper on a proposed experimental training loans scheme which will give individuals more chance to invest in their own training and which would involve the Government sharing the loan with existing lending institutions; £5 million has been set aside for 1985-86 which could benefit some 10,000 adults.

Labour Statistics

15. **Mr. Barron** asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many people have been unemployed for two years or more to the latest available date.

Mr. Peter Morrison: On 11 October, the number of claimants in the United Kingdom who had been unemployed for two years or more was 725,989.

23. **Mr. James Hamilton** asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many people aged 50 years or over have been unemployed for more then 12 months.

Mr. Alan Clark: The information requested is available in the House of Commons Library.

24. **Mr. Waller** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what is the latest figure for the number of persons in employment and the equivalent figure for the same period 12 months previously.

Mr. Alan Clark: The latest estimates are for June 1984 and these, together with figures for earlier dates, were

published in table 1.1 of the labour market data section of the October 1984 issue of *Employment Gazette*. A copy of the *Employment Gazette* is in the Library.

25. **Mr. Chapman** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what is his estimate of the total number of women who are employed full-time and part-time outside their own home; and how this figures compares with 10 years before.

Mr. Alan Clark: The latest estimates are for Great Britain for June 1984 when the numbers of females in full-time and part-time employment were 4,981,000 and 4,177,000, respectively. The corresponding numbers in June 1974 were 5,512,000 full-time and 3,421,000 part-time.

26. **Mr. Clwyd** asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many people have been registered unemployed for 12 months or more.

34. **Mr. Prescott** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what is the current rate of unemployment; and what are the numbers involved.

Mr. Alan Clark: The information is available in the House of Commons Library.

27. **Mr. Maxton** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what is the present number of people who have been registered unemployed for two years or more; and what actions the Government are taking to reduce this figure.

Mr. Alan Clark: The information requested is in the House of Commons Library. The principal action we are taking to help the long-term unemployed is to maintain our economic policies, which are the best guarantee of sustainable growth in output and jobs in the long term. In the meantime, help is available through the community programme which is funded to provide 130,000 temporary job opportunities.

36. **Mr. John Fraser** asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement about present levels of unemployment in Lambeth.

Mr. Alan Clark: The Government are concerned about the level of unemployment in Lambeth, and a substantial number of people in the area are benefiting from our special employment and training measures. Lambeth's particular problems are recognised by its designation as an inner city partnership with a budget of £13·5 million for 1984-85. Sustainable employment depends on a healthy economy and competitive industry. Our policies are directed to this end and we continue to look for ways of building on what has been achieved so far.

60. **Mr. Heffer** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what are the numbers of unemployed on Merseyside and in Liverpool; what are the numbers of youth unemployed in the areas concerned; and what steps he is taking to reduce the numbers by creating jobs.

Mr. Alan Clark: The numerical information the hon. Member requests is in the House of Commons Library, as was explained in the letter sent to him on 19 October 1984.

Merseyside benefits from a great deal of Government assistance to encourage industrial development and increase employment. Significant numbers of new jobs have also been created in the area by measures such as the enterprise allowance scheme, which has recently been extended, and the young workers scheme, which is specifically designed to help young people into jobs.

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what proportion of *(a)* the employed population and *(b)* the unemployed population, is in travel-to-work areas where the rate of unemployment in October was (i) above 24 per cent., (ii) above 20 per cent., (iii) above 17 per cent. and (iv) above 15 per cent.;

(2) what proportion of *(a)* the employed population and *(b)* the unemployed population was in the old travel-to-work areas where the rate of unemployment in August was (i) above 17 per cent., (ii) above 20 per cent., (iii) above 24 per cent. and (iv) above 15 per cent.

Mr. Alan Clark [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 November 1984, c. *49*]: Following is the available information in respect of estimates of employees in employment from the 1981 census of employment and unemployed claimants at the dates specified.

Percentages of total employees and total unemployed in travel-to-work areas by range of unemployment rates—United Kingdom

Range of unemployment rates	*Old travel-to-work areas*		*New travel-to-work areas*	
	Employees	*Unemployed August 1984*	*Employees*	*Unemployed October 1984*
Over 24 per cent.	0·5	1·3	1·1	2·6
Over 20 per cent.	4·3	8·2	7·5	13·4
Over 17 per cent.	11·1	18·7	20·9	32·0
Over 15 per cent.	28·0	41·0	32·3	45·9

Note: The two sets of figures for the old and new travel-to-work areas are not fully comparable because the level of unemployment was higher in October than in August. Also the denominators used to calculate unemployment rates relate to 1978 for the old travel-to-work areas, but 1983 for the new ones.

Wages Inspectors

16. **Mr. Rogers** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what are the present number of wages inspectors; and what were the corresponding figures in 1982, 1980 and 1978.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: At present there are 120 posts for outdoor wages inspectors. The corresponding figures were 153 in 1978, 177 in 1980 and 120 in 1982.

Trainees (Prospects)

17. **Mr. Madden** asked the Secretary of State for Employment, what proposals he has to assist those aged

under 18 years who have completed a one-year Manpower Services Commission scheme and who are unable to secure employment or return to full-time education or training.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The youth training scheme has proved a success in helping young people to find work or move into further training. Furthermore, the young workers scheme assists in reducing unemployment among young people through promoting more realistic wage levels.

Disablement Resettlement Officers

18. **Mr. Wigley** asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many disablement resettlement officers are currently employed by his Department.

Mr. Alan Clark: There are currently around 450 disablement resettlement officers.

Industrial Democracy

20. **Mr. Park** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what steps the Government are pursuing to encourage greater industrial democracy in British industry.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The Government are convinced of the benefits to employers and employees alike of good employee involvement practices and take every suitable opportunity to encourage the voluntary adoption and development of appropriate arrangements.

The Government hope that section 1 of the Employment Act 1982, which requires companies with more than 250 employees to include in their annual directors' report a statement of their employee involvement arrangements, will give a stimulus by ensuring that the matter is considered at board level, thus encouraging companies to review, and, where appropriate, improve their existing practice.

Manufacturing Industry

21. **Mr. Gordon Brown** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what are the numbers of people employed in manufacturing industry at the present time; and how this figure compares with this month in 1979.

Mr. Alan Clark: The latest estimate is for Great Britain for September 1984 when the number of employees in employment in manufacturing industries was 5,515,000. The corresponding number in September 1979 was 7,129,000.

National Insurance Contributions

22. **Mr. Penhaligon** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what is the number currently employed at a salary level below the minimum for paying national insurance contributions; and how the number compares with five years ago.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Precise information is not available. Evidence from the "New Earnings Survey" and other data suggests that in April 1984 about 2·75 million employees had gross weekly earnings below the limit for national insurance purposes. Virtually all of these would be in part-time employment. In 1979 the comparable figure is estimated to have been about 2·25 million.

Secret Ballots

28. **Mr. Chope** asked the Secretary of State for Employment whether he is satisfied that employers are making full use of legislation which requires secret ballots to precede strike action.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: It is for employers themselves to decide whether or not to institute legal proceedings against trade unions which fail to hold ballots before industrial action. However, the fact that three employers have done so within seven weeks of the relevant provisions coming into force should lead trade unions to think very carefully before putting their funds at risk by embarking on industrial action without giving their members the chance to vote in a secret and properly conducted ballot.

Private Sector Employment

29. **Mr. Gerald Howarth** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what steps he proposes to take in the current Session of Parliament to remove barriers to employment in the private sector.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Sustainable employment in the private sector depends on a healthy economy and competitive industry. Our policies will continue to be directed towards this end, and towards improving the operation of the labour market. We will continue to seek effective means of building on our achievements to date, and, in common with other Departments, the Department is participating in a broad scrutiny of legislation and administrative processes with the aim of relieving the business community of unnecessary restrictions and regulations.

Youth Training Scheme

30. **Mr. Tom Clarke** asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many youth training scheme trainees have found work after their youth training year.

45. **Mr. O'Brien** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what is his estimate of the number of young people leaving the youth training scheme without a job.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Comprehensive information on the destinations of youngsters leaving the youth training scheme is not available. However, a recent sample survey of 3,500 young people in nine Manpower Services Commission areas who left individual programmes within the scheme between 1 April and 31 July 1984 showed that 58 per cent. of those leavers responding went into employment, six per cent. went into training or further education and 34 per cent. were unemployed. One fifth of this last group indicated an intention of going into full-time education or training. Most — 64 per cent. — of the young people responding had left before completing a full year on the scheme, but subsequent surveys of destinations will cover larger proportions of youngsters who complete a full year. A copy of the paper containing the results of the sample survey has been placed in the Library.

42. **Mr. Lofthouse** asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he is satisfied with the youth training scheme with respect to its equal opportunities policies.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Yes.

44. **Mr. Nellist** asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will increase the allowance paid to youngsters on the youth training scheme.

Mr. Peter Morrison: No.

56. **Mr. Andrew F. Bennett** asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many young people were on youth training schemes in Tameside and Stockport on 1 October.

Mr. Peter Morrison: On 30 September 1984 the numbers of young people in training on the youth training scheme in the local authority districts of Tameside and Stockport were 1,224 and 1,575, respectively.

Mr. Crowther asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list, by industry, the numbers and percentages of trainees placed in permanent jobs on completion of the first year of the youth training scheme.

Mr. Peter Morrison: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Manual Workers (Wages)

33. **Mr. Evans** asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make it his policy to guarantee the continuance of the existing right of manual workers to be paid in cash.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: No. The Government's policy on this matter was set out in the legislative proposals published by my right hon. Friend and placed in the Library on Wednesday 31 October. These matters are best left to be determined by employers, their employees and, where appropriate, their representatives.

Jobcentres

35. **Mr. Sackville** asked the Secretary of State for Employment whether he expects any jobcentres to close as a result of the Manpower Services Commission's consultations.

Mr. Peter Morrison: In eight towns two jobcentres will be merged into one, but in 82 other places new jobcentres will be opened.

Mr. Thurnham asked the Secretary of State for Employment what capital sum he expects to be invested in new technology in the jobcentre network.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The present intentions are for an investment of up to £19·5 million in new technology throughout the jobcentre network between now and March 1988.

Interest Rates and Inflation

38. **Mr. Nicholas Baker** asked the Secretary of State for Employment how his Department calculates the effect upon employment in the United Kingdom of a rise in interest rates or rising inflation.

Mr. Alan Clark: A rise in interest rates may be caused by a number of different factors, both domestic and in the world economy. Its effect on employment would depend on its exact cause and consequent effects throughout the economy. Employment effects will vary as other factors vary, and so will the method of analysis. A general estimate of the effect of a rise in interest rate is therefore impossible.

Similar considerations imply that it is not meaningful to consider the effects of inflation on employment without specifying the exact cause and assumptions about the behaviour of the rest of the economy.

Work Place Ballots

39. **Mr. Leigh** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what has been the incidence of work place ballots under the provisions of the Employment Act 1984.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The Trade Union Act 1984 deals with ballots for the election of trade union principal executive committees, ballots before industrial action and ballots on trade union political funds. The first and third of these provisions will come into force respectively on 1 October and 31 March 1985. The provisions governing ballots before industrial action came into force on 26 September this year. There is no requirement to notify the Department about ballots. One ballot has so far been held as a direct result of an employer seeking an injunction under the Trade Union Act. In that case, I understand that the ballot was conducted at the work place and was fully in accordance with the provisions of the Act.

Community Programme

40. **Mr. Boyes** asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will expand the community programme.

Mr. Peter Morrison: I refer the hon. Member to the statement by my right hon. Friend on 30 July, at columns 121-22.

48. **Mr. Sheerman** asked the Secretary of State for Employment when he will meet the Manpower Services Commission to discuss the community programme.

Mr. Peter Morrison: My right hon. Friend and I meet the chairman of the Manpowrer Services Commission frequently to discuss many matters, including the community programme.

49. **Mr. Shersby** asked the Secretary of State for Employment whether he is satisfied that recent changes in eligibility rules for the community programme will provide help for those most in need.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Yes. These charges will ensure that those most in need both of a job and of financial help will enjoy priority on the programme.

53. **Mr. Eggar** asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he is satisfied with the present structure of the community programme.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Yes, although we are continually seeking means of improving the effectiveness and efficiency of the programme.

Part-time Jobs

41. **Mr. Heathcoat-Amory** asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many female part-time jobs have been created in the most recent year for which figures are available.

Mr. Alan Clark: Information about job gains and job losses is not available from the Department's statistics, but an indication of the net changes can be seen by comparing the levels of employees in employment at different dates. Between June 1983 and June 1984 the estimated numbers of females in part-time employment in Great Britain increased by 165,000.

Preston

43. **Mr. Stan Thorne** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has to reduce the level of unemployment in the Preston travel-to-work area.

Mr. Alan Clark: The Government are concerned about the level of unemployment in Preston, and a substantial number of people in the area are benefiting from our special employment and training measures. Sustainable employment depends on a healthy economy and competitive industry. Our policies are directed to this end and we continue to look for ways of building on what has been achieved so far. One important effect on firms' competitiveness is the level of wages, and the Government believe that moderating the growth in real earnings will have a significant impact on unemployment in Preston and throughout the country.

Job Creation

46. **Mr. Pike** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what steps his Department intends to take to reduce unemployment.

Mr. Alan Clark: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Garston (Mr. Loyden) on 14 November, at column 262.

58. **Mr. Rowe** asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many new jobs are estimated to have been created in the last 12 months.

Mr. Alan Clark: Numbers of new jobs created are not available. Net changes in the number of jobs may be calculated by comparing employment estimates for different dates. The net increase in employment in Great Britain over the 12 months to June 1984—the latest estimate—was 247,000.

Mr. Miscampbell asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many new jobs have been created in Lancashire in each of the last three.

Mr. Alan Clark: No information is collected on numbers of jobs created. Net changes in employment are available, but, at county level, only for those dates when censuses of employment are conducted. The latest figures are from the June 1978 and the following September 1981 censuses of employment and show a net change of minus 28,700 employees in Lancashire in that period.

Technical and Vocational Education

47. **Mr. Sean Hughes** asked the Secretary of State for Employment when he will next convene a meeting of all interested parties to discuss technical and vocational education among 14 to 18-year-olds.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The Manpower Services Commission, which is answerable to Ministers of this Department, is advised on the operation of the technical and vocational education initiative by a national steering group. The membership of the group includes educational interests and representatives from local authority associations and industry and commerce. It last met on 19 November.

"Training for Jobs"

50. **Mr. Fisher** asked the Secretary of State for Employment when he will meet local authority education authorities to discuss "Training for Jobs".

Mr. Peter Morrison: We have at present no further plans to do so.

Job Sharing

51. **Sir Anthony Meyer** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what proposals he has received from the Trades Union Congress for a reduction in unemployment through schemes for job sharing.

Mr. Alan Clark: I have received no proposals from the Trades Union Congress designed to bring about a reduction in unemployment through job sharing schemes. We currently operate two experimental schemes—the job splitting and part-time job release schemes—which are designed to encourage the provision of more part-time jobs for the unemployed. As my right hon. Friend announced on 12 November, at column 444, both schemes will now remain open for applications for a further year with improved rules to encourage take-up.

Jobcentres (Placements)

52. **Mr. David Atkinson** asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many people he expects to have been placed in jobs by the jobcentre network in the current year; and how this compares with the previous years.

Mr. Peter Morrison: It is estimated that jobcentres will place 1·9 million people in jobs during the 1984-85 operational year. Information for the previous years is as follows:

Year ending	*Placings*
5 March 1982	1,496,766
4 March 1983	1,580,311
2 March 1984	1,820,724

There is likely to have been a substantial number of people who found jobs other than through the jobcentres. Nationally it is estimated that about a quarter of all engagements are made through jobcentres.

Skillcentres

54. **Mr. Roy Hughes** asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many men and how many women are currently being trained in skillcentres.

Mr. Peter Morrison: In September 1984, 9,971 people were in training in skillcentres. I regret that separate information on the numbers of men and women in skillcentres is not readily available.

Training

55. **Mr. Colvin** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what is his latest figure for the Government's expenditure on training for the current financial year.

59. **Mr. Moynihan** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what is his latest estimate for Government expenditure in the current financial year on training measures.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The Supply Estimate for training provided by the Manpower Services Commission for 1984-85 is £1,179 million including administration costs. Current forecasts indicate that actual expenditure is likely to be close to this figure.

Professional Executive Register

57. **Mr. Peter Bruinvels** asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many jobs were placed with the Professional Executive Register in each of the past five years; if he will give the corresponding figures for those jobs filled; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The information requested for each of the past five years ended 31 March, is as follows:

Year	*Total placings into employment**	*Net cost per placing†*	*Total orders notified‡*
		£	
1979-80	6,696	514·23	16,878
1980-81	4,938	1,134·96	14,943
1981-82	7,088	690·52	17,950
1982-83	7,717	548·83	17,448
1983-84	13,838	nil	22,159

* Includes placings on to the community programme and the former community enterprise programme.

† The net cost per job for 1979-80 to 1982-83 has been calculated by dividing the social subvention to Professional and Executive Recruitment net of any profit or less on commercial activities, by the total number of placings into employment. From 1 April 1983, Professional and Executive Recruitment has been operating on a self-financing basis and the preliminary (unaudited) costs of providing the service in 1983-84 have all been recovered from the fees charged for services provided.

‡ Some orders are for more than one vacancy, but records of the number of vacancies relating to the orders notified to the service are not kept.

Enterprise Allowance Scheme

Mr. Best asked the Secretary of State for Employment what is the number of people on Anglesey who have made applications under the enterprise allowance scheme since its inception; how many are currently waiting to go on to the scheme and what is the maximum time they will have to wait; and how many places are currently available.

Mr. Alan Clark: No separate figures are available for Anglesey, as all applications for the scheme in mid and north Wales are administered from Wrexham jobcentre. The enterprise allowance scheme has been very popular in mid and north Wales and waiting lists of people wanting to join the scheme have not been cleared as quickly as in other parts of the country. I have asked the Manpower Services Commission to see whether it is possible to speed up take-on in the area.

Wages Inspectorate

Mr. Nellist asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the areas covered by Wages Inspectorate divisions and for each division the number of establishments covered.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The information requested is given in the following table:

Wage Inspectorate Division	*Area covered*	*Number of Establishments (1983)*
London (East)	the London postal districts of N, E, EC, and SE	21,380
London (West)	the London postal districts of NW, W, WC and SW	24,056
South Eastern	the counties of Kent, Surrey and East and West Sussex	30,826
Southern	the counties of Berkshire, Buckingham, Hertford, Oxford, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight and parts of the London Boroughs of Enfield, Harrow, Hillingdon, Brent, Hounslow, Ealing and Richmond-upon-Thames	29,204
Eastern	the counties of Bedford, Cambridge, Essex, Norfolk and Suffolk	27,617
South Western	the counties of Avon, Cornwall, Devon, Dorset, Gloucester, Somerset and Wiltshire	34,000
Midlands (East)	the counties of Derby (except the High Peak District of Derby), Leicester, Lincoln, Northampton and Nottingham	22,912
Midlands (West)	the counties of Hereford and Worcester, Shropshire, Stafford, Warwick and The West Midlands	32,080
North West (West)	the counties of Lancashire, Merseyside, the Metropolitan District of Wigan and that part of Cheshire on the Wirral	26,912
North West (East)	the counties of Manchester, Cheshire (excluding that part on the Wirral) and the High Peace District of Derby	24,669
Yorkshire and Humberside	the counties of North, West and South Yorkshire, and Humberside	36,034
Northern	the counties of Cleveland, Cumbria, Durham, Northumberland and Tyne-and-Wear	20,884
Scotland (East)	the regions of Highland, Grampian, Tayside, most of Central, Fife, Lothian, Borders, Orkney and Shetland	22,232
Scotland (West)	the regions of Dumfries and Galloway, Strathclyde and part of the west of Central	16,398
Wales	the counties of Dyfed, West, Mid and South Glamorgan, Gwent, Powys, Gwynedd and Clwyd	22,067

Wages (Underpayment)

Mr. Nellist asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many wages council establishments in Coventry and the west midlands were found to be underpaying in the last year; how many workers were involved; and what was the amount of arrears paid and the number of prosecutions.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Statistics are not collected for geographical areas smaller than Wages Inspectorate divisions. In the midlands (west) division of the Wages Inspectorate, 543 establishments in 1983 were found to have underpaid 1,097 workers. Arrears totalling £89,208 were paid. No employers in Coventry or the west midlands were prosecuted last year for offences under the Wages Councils Act 1979.

Greater London

Mr. Tom Cox asked the Secretary of State for Employment what is the present number of *(a)* men and *(b)* women over the age of 50 years who are out of work in the Greater London area.

Mr. Alan Clark: On 11 October 1984 there were 50,682 men and 15,964 women who were unemployed and aged over 50 years in Greater London.

Clothing Labels (Denton)

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for Employment why people working at the Denton skillcentre and employment rehabilitation centre are engaged in removing labels, saying "Made in Taiwan" from clothing.

Mr. Alan Clark [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 November, 1984, c. *52*]: Routine work of this kind is carried out in employment rehabilitation centres in order to provide an opportunity in appropriate cases for assessing the dexterity of disabled people and their ability to maintain output on repetitive work. Work of this kind is not carried out in skillcentres.

I am looking into the exact nature of this operation, and I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Disabled Persons

Mr. Thurnham asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many registered disabled people are currently employed by Her Majesty's Government.

Mr. Hayhoe: I have been asked to reply.

On 1 June 1984, the latest date for which figures are available, 8,625 registered disabled people — full-time equivalents — were employed in Government Departments.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Brussels (United Kingdom Staff)

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many staff there are presently at the offices of the United Kingdom permanent representative to the European Communities in Brussels.

Mr. Renton: The permanent representative to the European Community has a staff of 74 United Kingdom-based officers, and eight locally engaged employees.

British Council

Sir Anthony Kershaw asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will arrange for an exhibition relating to the work of the British Council to be displayed in the Upper Waiting Hall.

Mr. Renton: An exhibition entitled "People to People —the work of the British Council" has been arranged for the period 10 to 14 December, to mark the 50th anniversary of the British Council.

Nicaragua

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the election in Nicaragua.

Mr. Renton: I refer the hon. Member to the statement my right hon. and learned Friend made on 9 November, at column 325, in the debate on the Address.

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has any plans to visit Nicaragua.

Mr. Renton: My right hon. and learned Friend has no plans to do so.

Youth Exchanges (Cockerill Report)

Mr. Haselhurst asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he is now in a position to make a statement on the report by Mr. Geoffrey Cockerill on youth exchanges.

Mr. Renton: I have now been able to consider this report in consultation with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science, taking into account the comments of the British Council, the Central Bureau for Educational Visits and Exchanges and other interested organisations. We accept the main recommendations of this report, namely, that there should be a single central office responsible for co-ordinating Government support for youth exchanges. The British Council and Central Bureau for Educational Visits and Exchanges have agreed to establish from April 1985 a youth exchange centre to develop and implemnt policies on youth exchange, and that each should devote to it initially no less than the resources they currently allot to youth exchange work individually. Thereafter, each body will allocate to the centre annually an agreed element of its total Government grant based on the centre's estimated requirements. Such a joint centre should provide for the best use of resources.

The centre will have a joint steering group, which will advise Ministers direct on request on youth exchange matters and will be advised by a consultative committee with membership drawn from the local authority and voluntary youth sectors. The centre will be responsible for the allocation of grant moneys for youth exchanges generally and will determine, in discussion with interested organisations, the extent and nature of and the detailed arrangements for delegating, as recommended in the report, the allocation of a proportion of grant moneys at local and regional level.

The centre will also be responsible for collaboration with, and the allocation of, operational funds to the Commonwealth Youth Exchange Council (CYEC): provision of an advisory service for those organising youth exchanges; and provision of training workshops for youth leaders and workers.

More detailed organisational arrangements are under consideration by a small preparatory committee of the agencies concerned.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Student Awards

Mr. Marlow asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the reduction to be made on the previously planned level of expenditure on student awards for 1985-86.

Mr. Brooke: There will be a net reduction of £24 million.

Students (Grants)

Mr. Shersby asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will give details of the percentage of students at Brunel university who in October were in receipt of the minimum grant of £205; and what are the comparable figures for students at other universities in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Brooke: The Department does not collect information about the number of minimum award holders at individual institutions.

Open University

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has as to those other non-Communist countries which operate a university similar in operation to that of the Open University; and if he will give the year in which each of these foreign universities were incorporated.

Mr. Brooke: The following is a list of those institutions of which the Government are aware.

Country	*Name of institution*	*Year of incorporation*
South Africa	University of South Africa	1964
Spain	Universidad Nacional de Educacion a Distancia	1972
West Germany	Fern Universitat	1974
Israel	Everyman's University	1974
Pakistan	Allama Iqbal Open University	1974
Canada	Athabasca University	1975
Venezuela	Universidad Nacional Abierta	1977
Costa Rica	Universidad Estatal Distancia	1977
Thailand	Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University	1978
Sri Lanka	Sri Lanka Open University	1981
The Netherlands	Open Universiteit	1981
Denmark	Open University of Jutland	1982
South Korea	Korea Correspondence University	1982

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will give a breakdown of *(a)* Open University and, *(b)* all other university undergraduates by Registrar General's social class definitions for each of the last three years for which figures are available.

Mr. Brooke: The distribution by parents' social class of home candidates accepted by universities in the United Kingdom through the Universities Central Council on Admissions (UCCA) in 1981, 1982 and 1983 were as follows:

	Social Class	*Percentage of acceptances classified by social class* 1981	1982	1983
I	Professional, etc. occupations	24·5	23·9	23·5
II	Intermediate occupations	48·9	49·6	48·4
IIIN	Skilled occupations—non-manual	9·1	9·1	8·7
IIIM	Skilled occupations—manual	12·3	12·2	12·4
IV	Partly skilled occupations	4·2	4·9	6·0
V	Unskilled occupations	1·0	0·9	1·1
	Total (numbers)	67,186	65,476	62,984
	Not classified	7,328	7,158	6,647

The University of Buckingham and the Open University are outside the UCCA scheme as are some candidates to some Scottish universities.

The Open University does not use social class in its statistics. The available information by occupations of the students—not their parents—is as follows:

Open University students on undergraduates courses

	1982	*1983*	*1984*
Total Numbers	63,119	66,403	66,763
of which the following percentages apply			
Armed Forces	3·1	3·1	3·0
Administrators and Managers	4·4	4·3	4·2
Teachers and Lecturers	21·0	18·3	17·4
The Professions and the Arts	10·5	10·6	10·5
Qualified Scientists and Engineers	3·8	3·8	3·7
Technical Personnel, including data processing, draughtsmen and technicians	12·8	12·9	13·0
Electrical, Electronic, Metal and Machines, Engineering and Allied Trades	3·3	3·3	3·5
Farming, Mining, Construction and other Manufacturing	2·2	2·3	2·2
Communications and Transport	1·8	1·9	1·8
Clerical and Office Staff	10·6	10·7	10·8
Shopkeepers, Sales, Services, Sport and Recreation Workers, Fire Brigade and Police	4·4	4·6	4·5
Housewives	17·1	17·3	17·2
Retired, Independent means, not working (other than housewives), Students	4·0	5·7	6·3
In Institutions, e.g. prison, chronic sick, etc.	0·4	0·4	0·4
No information	0·5	0·8	1·5

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list those institutions in Cheshire currently used by the Open University as study centres; and how many Open University students attended each of those centres in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Brooke: The information requested is as follows:

Number of finally registered students in 1984

Open University Study Centres	*Location*	*Numbers*
South Trafford College of Further Education	Altringham	336
Chester College of Further Education	Chester	459
Crewe and Alsager College	Crewe	220
Macclesfield College of Further Education	Macclesfield	209
Hartford High School	Northwich	147
Stockport College of Technology	Stockport	322
North Cheshire College	Warrington	337
		2,030

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will give a breakdown by region of the numbers of study centres used by the Open University in each of the last three years for which figures are available.

Mr. Brooke: The information requested is as follows:

The number of study centres used by the Open University

Region	*January 1982*	*January 1983*	*January 1984*
London	23	23	22
South	26	26	26
South West	17	17	17
West Midlands	20	20	20
East Midlands	21	23	22
East Anglia	21	21	21
Yorkshire	20	18	18
North West	21	21	21
North	17	18	17
Wales	19	19	18
Scotland	23	23	22
Northern Ireland	9	9	9
South East	19	20	20
Total	256	258	253

Pupil-Teacher Ratios

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what are the latest pupil-to-teacher ratios for each local education authority in England.

Mr. Dunn: In January 1984, the pupil-teacher ratios within maintained primary and secondary schools together with the overall pupil-teacher ratio for all teachers employed by local education authorities in England were as follows:

Local education authority	*Primary Schools*	*Secondary Schools*	*Overall*
Barking	21·7	15·8	17·5
Barnet	19·8	14·3	15·8
Bexley	24·5	16·7	18·7
Brent	18·3	12·8	14·0
Bromley	23·4	16·2	18·4
Croydon	22·1	15·7	17·4
Ealing	19·2	14·9	16·5
Enfield	22·8	15·4	17·3
Haringey	18·7	13·5	14·5
Harrow	20·9	14·1	16·6
Havering	22·9	15·7	17·5
Hillingdon	22·2	15·7	17·8
Hounslow	19·7	15·0	16·4
Kingston-upon-Thames	22·4	16·2	17·9
Merton	22·1	17·5	18·1
Newham	20·6	14·1	15·4
Redbridge	23·2	16·0	17·7
Richmond-upon-Thames	20·7	16·3	17·6
Sutton	24·8	17·1	19·0
Waltham Forest	20·9	13·7	15·3
ILEA	17·3	13·3	13·5
Birmingham	22·8	16·4	18·2
Coventry	22·1	15·9	17·3
Dudley	22·7	16·1	18·3
Sandwell	22·6	15·4	17·2
Solihull	23·0	16·8	18·9
Walsall	20·8	14·9	16·9
Wolverhampton	19·3	14·8	16·1
Knowsley	21·6	15·3	16·7
Liverpool	20·9	16·3	18·2
St. Helens	22·6	15·6	18·0
Sefton	22·6	16·4	18·3
Wirral	22·9	16·1	18·2
Bolton	23·8	16·0	18·5
Bury	22·8	15·6	17·7
Manchester	22·7	14·8	16·7
Oldham	23·1	17·0	18·2
Rochdale	22·4	15·0	16·6
Salford	21·5	15·5	17·0
Stockport	23·4	16·4	18·7
Tameside	23·6	15·9	18·3
Trafford	22·7	16·6	18·4
Wigan	21·4	15·3	16·9
Barnsley	21·1	16·3	17·4
Doncaster	20·7	16·2	17·6
Rotherham	22·0	16·7	18·4
Sheffield	20·2	15·6	17·0
Bradford	20·0	17·4	17·4
Calderdale	21·9	17·1	17·8
Kirklees	22·5	17·1	18·6
Leeds	22·6	16·4	17·6
Wakefield	21·8	17·3	18·5
Gateshead	18·8	16·1	16·6
Newcastle upon Tyne	18·4	14·2	15·3
North Tyneside	19·2	14·4	15·7
South Tyneside	20·2	14·9	16·5
Sunderland	21·9	16·2	18·1
Avon	23·9	16·4	18·6
Bedfordshire	23·3	17·5	18·9
Berkshire	23·0	16·2	18·0
Buckinghamshire	24·3	16·5	19·5
Cambridgeshire	23·6	16·8	19·4
Cheshire	22·7	16·9	18·6
Cleveland	22·1	16·2	17·9
Cornwall including Isles of Scilly	23·6	16·9	19·1
Cumbria	21·2	15·9	17·5
Derbyshire	22·2	16·9	18·6
Devon	23·6	16·9	18·8
Dorset	23·5	17·1	18·6
Durham	21·7	16·8	18·5
East Sussex	22·1	17·1	18·3
Essex	24·1	17·1	19·5
Gloucestershire	22·9	17·0	19·0
Hampshire	24·0	17·1	19·6
Hereford and Worcester	25·1	17·5	19·3
Hertfordshire	22·4	16·1	17·9
Humberside	20·9	16·2	17·5

Local education authority	Primary Schools	Secondary Schools	Overall
Isle of Wight	23·6	18·0	18·6
Kent	23·9	17·1	19·3
Lancashire	23·2	16·4	18·4
Leicestershire	22·5	16·0	17·8
Lincolnshire	24·1	17·0	18·9
Norfolk	22·3	16·6	18·8
North Yorkshire	21·8	16·4	18·0
Northamptonshire	22·1	16·5	18·0
Northumberland	23·3	17·4	19·2
Nottinghamshire	21·1	15·8	17·8
Oxfordshire	23·9	17·2	18·3
Salop	21·6	16·2	17·6
Somerset	23·8	17·6	19·4
Staffordshire	22·3	16·3	17·8
Suffolk	22·1	16·9	18·3
Surrey	22·5	16·4	18·8
Warwickshire	22·5	17·1	19·3
West Sussex	23·3	17·0	19·1
Wiltshire	23·5	17·0	19·0
ENGLAND	22·1	16·2	17·9

British Geological Survey

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what proposals he has to provide resources to the Natural Environment Research Council to continue the British Geological Survey and to publish information obtained.

Mr. Brooke: It is my right hon. Friend's practice to give the Natural Environment Research Council its grant-in-aid from the science budget without direction as to how it should be apportioned between its various activities, of which work on the geological survey of the United Kingdom—managed by the British Geological Survey—is one. I understand that the NERC intends to make resources available for this work to continue, but that the level of activity will depend on the size of the NERC's grant-in-aid and on the income it receives from Government Departments and other bodies for commissioned research. My right hon. Friend expects to receive soon the advice of the Advisory Board for the Research Councils on the allocation of the science budget in 1985-86.

I understand that the policy on publishing the results of this work will follow the normal practice of the British Geological Survey.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Prime Minister's Questions

Mr. Winnick asked the Lord Privy Seal if he will consider any changes in the allocation of time for oral questions to the Prime Minister.

Mr. Biffen: I have no such proposals.

SCOTLAND

Licensing (Scotland) Act 1976

Mr. Moynihan asked the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to complete his review of the effect of section 64 of the Licensing (Scotland) Act 1976.

Mr. Michael Ancram: I expect to receive next summer the results of a survey into the effects of and public attitudes towards, Scottish licensing legislation, undertaken by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys. I shall consider thereafter what, if any, changes (including amendments to legislation) may be desirable.

Health Statistics

Mr. Colvin asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish in the *Official Report* the annual figures since 1970 showing the number of cases in the following categories *(a)* leukaemias, *(b)* myeloid leukaemia, *(c)* Hodgkin's disease, *(d)* lymphosarcoma, *(e)* all diagnoses of cancer and *(f)* abnormalities at birth, for Scotland.

Mr. John MacKay: The figures for categories *(a)* to *(e)* for 1970 to 1980 are given in the following publications, both of which are in the Library:

"Cancer Registration and Survival Statistics Scotland 1963 to 1977".

"Cancer Registration Statistics Scotland 1971 to 1980".

The figures for 1981 (the latest year for which figures are available) are as follows:

	Number
(a) Leukaemias	365
(b) Myeloid leukaemia	174
(c) Hodgkin's disease	150
(d) Lymphosarcoma	150
(e) All diagnoses of cancer	23,506

Comprehensive figures on abnormalities at birth are not available, but the data collected since 1980 show that congenital abnormalities recorded, as percentages of live births, were:

1980	1981	1982
11·5	11·5	11·5

Teachers

Mr. Dewar asked the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to make a decision about the setting-up of an independent review into the salary and conditions of teachers in Scotland.

Mr. George Younger: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend on 9 November 1984, at column *11*, to my hon. Friend the Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. McQuarrie).

Bison Wall Frame Buildings

Mr. Litherland asked the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will list, for each of those faults *(a)* to *(e)* specified in his Department's letter of 5 October 1983, those authorities which have undertaken, are undertaking or are planning to undertake remedial works on Bison wall frame buildings with respect to each fault specified;

(2) if he will list those authorities which have appraised or are appraising their Bison wall frame dwellings for possible faults *(a)* in the connection between wall and floor panels and in the restraint of load-bearing walls, *(b)* in parapet fixing, *(c)* in the ties between inner and outer leaves of external cladding panels and *(d)* with spalling concrete of loose aggregate finishes.

Mr. Ancram: Detailed information is not available centrally in the form requested. It is primarily for housing authorities themselves to decide on the scope of appraisals and remedial works in connection with the five listed—or any other—faults in their Bison dwellings. However,

replies to the 5 October 1983 letter and to a further departmental letter of 25 July 1984 indicate that the authorities listed as follows have carried out or are undertaking appraisals of their Bison blocks, and a number have carried out or are arranging to carry out the remedial works they consider necessary. These are principally related to fault *(c)*, deficiencies in ties between the inner and outer leaves of external wall panels.

District Councils
- Aberdeen
- Argull and Bute
- Cunninghame
- Dundee
- Dunfermline
- Edinburgh
- Glasgow
- Inverclyde
- Kyle and Carrick
- Motherwell
- Renfrew

Other Bodies
- Cumbernauld Development Corporation
- Livingston Development Corporation
- Scottish Special Housing Association

Mr. Litherland asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list those local authorities which have replied to his Department's letter of 5 October 1983 about Bison wall frame dwellings, together with the date on which each reply was received.

Mr. Ancram: The local authorities and other bodies which have replied to the letter of 5 October 1983 and the dates on which the replies were sent are as follows:

District Councils	*Date on which reply sent by authority*
Aberdeen	28 October 1983
Argyll and Bute	19 October 1983
Cunninghame	18 November 1983
Dundee	24 November 1983
Dunfermline	14 November 1983
Edinburgh	10 November 1983
Glasgow	8 November 1983
Inverclyde	9 November 1983
Kyle and Carrick	15 November 1983
Motherwell	2 November 1983
Renfrew	15 November 1983
Other Bodies	
Cumbernauld Development Corporation	12 April 1984
Livingston Development Corportation	10 October 1983
Scottish Special Housing Association	16 November 1983

Salmon Poaching

Mr. Mason asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions have taken place between his Department and interested parties on a salmon tagging scheme to offset salmon poaching; and if he will make a statement on the prospects for his Department sponsoring legislation on this matter.

Mr. John MacKay: My officials have been discussing a number of practical difficulties with various interested organisations. These discussions are continuing.

I hope that it may be possible to reach conclusions on this matter in the near future.

NHS (Expenditure)

Mr. Millan asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give figures for Scotland for the increase in National Health Service expenditure from 1978-79 to 1983-84 in cash, cost and volume terms similar to those given for England in the annual report 1984 on the National Health Service in England.

Mr. Younger: The Information requested is as follows:

Expenditure on the NHS 1978-79 to 1983-84

£ million gross

	Cash	*Cost (at 1983-84 prices measured by the GDP deflator)*	**Volume (1983-84 prices measured by the NHS pay and prices deflator)*
1978-79	883	1,515	1,650
1983-84	1,764	1,764	1,764
Increases in £ million	881	249	114
Percentage increases	99·8	16·4	6·9

* A series of deflator factors for the NHS in Scotland is not available. The measurement of volume input given in this table makes use of the deflator factors used in table 2 of "The Health Service in England Annual Report 1984".

ENVIRONMENT

Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he intends introducing legislation to strengthen the provisions of sections 28 and 29 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: I shall answer this question shortly.

Smokeless Zones

Mr. Alton asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will consider lifting smokeless zone requirements in certain areas for the duration of the mining dispute.

Mr. Waldegrave: My right hon. Friend would be prepared to consider short-term suspension of smoke control orders in the light of evidence about the need for such action and after consultation with the relevant local authorities.

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Mr. Weetch asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will list the areas of outstanding natural beauty designated as such by the Countryside Commission since 1979.

Mr. Waldegrave: The areas are as follows:
- High Weald
- Cranbourne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs
- Camel Estuary Extension to the Cornwall AONB

All three orders were confirmed by my right hon. Friend in 1983. He is considering a fourth order designating part of the north Pennines.

Salcey Forest

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give the area of Salcey forest that was originally notified as a site of special scientific interest

by the Nature Conservancy Council and the area that remains under such notification following the Forestry Commission's clear, fell and replanting activities.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: I am advised by the Nature Conservancy Council that Salcey forest SSSI was first notified in 1970 covering 1,250 acres. It was renotified in June 1984 covering 432 acres.

Coalite Company (Pollution)

Mr. Mason asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if any steps have been taken by the Yorkshire water authority against the Coalite company in respect of its pollution of the river Rother; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Macfarlane: The Coalite company has a consent to discharge effluent under the Rivers (Prevention of Pollution) Acts 1951-1961. The conditions attached to that consent are currently the subject of an appeal by the company to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. I can make no statement while the appeal is under consideration.

Urban Aid Programme

Mr. Adley asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will indicate the differences in the objectives of the urban aid programme and the urban development grant scheme; and if he plans any changes therein.

Sir George Young: Urban development grant is part of the urban programme and its objectives are included within the urban programme's wider objectives. Urban development grant's primary aims are to promote the economic and physical regeneration of inner urban areas by levering private sector investment into such areas which would not otherwise take place and to encourage local authorities to take an active part in promoting such investment. The urban programme encompasses a broader range of social environmental and economic objectives. Urban development grants were introduced in 1982 and no changes in its objectives are planned.

Truscon RD7 Houses

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will consider designating houses of Truscon RD7 construction for the purposes of a scheme of assistance under the Housing Defects Act 1984; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: We do not have evidence which would justify designation of houses of Truscon RD7 construction under section 1 of the Housing Defects Act. If the hon. Member has evidence he would like to submit, my right hon. Friend will consider it.

Housing Investment Programme

Mr. John Fraser asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the total of the housing investment programme bids of English housing authorities; and if he will publish in the *Official Report* a statistical summary of 1985-86 HIP 1 and HIP 2 submissions of English local authorities in the same manner as was provided for the local authority associations for 1984-85.

Mr. Gow: Local authorities' bids for their 1985-86 housing investment programmes total £4,868 million. Summaries of local authorities' HIP 1 and HIP 2 returns will be placed in the Library as soon as possible.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will indicate those London boroughs which in 1984-85 had their score on the general needs index used to make housing investment programme allocations to individual authorities increased to reflect inner city problems in their areas.

Sir George Young: Those designated under the urban programme, that is, Brent, Ealing, Greenwich, Hackney, Hammersmith and Fulham, Haringey, Islington, Lambeth, Lewisham, Newham, Southwark, Tower Hamlets and Wandsworth. The generalised needs index also includes scores for inner city problems such as overcrowding, households sharing accommodation, homelessness and dwellings in poor condition.

Local Government Reform

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) how much is now paid by the London boroughs for the right to nominate elderly Londoners to 50 per cent. of the vacancies in the Greater London council's seaside and country homes; and how much they will have to pay in the event of the Greater London council being abolished;

(2) if he will ensure that all homes on Greater London council's seaside and country homes estates which become vacant will remain available for letting in the event of the Greater London council being abolished and that all such lettings will be to elderly people;

(3) what proportion of vacancies in seaside and country homes currently owned by the Greater London council will be made available to elderly Londoners in the event of the Greater London council being abolished;

(4) if his detailed exploration into the possibility of transferring Thamesmead to a trust in the event of the Greater London council being abolished has revealed how deficits met by the Greater London council would be paid;

(5) if he will estimate the number of elderly Londoners able to retire to the country through the seaside and country homes scheme if the Greater London council is abolished.

Sir George Young: Our detailed proposals will be announced in due course.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he intends to take powers to develop new estates of seaside and country homes for London residents in the event of the Greater London council being abolished.

Sir George Young: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) on 15 November, at column 314.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment why all vacancies in the Greater London council's seaside and country homes are not to be made available to elderly Londoners in the event of the Greater London council being abolished.

Sir George Young: We believe that the district councils as owners of the properties should be able to use a proportion of the lettings, as has been recognised in previous transfers of GLC stock.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment who will have ultimate responsibility for the Greater London council seaside and country homes scheme in the event of the Greater London council being abolished; and what control elected representatives of the people of London will have over the scheme.

Sir George Young: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 25 October, at column 698.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how he will ensure that district councils in receipt of the Greater London council's seaside and country homes, in the event of the Greater London council being abolished, report all vacancies to him.

Sir George Young: We anticipate no difficulty in securing such information under the powers to be conferred on my right hon. Friend under the abolition legislation.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the number of civil servants now working in his Department on *(a)* duties associated with the abolition of the Greater London council and metropolitan county councils and *(b)* rates limitation, listing in each case the numbers and ranks of officers and the estimated cost per year of each group.

Mr. Waldegrave: I shall answer this question shortly.

Housing (London)

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) why, in the light of the balance of responses to "Streamlining the Cities: Housing", he has decided to adhere to his original proposal to repeal without replacement the Greater London council's statutory duty to provide research and information on London's housing;

(2) how surveys of the whole of London's housing stock will be carried out if the Greater London council is abolished.

Sir George Young: I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. Friend's reply of 16 November to my hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Mr. Hayes), at column 378.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a minimum as well as a maximum limit on the level of funding by the London boroughs under the proposed arrangements for collective grant-giving in the event of the Greater London council being abolished.

Sir George Young: No.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will revise his proposal for the prescribed majority of boroughs required to fund a voluntary body under the proposed collective arrangements in the event of the Greater London council being abolished, from 66 per cent. to 51 per cent.; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: The Government's proposal that the required majority should be two thirds was set out in a consultation document issued on 20 September. Representations have been received both that this majority should be increased and that it should be reduced. Consultations are continuing, however, and no final decision has been taken.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussions he has had with the Association of London Authorities over the Government's proposals for the collective funding by the London boroughs of voluntary organisations in the event of the Greater London council being abolished.

Sir George Young: The consultation document on these proposals issued on 20 September was not sent to the Association of London Authorities, but copies went to the GLC and to the councils of all London boroughs; that is, to all the members of this association. The Government would welcome a response from the association to the consultation paper.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what comments he has received from voluntary bodies concerning the capacity of the London Boroughs Association for funding voluntary bodies in response to the White Paper, "Streamlining the Cities".

Sir George Young: A number of voluntary organisations have expressed doubts about the arrangements proposed for collective funding of voluntary bodies serving more than one borough. While I am confident that the statutory mechanism proposed will provide an adequate basis for London boroughs collectively to take on this role, we are nevertheless giving these representations serious consideration and will be having further discussions with representative voluntary bodies.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what form the consultation with tenants at Thamesmead will take about proposals to abolish the Greater London council; if it will commence before the publication of the main abolition Bill; when he expects it to finish; and what account will be taken of the wishes so expressed by the tenants.

Sir George Young: There will be wide consultation with residents before any decision is taken, and a trust will not be imposed against their wishes.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what financial and administrative benefits he expects from vesting nomination rights in the Greater London council's seaside and country homes in him in the event of the Greater London council being abolished;

(2) if his detailed explorations into the possibility of transferring Thamesmead to a trust in the event of the Greater London council being abolished have revealed what administrative and financial benefits would accrue from such a transfer;

(3) what administrative and financial benefits will accrue from vesting nomination rights to homes in the London-wide mobility scheme in himself in the event of the Greater London council being abolished.

Sir George Young: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 25 October, at column 704.

Thamesmead

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment why the number, as opposed to the identity, of respondents to his invitation to consortia of private developers to contact him concerning the possible sale of development land at Thamesmead is a matter of commercial confidence.

Sir George Young: As I explained to the hon. Member in my answer of 25 October, at column 691, the responses we received are regarded as a matter of commercial confidence.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment why he has dropped his proposal for a sale to private developers of land at Thamesmead in the event of the Greater London council being abolished.

Sir George Young: We remain of the view that private developers should have a primary role in the development of the vacant land at Thamesmead, whether or not control passes to a trust.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if his detailed explorations into the possibility of transferring Thamesmead to a trust in the event of the Greater London council being abolished have revealed what sources of public funding could be made available to such a trust.

Sir George Young: We should be ready to consider applications for grants such as derelict land grant or urban development grant, subject to the normal grant rules.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if his detailed explorations into the possibility of transferring Thamesmead to a trust in the event of the Greater London council being abolished have revealed how many staff would be needed by such a trust.

Sir George Young: This would be a matter to be determined by any trust which is established.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what would happen to the development land at Thamesmead in the event of Greater London council housing there being transferred to the boroughs of Bexley and Greenwich, as proposed in paragraph 2.6.5. of his Department's publication of 31 July on abolition, if the Greater London council were abolished.

Sir George Young: In that event, our preferred solution would remain as proposed at paragraph 11 of my Department's consultation paper of October 1983.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if his detailed explorations into the possibility of transferring Thamesmead to a trust in the event of the Greater London council being abolished have revealed the relative site areas of Thamesmead and Stockbridge village trust.

Sir George Young: The relative site areas are, within wide limits, of only limited relevance to the suitability of the trust approach.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will wait until spring 1986, when his Department has completed its assessment of Stockbridge village trust, before taking a decision on whether to transfer Thamesmead to a trust along the lines of Stockbridge village, in the event of the Greater London council being abolished.

Sir George Young: The decision will be made as soon as consultations with residents and others concerned have been completed and the results analysed.

Single Homeless Persons

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment which body will assume responsibility for the activity and schemes to help the single homeless which are at present carried out directly by the Greater London council and not through voluntary organisations and which relate to an area wider than that of a single borough, if the Greater London council is abolished.

Sir George Young: Responsibility for activities undertaken by the Greater London council using powers held concurrently with London borough councils will pass to those councils on abolition.

Housing Mobility Scheme (London)

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he intends to announce before the publication of the main abolition Bill who will run the London-wide mobility scheme in the event of the Greater London council being abolished.

Sir George Young: No.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will ensure that the statutory London mobility scheme will extend beyond 1990 in the event of the Greater London council being abolished.

Sir George Young: This is a matter for detailed consultation and decision in due course.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if the proportion of vacancies in ex-Greater London council dwellings going into the London-wide housing mobility scheme will remain at 5 per cent. in the event of the Greater London council being abolished; and if he intends to give himself discretion to lower that proportion at any time.

Sir George Young: I refer the hon. Member to my answer to him of 25 October, at column 698.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will estimate what effect his proposals for the Greater London mobility scheme, in the event of the Greater London council being abolished, will have on the prospects for unification of the various housing mobility schemes in London.

Sir George Young: We have made it clear that we welcome current moves to place the working arrangements for the Greater London mobility scheme and the inter-borough nomination scheme on a common footing. I see no reason why the joint operation of the two schemes should not continue after abolition.

Retirement Homes

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what experience his Department has so far of allocating retirement homes to elderly people.

Sir George Young: We intend that my right hon. Friend should be able to delegate the exercise of the nomination rights vested in him by the abolition legislation. We shall consult with those concerned on the detailed arrangements.

Housing (Harassment)

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment why his Department has undertaken no surveys of the extent of harassment and Rent Act evasion in privately rented housing in London.

Sir George Young: Local authorities which have specific powers under the Protection from Eviction Act and other relevant legislation are best placed to assess the extent of harassment and evasion in their areas. The Department gives careful consideration to evidence received from them and from other bodies which are directly concerned with these matters.

London Boroughs Association and Association of London Authorities

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list *(a)* the boroughs in membership of the London Boroughs Association and *(b)* the boroughs in membership of the Association of London Authorities.

Sir George Young: The hon. Member should seek this information from individual London boroughs or from the two associations concerned.

Urban Programme

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the eligibility of the London borough of Bexley and Greenwich for funding under the urban programme; and what is the eligibility of Knowsley borough council.

Sir George Young: Greenwich is a designated authority under the Inner Urban Areas Act 1978. Bexley is not so designated, but, like Greenwich may apply for funding under the "traditional" urban programme. Knowsley is a programme authority under the Act.

Rivers (Pollution)

Mr. Mason asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what fishing rivers have been polluted in the area of the Yorkshire water authority during the past two years; what is the authority's policy on prosecution following pollution by industrial enterprises; whether it has a policy on re-stocking of the lost fish due to pollution; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Macfarlane: I shall answer this question shortly.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 21 November 1984

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Legal Aid

Mr. Foulkes asked the Attorney-General if he will place in the Library a copy of the new guidelines issued by the Lord Chancellor's Department concerning legal aid; and why these guidelines were issued.

The Solicitor-General: Copies of the circular (LCD Circular JC (84) 8) have been placed in the Library today. The circular provides guidance on the criteria for the grant of legal aid for trials in the magistrates' courts and appeals from them to the Crown court. It has been issued to encourage consistent interpretation of the criteria by the courts and the criminal legal aid committees of the Law Society.

Mr. Foulkes asked the Attorney-General if he will make a statement on the Widgery criteria for granting legal aid.

The Solicitor-General: The criteria for the grant of legal aid recommended by the departmental committee on legal aid in criminal proceedings under the chairmanship of the then Mr. Justice Widgery (Cmnd. 2934) have been endorsed by successive Home Secretaries and Lord Chancellors. In June 1983 the Lord Chancellor invited the Legal Aid Advisory Committee to review the financial and non-financial criteria for the grant of both civil and legal aid. I understand that the advisory committee expects to report soon.

ENERGY

Plutonium

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list the definitions of plutonium used by his Department, specifying the isotopic composition of each.

Mr. Goodlad: Plutonium is not classified by the Department into different grades defined by isotopic composition.

Irradiated Fuel (Exports)

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Energy if irradiated fuel has been exported to Japan for its fast reactor research and development programme.

Mr. Goodlad: Small quantities of experimental fast reactor fuel manufactured in Japan were irradiated in the Dounreay reactor prior to its closure. The irradiated fuel was subsequently returned to Japan for examination. These were commercial transactions carried out under safeguards.

Magnox Reprocessing Line, Sellafield

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson asked the Secretary of State for Energy what action has been taken by his Department to ensure that inspectors from Euratom and the International Atomic Energy Agency are allowed to examine the Magnox reprocessing line at Sellafield.

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Energy if the Magnox reprocessing line at Sellafield is subject to inspection by Euratom.

Mr. Goodlad: Euratom safeguards arrangements for magnox fuel cover all movements of civil material to and from the Sellafield reprocessing plant, which are reported to it and the IAEA on a routine basis. Euratom inspectors have access to the civil magnox reactors and to the plutonium product storage facilities at Sellafield. Thus they are aware of the amounts and location of the civil material.

As the magnox reprocessing plant at BNF Sellafield co-processes fuel from the civil magnox reactors of the CEGB and the SSEB, together with that arising from the military reactors at Chapel Cross and Calder Hall, the Government cannot accept for national security reasons an inspection regime for the plant which would reveal classified information on the production of military material.

On accession to the Euratom treaty in 1973 it was recognised by the United Kingdom Government and Euratom that these considerations could make the negotiations of a mutually satisfactory inspection regime for the plant very difficult.

Negotiations on an inspection regime to cover the reprocessing plant are continuing and following a recent visit to the plant by representatives of Euratom new proposals are under consideration.

WALES

Areas of Special Scientific Interest

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many sites of special scientific interest have been designated in Wales under the Wildlife and Countryside Act.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: 394 sites of special scientific interest have been notified or renotified in Wales under section 28 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Wales what is the average period between notification by owners of sites of special scientific interest in Wales of their intention to undertake agricultural or other activity with impact on the site's designation and response to the notification by the Nature Conservancy Council.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: Section 28(5) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 requires owners and occupiers of sites of special scientific interest to give the Nature Conservancy Council three months notice of their intention to carry out operations contained in the list of notifiable operations for the site in question. This period can be extended by mutual agreement between the parties. Details of the extent to which this occurs and the periods involved are not available. The Nature Conservancy Council aims in Wales to provide an initial response to notifications within four weeks. The length of time

entailed in giving a final response in terms of giving consent or negotiating a management agreement in accordance with section 28(6) depends on the circumstances of each notification. It is not possible to assess the average period involved.

TRANSPORT

Road Construction (Compensation)

Mr. Adley asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will introduce legislation to extend the availability of compensation to individual households for environmental damage caused by road construction to include any road where any part of the funding thereof emanates from his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: Compensation under the Land Compensation Act 1973 for depreciation in the value of dwellings by noise, vibration, smell, fumes and other physical factors caused by the use of a new or altered road may be claimed from and is payable by the highway authority which constructed the road or carried out alterations, irrespective of the source of the funds for the works.

Passenger Rail Services (Privatisation)

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement outlining the policy of Her Majesty's Government on the privatising of passenger rail services.

Mr. David Mitchell: We have told BR that we shall welcome proposals from it for more private sector finance and participation in the development of stations and railway services.

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received from Messrs. Brengreen Holdings Ltd. and its associates about the privatising of the Fenchurch street to Shoeburyness line; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: Brengreen has told me that it has decided to shelve the project for the time being because in its view the information provided by BR is insufficient.

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he has taken to ensure that British Rail provides firms intending to promote privatisation schemes with the information which they require to draw up detailed bids and tenders; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: It is for the board to decide how to respond to such requests in the light of the competing demands on senior management time.

Archway Road (Inquiry)

Sir Hugh Rossi asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he is yet in a position to announce the date for the new inquiry for Archway road; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ridley: I announced yesterday the commissioning of an assessment study of the problems and possible options for the traffic corridor in east London between the A1 and the A102. This will include a review of the areas around both Holloway road and Archway road. In view of this I am notifying all those concerned that there will be no new inquiry into the present draft orders, which are being withdrawn. I propose to pursue the revocation of the 1975-made orders. When I have the results of the assessment study I shall be able to consider what the next steps for Archway road should be.

Blindness Allowance

Mr. Murphy asked the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received regarding the introduction of a blindness allowance; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

We have received over 150 representations from hon. and right hon. Members referring to a campaign for a blindness allowance organised by the Royal National Institute for the Blind, the National Federation of the Blind and the National League of the Blind and Disabled. I also met recently with a delegation from these organisations.

On the question of the introduction of a blindness allowance, I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfield) on 22 October at column *514*.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Customs Officers

Mr. Terlezki asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will increase the number of Customs officers commensurately with the increase in passengers coming through customs.

Mr. Hayhoe: Relating increases in the number of Customs officers directly to the number of passengers would not be the most effective response to the threat of increased smuggling, which is what I think my hon. Friend has in mind. however, this year the Government have made available an additional 60 posts for the control of passengers and freight and next year 100 new posts have been allocated for use in areas where they are most likely to yield results, for example by increasing Customs intelligence efforts and improving selective controls.

Isle of Man

Mr. Skeet asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether Her Majesty's Government will compensate the Isle of Man for a reduction of its share of revenue accruing under section 2 of the Miscellaneous Financial Provisions Act 1968 due to the enactments of the Petroleum Royalties (Relief) Act 1983 which exempts royalties payable on petroleum from new offshore fields.

Mr. Moore: A request by the Isle of Man for compensation for the loss of this revenue is under consideration.

Money Transfer

Mr. Foulkes asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will indicate in relation to each of the provisions in the Finance Acts referred to in his answer of 15 November, *Official Report*, column *352*, whether *(a)* he is satisfied with the effects of the measures and *(b)* he intends to take further steps in the areas concerned; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will estimate the savings to the Exchequer resulting from each of the tax measures enacted since March 1981 given in his answer of 15 November, *Official Report*, column *352*.

Mr. Moore: We keep the operation of these provisions under review, but I regret that it is not possible to give the estimates sought.

Low Tax Areas

Mr. Foulkes asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he intends to take to deal with the tax-induced distortions of the economy resulting from low tax areas.

Mr. Moore: A number of recent measures are set out in my reply to the hon. Member on 15 November, at column *352*. We keep the case for further action under review.

Customs and Excise

Mr. Tim Smith asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer when, and in what form, he intends to publish his proposals for changes in the enforcement powers of Her Majesty's Customs and Excise.

Mr. Hayhoe: Her Majesty's Stationery Office is publishing today a paper containing detailed proposals and draft clauses for implementing the majority of the Customs and Excise recommendations in volumes 1 and 2 of the Keith report. In a foreword to that paper, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer endorses the proposals and confirms that he intends to bring forward the necessary implementing legislation in the 1985 Finance Bill.

EC (Own Resources)

Mr. Malone asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about an advance of own resources payments to the European Community in November.

Mr. Ian Stewart: I informed the House on 12 November, at columns 89-90, of the Government's intention to comply with the Commission's invitation under article 10(2) of Council regulation 2891/77, to member states to advance from 20 December to 20 November payments of own resources other than VAT levies and customs duties collected by the Government on their behalf in October. The latest estimates of these own resources collected in October is now £165 million, an increase of £35 million over the estimate announced on 12 November. Pending parliamentary approval of Supplementary Estimates, payment of the £165 million will be made by a repayable advance from the Contingencies Fund.

The payment of levies and duties on 20 December 1984, which is made direct from the Consolidated Fund under section 2(3) of the European Communities Act 1972, will be reduced by the amount of the advance. There will, therefore, be no net addition to public expenditure.

MIRAS (Abuse)

Mr. Craigen asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what evidence he has received from building societies regarding possible abuse of the mortgage interest relief at source scheme by applicants for a mortgage attempting to obtain tax relief on more than one property.

Mr. Moore [*pursuant to his reply*, 20 November 1984, c. 95-96] I am not aware of evidence put forward by building societies indicating a particular problem of abuse of the mortgage interest relief at source scheme through claims for more than one property. If the hon. Member has information relevant to abuse of the scheme, perhaps he would write to me with details.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

White Electrical Goods

12. **Mr. Greenway** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures he is taking to ban imports of white electrical goods; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fletcher: None. There is no evidence which suggests that the benefits of a ban would outweigh the costs to the consumer and the national economy.

European Regional Development Fund

17. **Mr. Ron Davies** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what benefits he anticipates will accrue to local authorities as a result of recent revisions of the European regional development fund to take effect from January 1985.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The main benefits will be an increase in the percentage contributions from the ERDF to qualifying local authority projects. In the longer term, we hope for some reduction in administrative burdens arising from the new provisions permitting support for national programmes instead of many individual projects.

Film Policy

20. **Mr. Gould** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received on Cmnd. 9319 on "Film Policy".

Mr. Norman Lamont: We have received a number of letters from the industry commenting on the proposals in the White Paper. It has also been discussed in my meetings with members of the industry and the Cinematograph Films Council.

Manufactured Goods

21. **Mr. Fisher** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the balance of trade in manufactures for the first nine months of 1984.

Mr. Norman Lamont: There was a deficit of £3·3 billion.

32. **Mr. Kirkwood** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he is satisfied with the existing controls on the export of United Kingdom manufactured goods which could be used for the purpose of civil repression or torture by foreign Governments or other organisations.

Mr. Channon: Existing controls appear to be operating effectively. I have been informed that shortly

after the introduction of export controls on leg irons in February 1984, the firm which used to manufacture them in this country ceased to do so. If the hon. Member has any proof that controls are being evaded I shall be glad to consider it.

33. **Mr. Teddy Taylor** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what percentage of the European Economic Community (original Six) market for manufactures was secured by British firms in the most recent annual period for which figures are available; and what was the comparable figure for 1972.

Mr. Channon: In 1983, the United Kingdom accounted for 7 per cent. of the imports of manufactures by the original six members of the European Community. The comparable figure for 1972 was 6·1 per cent.

Mexico (Ministerial Visit)

22. **Mr. Brandon-Bravo** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the recent visit to Mexico by the Minister for Trade the right hon. Member for Southend, West (Mr. Channon).

Mr. Channon: I visited Mexico in September to assess prospects for United Kingdom exports and investment. I was accompanied by a group of business men representing a broad cross-section of United Kingdom industry. I believe there are considerable opportunities for us in Mexico.

Manufacturing Industry

23. **Mr. Knox** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the most recent figure for output in manufacturing industry; and how this compares with the figure for the same month in 1979.

Mr. Norman Lamont: For the third quarter of 1984 the provisional index of production for manufacturing industry is 98, based on 1980 equal to 100. This is 9 per cent. lower than the index of production for manufacturing industry in the third quarter of 1979.

Regional Economic Development

24. **Mr. Sackville** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will commission a study on the implications for regional economic development of air transport facilities.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Decisions about infrastructure take account of the implications for regional economic development.

Greater Manchester

25. **Mr. Tony Lloyd** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will indicate the proportion of regional industrial assistance given by his Department for the Greater Manchester region in the years 1979 to 1984.

Mr. Norman Lamont: About 1 per cent.

Lotteries

26. **Mr. John Fraser** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will establish an inquiry into the use of lotteries as a trading practice.

Mr. Fletcher: I see no reason to do so.

New Technology

27. **Mr. Baldry** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress is being made in tackling skill shortages in new technology industries.

Mr. Pattie: In its first report published in July the information technology skills shortages committee, chaired by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Industry, proposed a new "partnership for change" between industry and the academic world to tackle the problem if IT skill shortages at the graduate level. Action is in hand to put the Committee's proposals into effect. The Committee will shortly produce a report on IT skill shortages at other levels in the work force; and a final report before the end of the year will examine the action taken to date and the direction of further effort.

Merseyside

28. **Mr. Sean Hughes** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will report on the progress of the preparatory study presently being conducted prior to integrated operations on Merseyside.

Mr. Norman Lamont: This study has been commissioned by Merseyside county council, with financial assistance from the European Commission, to consider the feasibility of an integrated operation. I understand that it is hoped to complete the study before the end of the year.

USSR

29. **Mr. Chapman** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the value of United Kingdom exports to and imports from the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics for the last 12 months for which figures are available.

Mr. Channon: This information can readily be derived from table IB of the appropriate volumes of the "UK Overseas Trade Statistics", copies of which are in the Library.

Regional Aid

30. **Mr. McQuarrie** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he expects to be in a position to announce details of the new areas which will be able to obtain finance under the regional aid policy; and in what circumstances this aid will be available.

31. **Mr. Kenneth Carlisle** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he will announce his proposals on regional aid.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I hope to make a statement to the House on our regional industrial policy changes in the near future.

High Technology Products (Exports)

34. **Mr. Ashdown** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the number of people presently involved in the issue of licences relating to the Export of Goods (Control) Order governing the export of high technology electronic items; whether he has any plans to increase these; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Channon: Seventeen people are currently employed full-time in the issue of export licences for

electronic goods. Staffing levels are kept under regular review and adjustments are made as necessary to take account of changes in work load.

Mr. Batiste asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether Her Majesty's Government, via Customs and Excise or otherwise, supply information to the United States Government concerning exports of high technology products incorporating United States components or expertise by British companies from Great Britain with British export licences but for which no United States export licence under the extra-territorial provisions of the Export Administration Act has been obtained.

Mr. Hayhoe: I have been asked to reply.

Information is exchanged between the customs authorities of the COCOM countries in cases where there is suspicion of an actual or potential breach of these multilaterally agreed strategic export controls. These arrangements include cases where goods have been exported from the United Kingdom with a valid United Kingdom export licence but subsequently appear to have been diverted to a proscribed destination. The licensing status of the goods or components under United States legislation is not a matter which Customs and Excise would take into account.

Textiles and Clothing

35. **Mr. Waller** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has received Professor Silberston's report on the effects of trade restrictions on the British textile and clothing industries.

Mr. Channon: Professor Silberston has now completed his report. It will be published by Her Majesty's Stationery Office in December.

British Telecom plc

36. **Mr. Tim Smith** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry why the draft prospectus for the sale of shares in British Telecom plc proposes restrictions on general meetings of shareholders.

Mr. Pattie: The draft prospectus for the sale of shares in British Telecom does not propose restrictions on attendance at general meetings. It does however give notice that if a very large number of persons are allocated shares the company may need to seek authority to restrict or regulate, so far as necessary, attendance at general meetings on a basis as fair as possible to all members and without prejudice to voting rights.

37. **Mr. Strang** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is his latest estimate of the full cost to public funds — including underwriters' fees — of the arrangements for the privatisation of British Telecom.

Mr. Pattie: Disclosure of actual costs will be made to Parliament by means of a Spring Supplementary Estimate.

Coal Industry Dispute

38. **Mr. Parry** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement about the effects on United Kingdom imports and exports of the mining dispute at the latest date.

Mr. Channon: It is difficult to make precise estimates but in the first nine months of this year net imports of coal and oil are thought to have been increased by £1½ billion as a result of the dispute. The bulk of the deterioration will be of a strictly temporary nature.

39. **Mr. Pike** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the effect has been on manufacturing industry of the coal strike; and, in particular, what has been the effect on productivity and output.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The strike continues to have minimal effect on the output or productivity of the vast majority of United Kingdom manufacturing industry.

COCOM Agreement

Mr. Batiste asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether, in the context of the COCOM agreement, any change in the status of the People's Republic of China is proposed by Her Majesty's Government or has been proposed to Her Majesty's Government by other consultative committee partners.

Mr. Fletcher: The list of countries to which the COCOM strategic export controls apply and the details of such controls are kept under review. Details of the Committee's discussions are confidential.

Alvey Programme

Mr. Batiste asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) whether proposed projects under the Alvey programme will be acceptable to Her Majesty's Government if there is only one non-academic participant;

(2) whether United States-controlled companies will be permitted to participate in projects under the Alvey programme as the sole non-academic participant.

Mr. Pattie: We expect there to be at least two companies in an industrial Alvey project, although this rule is not applied rigidly. A foreign controlled company must have a United Kingdom industrial collaborator.

Exports

Mrs. Jill Knight asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he is taking to end different labelling requirements, national dimensional standards, national certification standards, health and safety regulations and other non-tariff barriers operating against British manufacturers seeking to export to Europe.

Mr. Fletcher: The Government fully recognise the difficulties which can face United Kingdom exporters to Europe as a result of non-tariff barriers within the Community. The Government are pressing for the removal of non-tariff barriers to trade. Complete deregulation is not practicable; Governments of all member states need to maintain essential safeguards for the protection of consumers and employees.

The Government have therefore supported common solutions to the problems for intra-Community trade caused by differing national standards. In particular the Council of Ministers agreed in July 1984 the guidelines for a new Community standards policy to speed up the achievement of common solutions and improve mutual recognition of national standards. The Government will press for early and satisfactory implementation of those guidelines.

Outside the Community, the Government plays its full part in international fora, such as the GATT, UN

Economic Commission for Europe, which seek to facilitate international trade by basing technical regulations on internationally agreed standards.

Cosmetics

Mr. John Fraser asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he proposes to take action under consumer safety legislation in respect of skin bleaching cosmetics containing hydroquinine, details of which have been supplied to him by Lambeth borough council.

Mr. Fletcher: The Laboratory of the Government Chemist is testing the skin lighteners. If they are found to contain more than the 2 per cent. permitted under the Cosmetic Products (Safety) Regulations the suppliers will be prosecuted. I am also having those brands not properly labelled taken off the market and am asking the EC Commission to plug the gap in the legislation which lets through monomethyl hydroquinone. I am watching the situation carefully.

Chemical Industry

Mrs. Ann Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what was, as a percentage figure, the total rise in value of net surplus exports of the chemical industry in each of the last five years for which figures are available.

(2) what was the value at current prices of the net trade balance of chemicals into the United Kingdom in each of the last five years for which figures are available.

Mr. Fletcher: The available information is as follows:

United Kingdom Trade in Chemicals and Related Products

	(a) Exports (£ million fob)	(b) Imports (£ million cif)	(c) Crude Surplus (£ million)	(d) Exports as Percentage of Imports	(e) Change in (d) from previous year
1979	4,911	3,402	1,509	144	−5%
1980	5,286	3,147	2,139	168	+17%
1981	5,550	3,597	1,953	154	−8%
1982	6,119	4,179	1,940	146	−5%
1983	6,933	5,119	1,814	135	−8%

Source: United Kingdom Overseas Trade Statistics, Tables II and V, SITC(R2) Section 5.
Note: The crude surplus is the balance of exports valued fob less imports valued cif.

Mrs. Ann Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was, as a percentage, the total rise in output of the United Kingdom chemical industry in each of the last five years for which figures are available.

Mr. Fletcher: The index of the output of the chemical industry, class 25 of the Standard Industrial Classification 1980, is published in table 7.1 of the "Monthly Digest of Statistics", copies of which are in the Library.

Mrs. Ann Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will estimate the total capital investment which has taken place within the United Kingdom chemical industry in each of the last five years for which figures are available.

Mr. Trippier: Available information is given in the following table:

Investment in the United Kingdom chemical industry†*

	£ million at constant 1980 prices
1979	1,182
1980	994
1981	749
1982	687
1983	740

* Excluding assets leased from the financial industries.
† Class 25 of Standard Industrial Classification (Revised 1980).

Chemical Products

Mrs. Ann Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if he will estimate the percentage of total European Economic Community chemical product consumption accounted for by the United Kingdom in each of the last five years for which figures are available;

(2) what was the percentage of total European Economic Community chemical production which has been met by United Kingdom manufacturers in each of the last five years for which figures are available.

Mr. Fletcher: The latest information available from official sources appear in "Structure and Activity of Industry" published by Eurostat, but relates only to 1979. More up-to-date estimates are available from the Chemical Industries Association as follows:

Chemicals production and consumption (NACE 25)
United Kingdom as proportion of European Economic Community
Percentage

	Production	Consumption
1979	16	17
1980	17	16
1981	17	17
1982	17	17
1983	16	17

Note :
Based on data compiled by Chemicals Industry Association from EC national trade associations. The United Kingdom percentages may be slightly understated as the data for the Federal Republic of Germany, Netherlands, Italy and Denmark includes man-made fibres.

Currys Ltd. (Takeover)

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received advocating the reference of the proposed takeover of Currys Ltd. to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fletcher: A number of hon. Members have written to me about the proposed takeover of Currys by

Dixons. My right hon. Friend announced on 7 November that this merger is not to be referred to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission.

Wine Sales (Standard Measures)

Sir David Price asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he has taken to ensure that wine sold by the glass is sold only in standard measures; and whether he intends further action.

Mr. Fletcher: A voluntary code of practice for measures of wine sold by the glass in licensed premises came into operation on 1 May 1984 following agreement by all the main trade organisations representing the interests of brewers, licensed victuallers, hoteliers, restauranteurs and caterers. The code provides that establishments must choose no more than two sizes, to be chosen from either an imperial or metric range based on legal capacity measures.

A report setting out the findings of recent surveys by trading standards officers on the adoption of the code has been made available to the sponsoring bodies and I hope that, as a result, recognition and use of the code's provisions will become more widespread.

Exports and Imports (Middle East)

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will set out in tabular form for each of the calendar years 1980, 1981, 1982 and 1983 the value of United Kingdom exports to and imports from Iraq, the United Arab Emirates, Jordan and Israel, respectively.

Mr. Fletcher: The information is as follows:

Value £ million

	1980	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*
UK Imports (c.i.f.):				
Iraq	532	73	80	30
United Arab Emirates	482	393	267	319
Jordan	6	10	17	28
Israel	233	256	276	314
UK Exports (f.o.b.):				
Iraq	322	624	874	400
United Arab Emirates	501	492	559	568
Jordan	95	204	295	263
Israel	231	212	264	355

Source: Table IB of the United Kingdom Overseas Trade Statistics, 1981 and 1983.

Note: The United Arab Emirates comprise Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ras al Khaimah, Ajman, Umm al Qaiwain and Fujairah.

Israel

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether the Minister for Trade will seek to arrange a ministerial visit to Israel for talks on trade and export promotion.

Mr. Fletcher: My right hon. Friend has no plans at present for a visit. Officials from my Department will be visiting Israel next year to attend the seventh meeting of the United Kingdom/Israel joint committee for discussions on matters relating to trade between the two countries.

Johnson's Cleaners (Takeover)

Mr. Stan Thorne asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will refer to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission the proposed merger or takeover of Johnson's Cleaners by Nottingham Manufacturing.

Mr. Fletcher: My right hon. Friend announced on 15 November his decision not to refer this merger to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission.

Opencast Workings

Mr. Skeet asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will consolidate the law relating to the working of sand, gravel and limestone with that affecting opencast coal in one statute.

Mr. Macfarlane: I have been asked to reply.

The NCB's opencast coal operations are being brought into line with the procedures applying to licensed opencast coal operators and to other mineral operators. As part of this process, we need to consider the compulsory powers of access available to the NCB under the Opencast Coal Act 1958 along with those available to other mineral operators. A start has been made, but it is too early to say what the conclusions might be. Any proposals will be discussed at an early stage with the NCB and other mineral operators.

SCOTLAND

Youth Training

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many teenagers who have now left youth training schemes in Scotland are currently unemployed.

Mr. Allan Stewart: I refer to the answer given to the hon. Member by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Department of Employment on 12 November 1984, at column *98*. I regret that no comparable imformation is separately available for Scotland.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list for the Cowdenbeath jobcentre area the number of claimants who have been unemployed *(a)* less than six months, *(b)* over six months and up to one year, *(c)* over one year and up to two years, *(d)* over two years and up to three years and *(e)* over three years at the latest date for which figures are available.

Mr. Allan Stewart: I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. Friend's letter to him of 22 October. The information requested is available in the House of Commons Library.

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the most recent figures for unemployment in the Cowdenbeath jobcentre district by postcode areas; and by how much unemployment has changed in each area over the previous 12 month period.

Mr. Allan Stewart: I refer the hon. Member to my earlier reply to him on 16 November, at columns *370-72*.

Legal Aid

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what new guidelines he has issued in the last six months concerning the availability of legal aid.

Mr. Ancram: None.

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the Widgery criteria for granting legal aid.

Mr. Ancram: The Scottish Home and Health Department has brought to the notice of district courts in Scotland criteria for criminal legal aid similar to those recommended by the Widgery committee on legal aid in criminal proceedings in England and Wales.

Police (Statistics)

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will lay before Parliament a consolidated and classified extract of statistics collected under section 47 of the Police (Scotland) Act 1967 for the years since 1979.

Mr. Younger: "Criminal Statistics, Scotland, 1980-82" (Cmnd. 9403) was laid before Parliament yesterday and will be published today. Certain information for these years has already been released in statistical bulletins, copies of which were sent to all Scottish Members, and placed in the Library at the time of issue. We have extended the range of data collected on appeals —the subject of one of the chapters of the volume— from that originally intended and this has deferred the publication. Delays of this nature should not recur in future since I propose a change in the arrangements for publication of criminal statistics for the years 1983 onwards. I propose to meet the requirements of the 1967 Act by laying before Parliament a simple abstract drawn from the data collected from Scottish police forces. At the same time, the range of topics covered by my Department's statistical bulletins will be extended to cover the data hitherto presented in the annual publication which will no longer be produced in its present form. This change will bring current statistics to public notice much more quickly, while maintaining all the existing statistical series.

PRIME MINISTER

British War Widows and Associates

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Prime Minister what recent representations she has received from British War Widows and Associates; what reply she is sending; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I have received a letter from the president of the British War Widows and Associates raising a number of questions relating to war widows. My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security, the Minister with special responsibility for war pensions, has replied on my behalf. A copy of his reply has been sent to the right hon. Gentleman.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Sunday Trading

40. **Mr. Dykes** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will outline the Government's reactions to the report recommending changes in the laws on Sunday trading.

Mr. Mellor: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Westminster, North (Mr. Wheeler) on 16 November, at column 365.

Mr. Mark Carlisle asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to publish the report of the committee of inquiry into proposals to amend the Shops Act; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brittan: I am publishing the committee's report today. As I said when I set up this committee last year, there is widespread agreement that the present law is unsatisfactory and in need of reform and I am grateful to Mr. Robin Auld, the chairman and his two committee members Mrs. Liliana Archibald and Miss Frances Cairncross for the depth and extent of their study. I welcome the report, which we wish to consider carefully, in the light of reactions to it, before reaching any conclusions.

Prison Statistics

Mr. Evennett asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the average prison population in the last three years for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: The information requested is published annually in "Prison Statistics, England and Wales" (table 1.4 of the latest issue for 1983, Cmnd. 9363).

Civil Defence

Mr. Leigh asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has plans to appoint regional co-ordinators for civil defence for all the agencies involved; and what their roles will be.

Mr. Giles Shaw: No, but in December we shall be starting an 18-month to two-year pilot study in the north-west of the need to co-ordinate regional planning. The aim will be to define the requirements, identify the options available, conduct trials with a view to assessing their costs and effectiveness, and make proposals. The results of the study will be made available to the House in due course.

Coal Industry Dispute

Mr. Soley asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish in the *Official Report* the following information on the mining dispute: *(a)* the number of police sent out of each police force area for duty in connection with the dispute during each week of the dispute; *(b)* the number of police injured in each police force area; *(c)* how many were seriously injured; and *(d)* how many were treated in hospital other than as outpatients.

Mr. Maude asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many policemen to date have been injured while carrying out duties connected with the mining dispute.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The following numbers of police officers have been injured, in the period from 13 March to 16 November inclusive, in dealing with events arising from the miners' dispute:

Police force area	*Numbers injured*
Cleveland	2
Derbyshire	236
Durham	30
Dyfed-Powys	1
Essex	7
Greater Manchester	13
Gwent	1
Humberside	2
Kent	55
Lancashire	1
Leicestershire	1
Merseyside	4
Metropolitan	4
Norfolk	15
Northumbria	32
North Wales	1
North Yorkshire	14
Nottighamshire	130
South Wales	13
South Yorkshire	323
Staffordshire	18
Sussex	2
Thames Valley	2
Warwickshire	1
West Yorkshire	254
Total	1,162

The information requested about the number of police sent out of each police force area for duty in connection with the dispute and about the seriousness of police injuries is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Soley asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will publish in the *Official Report* the following information; *(a)* the number of written complaints about police conduct during the dispute received in each police force area and *(b)* the general nature of these complaints.

Mr. Mellor: The following tables set out the only information which is available centrally. It relates to the period 13 March to 13 November 1984 and indicates the number of complaints received in each police force area (not the number of complaints made about officers of those forces). It does not distinguish between complaints made in writing and those made orally.

Force area	*Number of complaints*
Cheshire	3
Derbyshire	57
Durham	19
Dyfed-Powys	1
Essex	1
Greater Manchester	6
Gwent	15
Humberside	4
Kent	15
Lancashire	4
Lincolnshire	2
Merseyside	5
Metropolitan	4
Northumbria	16
North Wales	2
North Yorkshire	1
Nottinghamshire	61
South Wales	9
South Yorkshire	159
Staffordshire	6
Thames Valley	1
Warwickshire	23
West Yorkshire	6
All others	0
TOTAL	420

The following table indicates the nature of the allegations made (some of the complaints in the previous table will have related to more than one type of allegation):

Allegation	*Numbers*
Assault	198
Damage	16
Harassment	61
Incivility	83
Irregular Procedure	53
Motoring Offence	7
Neglect of Duty	13
Unlawful arrest	11
Oppressive conduct	31

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police have been injured and from which force area in each of the last four weeks whilst policing the mining dispute.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The following numbers of police officers have been injured, in the period from 17 October to 16 November inclusive, in dealing with events arising from the miners' dispute:

Police force area	*Numbers injured*
Derbyshire	17
Durham	8
Dyfed-Powys	1
Greater Manchester	2
Kent	1
Lancashire	1
Northumbria	10
South Wales	6
South Yorkshire	56
West Yorkshire	146
TOTAL	248

The table above gives the police force areas in which the injuries occurred. Information about the police forces from which the injured officers come is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate expense.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has regarding length of time in bringing to court people charged with offences arising out of the mining dispute.

Mr. Mellor: Comprehensive information on the length of time taken to bring people to court in these circumstances could not be collected without disproportionate effort. I would, however, refer my hon. Friend to

the estimates recently obtained from certain magistrates' courts which were set out in the reply I gave to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Bedfordshire, North (Mr. Skeet) on 14 November, at columns 240-41.

Probation and After Care Service

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the average number of persons in prisons awaiting completion of parole reports by the probation and after care service in each metropolitan county area in each year since 1974 by age, sex and type of offence.

Mr. Mellor: This information is not available in any of the forms requested. Reports from the probation service are required for all prisoners being considered for parole. The numbers of prisoners so considered in the years in question were as follows:

	Number
1974	9,877
1975	9,455
1976	10,077
1977	10,344
1978	10,183
1979	10,156
1980	10,070
1981	9,620
1982	9,193
1983	9,534

Further details about the parole scheme are contained in the annual reports of the Parole Board, all of which are in the Library of the House.

If the hon. Member has a particular point in mind, perhaps he would let me know.

Republic of Ireland (Extradition)

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the number of warrants for extradition, in connection with terrorist offences, which have been issued to the authorities in the Republic of Ireland by police forces in Great Britain for which the person named therein has not yet been extradited.

Mr. Mellor: Nine warrants naming one individual remain unexecuted by the authorities in the Republic of Ireland in respect of offences of a terrorist nature committed in England and Wales. Extradition from the Republic to Scotland is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Prisoners (Discharge Costs)

Mr. Soley asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the cost of admitting and discharging a prisoner from one of Her Majesty's prisons.

Mr. Mellor: This information is not available and could be obtained only by special research. Some information about the costs of reception, discharge and transfer of prisoners, drawn from the prison department costing system, is expected to be available in due course for the current and future financial years.

Prisoners (Cost)

Mr. Soley asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the cost of keeping a female prisoner in one of Her Majesty's prisons.

Mr. Mellor: The average weekly cost of keeping a female prisoner in custody in the financial year 1982-83, the latest year for which information is available, was £308.

Mr. Soley asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the weekly cost of keeping a male prisoner in one of Her Majesty's prisons.

Mr. Mellor: The average weekly cost of keeping a male prisoner in custody in the financial year 1982-83, the latest year for which information is available, was £215.

Licensing Laws

Mr. Miscampbell asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he is satisfied with the working of the licensing laws; and if he has any proposals for their reform.

Mr. Mellor: We have no immediate plans to reform the licensing law, but my right hon. and learned Friend is keeping the matter under review.

Police (Establishment)

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department which police authorities have requested an increase in their authorised establishment of serving police officers during 1984; what increases he has approved; when they will take effect; and if he will give the same information for each of the past five years.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Ten police authorities in England and Wales applied for increases totalling 90 posts in their police establishments for the current financial year 1984-85, and there were applications outstanding from four other police authorities. Thirty-two additional posts have so far been approved for four forces, and further consideration will be given shortly, in the light of advice from Her Majesty's Inspectors of Constabularly, to five applications which my right hon. and learned Friend undertook to consider again later this year.

The information for 1984-85, together with comparable information for each of the five previous financial years, and including the increases approved for the Metropolitan police, is as follows:

Financial Year	*1979-80*		*1980-81*		*1981-82*		*1982-83*		*1983-84*		*1984-85*	
	Increase applied for	*Increase approved*	*Increase applied for*	*Increase approved*	*Increase applied for*	*Increase approved*	*Increase applied for*	*Increase approved*	*Increase applied for*	*Increase approved*	*Increase applied for*	*Increase approved*
Avon and Somerset	146	100	100	67	30	—	30	—	—	—	—	—
Bedfordshire	13	—	2	13	33	15	37	5	20	20	—	—
Cambridgeshire	50	50	—	—	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Cheshire	100	—	40	40	10	—	10	—	—	—	—	—
Cleveland	50	8	50	52	—	3	—	—	—	—	—	—

Financial Year	1979-80		1980-81		1981-82		1982-83		1983-84		1984-85	
	Increase applied for	Increase approved	Increase applied for	Increase approved	Increase applied for	Increase approved	Increase applied for	Increase approved	Increase applied for	Increase approved	Increase applied for	Increase approved
Cumbria	130	25	100	15	85	—	85	—	7	—	4	—
Derbyshire	3	3	152	55	75	—	75	—	7	*7	—	—
Devon and Cornwall	62	34	—	27	10	—	10	—	—	—	†4	—
Dorset	—	—	20	—	12	12	50	7	11	—	1	—
Durham	—	—	—	—	—	6	2	2	—	—	—	—
Dyfed Powys	—	18	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Essex	179	78	101	30	45	—	45	10	35	10	10	10
Gloucestershire	—	—	36	15	9	9	—	—	24	24	—	—
Greater Manchester	365	31	300	175	125	—	125	2	—	—	—	—
Gwent	—	—	—	—	—	—	3	3	—	—	—	—
Hampshire	81	80	50	50	—	—	—	—	—	—	†3	—
Hertfordshire	—	—	—	35	—	—	40	—	—	—	—	10
Humberside	—	—	48	33	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Kent	100	51	—	—	—	4	—	—	44	—	—	—
Lancashire	70	20	20	20	—	—	—	—	20	—	—	—
Leicestershire	31	21	3	—	3	—	3	6	—	—	—	—
Lincolnshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	1	1	—	—
Merseyside	—	1	238	155	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Norfolk	—	—	59	—	—	—	8	8	—	—	—	—
Northamptonshire	56	28	28	28	—	—	—	—	14	12	16	7
Northumbria	150	—	30	30	—	2	—	—	25	—	†21	—
North Wales	60	33	3	3	1	1	—	—	3	3	—	—
North Yorkshire	85	40	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Nottinghamshire	124	115	—	(−1)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
South Wales	—	—	102	30	—	6	—	—	4	4	—	—
South Yorkshire	—	—	120	120	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Staffordshire	30	—	30	33	—	—	—	—	50	—	—	5
Suffolk	49	35	—	—	—	1	—	—	14	12	—	—
Surrey	3	3	250	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	†14	—
Sussex	6	21	—	—	—	—	—	(−1)	20	8	—	—
Thames Valley	99	8	100	98	18	4	18	17	308	143	—	—
Warwickshire	50	1	50	43	68	—	68	5	—	—	—	—
West Mercia	87	87	90	—	90	—	90	2	—	—	—	—
West Midlands	—	—	100	175	—	—	—	—	—	—	14	*14
West Yorkshire	—	—	100	50	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Wiltshire	29	11	—	2	—	—	12	7	—	—	†3	—
City of London	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	(−224)	—	—
Metropolitan	—	—	—	(−12)	—	38	—	—	—	300	—	200

* Supernumerary posts.
† Further consideration will be given shortly to these applications.

Winson Green Prison

Mr. Terry Davis asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether there are any restrictions on the food which may be taken by approved visitors to men who are on remand at Her Majesty's prison, Winson Green, and have been provisionally put in category A.

Mr. Mellor: Food will be accepted provided that it is not in need of preparation and where it requires early consumption it is limited to 24 hours supply. Non-perishable food will be accepted in a reasonable quantity. Food and drink in potentially dangerous containers will not be accepted unless it can be conveniently removed from the container before issue. The governor has discretion to refuse food which is manifestly unsuitable or in unreasonable quantities. Additionally, the privilege of receiving food and drink may be withdrawn if it is abused.

These restrictions apply to all unconvicted prisoners including those placed provisionally in category A.

Community Programme

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received alleging recent changes in the community programme regulations to be in contravention of the Sex Discrimination Act 1975; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waddington: My right hon. and learned Friend has received one letter, which he will answer shortly, from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) drawing his attention to the concern expressed by the Equal Opportunities Commission about the new regulations. I understand that the Commission has already made known its views to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment, who has responsibility for the community programme and for the employment provisions of the Sex Discrimination Act 1975.

Equal Opportunities Commission

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he next expects to meet the chairman of the Equal Opportunities Commission; what matters he intends to discuss; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waddington: My right hon. and learned Friend hopes to meet the chairman of the Equal Opportunities Commission early next year, when he expects to discuss a range of matters of current interest to the commission and to him.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Milk Quotas

Dr. Roger Thomas asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the representations he has had from farmers and farming organisations alleging inconsistencies or anomalies in secondary milk quota allocations; and whether he is satisfied with progress to date on these matters.

Mr. Jopling: I have received a number of representations from individuals and from farming organisations concerning decisions of the tribunal and its local panels in particular cases. The tribunal is a judicial body and I am content that the Dairy Produce Quota Regulations provide it with a satisfactory framework in which to operate.

Despite strenuous efforts on the part of the tribunal and local panels, for which I am extremely grateful, progress with the very high number of cases calling for attention is taking longer than I would wish. I am therefore taking steps to increase the number of tribunal members to 90 in order that the cases can be dealt with as quickly as possible.

Dr. Roger Thomas asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement as to the guidelines and criteria adopted by secondary milk quota panels in their allocation of such quotas to applicant farmers; and how many unsuccessful applicants proceed to further appeal procedures.

Mr. Jopling: The chairman of the Dairy Produce Quota Tribunal for England and Wales has issued clear guidance to the local panels and copies have been sent to all milk producers. For convenience, I am arranging for copies of this guidance to be placed in the Library of the House.

It is difficult yet to be precise about the number of appeals, but the proportion seems to be around 20 per cent.

Nuclear War (Washington Conference)

Mr. Home Robertson asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the scientists known to him to have expressed reservations about the conclusions of the Washington conference on the long-term consequences of nuclear war.

Mrs. Fenner: No formal list is kept by my Department, but I note that reservations about the conclusions of this study have been expressed by Professor Edward Teller, Dr. S. F. Singer and Mr. John Maddox, in addition to six scientists—Dr. Norman Myers, R. P. Turco, O. B. Toon, T. P. Ackerman, J. B. Pollack, and Carl Sagan — who were themselves involved in this study.

Unfit Commodities

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much of the following commodities have been made unfit for human consumption under European Economic Community policies for each of the last five years; and, in each case, what was the ultimate use of the product: beef, butter and skimmed milk.

Mr. MacGregor: There have been no measures under European Community policy in the last five years to make beef or butter unfit for human consumption.

The table shows the quantities of liquid skimmed milk which have been subsidised for use as stockfeed in each of the last five years. It is necessary to ensure that the subsidy is paid only when the milk is used for the purposes laid down in the rules. To this end controls are applied which may entail denaturing the milk so that it cannot be used for other purposes; or they may entail administrative controls which avoid the need for denaturing. Figures distinguishing these arrangements are not available except at disproportionate cost.

Liquid skimmed milk subsidised as stockfeed

Year	*million litres*
1980	652
1981	622
1982	652
1983	1,176
*1984	808

* to end October

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, for the following commodities, what is the maximum period of time, under normal storage conditions, that the product will remain fit for human consumption: *(a)* beef, *(b)* butter and *(c)* skimmed milk.

Mr. MacGregor: The maximum storage life of any commodity before it becomes unfit for human consumption depends upon its initial condition, the way it is treated and the temperature and conditions under which it is stored.

Butter, beef and skimmed milk powder, if stored satisfactorily, can remain fit for human consumption for several years. Eventually chemical decomposition may make the product unpalatable, whilst remaining fit for human consumption.

Skimmed milk is stored as skimmed milk powder.

Fishing Policy

Dr. Godman asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what changes are anticipated in the size, structure and operational activities of the European Community's fishing fleets following the admission of Spain to the European Economic Community.

Mr. MacGregor: The table sets out, in terms of gross registered tonnage (GRT), the size and structure of the Spanish and European Community's fishing fleets:

Total tonnage (GRT) of powered fishing vessels (1982 figures)

Classification	*European Community (including Greenland)*	*Spain*
0- 49·9 GRT	438,471	112,399
50- 99·9 GRT	158,299	85,029
100- 149·9 GRT	115,276	72,894
150- 499·9 GRT	279,956	314,370
500- 999·9 GRT	105,621	52,693
1,000-1,999·9 GRT	86,381	88,302
Over 2,000 GRT	77,459	12,871
Total GRT	1,261,463	738,468
Total number of vessels	54,869	17,499

These figures include the fishing fleets operating in the waters of third countries — that is, other than the

Community, Spain and Portugal—which in the Spanish case represents the greater part of the total fleet; some two thirds of Spanish catches are taken in third country waters.

The effect, if any, of Spanish accession to the Community on the operational activities of the fishing fleets of the existing Community and of Spain will depend on the terms of accession in the fisheries sector, including the transitional arrangements, which are currently under negotiation between the Community and Spain. The Government are playing their full part in determining the Community's position with the aim of protecting the interests of United Kingdom fishermen.

ENVIRONMENT

Sports Funding

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will provide for the continuation of Greater London council sports funding in the event of abolition of the council.

Mr. Macfarlane: My right hon. Friend announced our plans for sport and recreation following dissolution of the GLC on 11 April. Responsibility for these matters will pass to the boroughs. The Sports Council will have additional funds to assist withprojects of wider than local interest.

Thamesmead

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if, before reaching a decision on the future of Thamesmead in the event of the Greater London council being abolished, he intends to consult further the London boroughs of Bexley and Greenwich over the possibility of transferring ownership of Greater London housing stock at Thamesmead to them; and if he will compel them to accept the stock against their wishes.

Sir George Young: If, after consultation with the residents of Thamesmead, ownership by a trust does not appear to be the best option, the local authorities concerned would be consulted about the detailed arrangements for transfer to borough ownership.

Greenwich have not yet accepted my invitation to a discussion about the possibility of a trust for Thamesmead.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he intends to consult the London boroughs of Greenwich and Bexley, the Greater London council and the private construction industry before reaching a decision on whether to transfer Thamesmead to a trust in the event of the Greater London council being abolished.

Sir George Young: There will be wide consultation before a decision is taken, including with the residents. Greenwich has not yet accepted my invitation to a discussion about the possibility of a trust for Thamesmead.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if, before reaching a decision on the future of Thamesmead in the event of the Greater London council being abolished, he intends to consult further the London boroughs of Bexley and Greenwich over the possibility of transferring ownership of Greater London housing stock at Thamesmead to them; and if he will compel them to accept the stock against their wishes.

Sir George Young [*pursuant to his reply*, 20 November 1984]: If, after consultation with the residents of Thamesmead, ownership by a trust does not appear to be the best option, the local authorities concerned would be consulted about the detailed arrangements for transfer to borough ownership. Greenwich has not yet accepted my invitation to a discussion about the possibility of a trust for Thamesmead.

House Sales (Computer Services)

Mr. Weetch asked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what information he has as to which local authorities have adopted computer services and methods for recording and responding to inquiries regarding local land charges and additional inquiries relating to residential properties undergoing conveyancing;

(2) if he will introduce measures to enable him to grant funds to local authorities to enable them to convert to computer their local land charges register and additional inquiries information.

Mr. Macfarlane: Local authorities were first empowered to maintain computerised local land charge records by the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982. A report by LAMSAC in January this year indicated that at least 5 authorities were developing such systems. I understand that LAMSAC will shortly finalise a specification of a computerised record of local land charges and additional inquiries which will be made available to local authorities generally. The contribution which might be made by computerisation to speeding local searches and simplifying house buying is being considered by the conveyancing committee chaired by Professor Farrand. We shall consider how any extension of computerisation might be financed in the light of the committee's second report.

Mining Exploration

Mr. Skeet asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will introduce legislation to permit all preliminary drilling for general mining exploration to proceed without the need to obtain planning permission; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Macfarlane: No. Some forms of exploratory drilling can be so environmentally intrusive that it is clearly proper for them to continue to require an express planning permission. The planning authority can then consider the proposed development in the light of the particular circumstances and, where necessary, impose conditions to minimise the impact on local people and amenity. I am, however, proposing to amend the Town and Country Planning General Development Order 1977 to introduce a new class to permit, subject to conditions, certain less obtrusive exploratory operations for the purpose of ascertaining the presence, extent or quality of a deposit of a mineral with a view to its exploitation. It is hoped to effect this change in the first half of next year as part of a broader package of General Development Order amendments which are being formulated.

Tenants Charter

Mr. Heddle asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he is satisfied that local authorities are fulfilling their obligations to maintain lists available to

the public of their tenants who are prepared to take advantage of the provisions of the tenants charter; and whether he has any plans to monitor the effectiveness of this section of the tenants charter.

Sir George Young: Local authorities are not obliged to maintain such lists.

Local Authority Grants (Contractors)

Mrs. Ann Winterton asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what consideration he has given to suggestions that a system be introduced whereby local authority grants for building improvements are made only to value added tax registered contractors.

Sir George Young: We hope shortly to publish our proposals for changes to the home improvement grant system. These will include measures to help ensure that grant-aided work is carried out cost-effectively by competent builders.

Housing (Repairs and Improvements)

Mrs. Ann Winterton asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will estimate the total sums spent by United Kingdom householders on *(a)* repairs to their properties and *(b)* improvements to their properties in each of the last five years for which figures are available at current values.

Sir George Young: Information in the form requested is not available. However the Department has information for 1981 from the "English House Condition Survey", which indicated that £5·9 billion was spent by households of all tenures in England on their homes in that year. The statistics do not distinguish between improvements and repairs.

Mrs. Ann Winterton asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will estimate the total value of housing repairs and improvements with publicly funded grants carried out by firms engaged in construction work during the last three years for which figures are available.

Sir George Young: The information requested for the last three years is not available. However, from information available for 1983, the Department estimates that the total value of grant-assisted work was around £1,400 million, of which some 90 per cent. was for work carried out by firms engaged in construction.

Building Firms (Complaints)

Mrs. Ann Winterton asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many complaints have been brought to the attention of his Department in each of the last three years for which figures are available concerning dissatisfaction with work undertaken by building firms.

Sir George Young: Although we receive such complaints from time to time, my Department does not keep a detailed record of these, since in practice the large majority are made locally to the Citizens' Advice Bureaux or the trading standards department of local authorities. The number of consumer complaints notified by these bodies to the Office of Fair Trading about construction, double glazing and house insulation work in the United Kingdom since 1981 is as follows:

Year	*Numbers*
1981	24,673
1982	28,727
1983	36,316
*1984	23,015

* First six months only.

The Government are well aware of the public concern about the quality of building work. It welcomes the initiative now being taken by the construction industry to tackle this problem. The Federation of Master Builders has operated a national register of warranted builders for several years and the Building Employers Confederation has just launched its own guarantee scheme. As these schemes are taken up by consumers they will make an important contribution towards alleviating this problem.

Housing Stock

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimate he has made of the sum necessary to ensure adequate renovation and replacement of existing housing stock.

Sir George Young: The amount required annually for renovation and replacements will depend on a variety of factors including the rate of deterioration; the standard to which houses are repaired or improved; and the balance between renovation and clearance. It is for local authorities to decide, in the light of changing circumstances, how much should be allocated to renovation and replacement from within the total capital resources available to them. It is also for private individuals to decide how much to spend on the renovation and replacement of their properties.

Rivers (Pollution)

Mr. Mason asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what fishing rivers have been polluted in the area of the Yorkshire water authority during the past two years; what is the authority's policy on prosecution following pollution by industrial enterprises; whether it has a policy on re-stocking of the lost fish due to pollution; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Macfarlane [*pursuant to his reply*, 20 November 1984]: During 1982-83 and 1983-84 there were significant pollution incidents on the Rivers Swale, Ure, Calder, Aire, West Beck, Don and Dearne and their tributaries.

In mounting a prosecution for pollution the authority has regard to the severity of any fish kill as well as the available evidence and the particular circumstances. Requests for aid towards the restoration of any fish stocks affected by pollution are considered sympathetically.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Chemical Weapons

Mr. Michie asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the United Kingdom delegation to the United Nations committee on Disarmament will support article X of the proposed United States draft chemical weapons ban treaty.

Mr. Renton: We have made clear at the Conference on Disarmament that the verification provisions in the

United States draft chemical weapons treaty point to the path which the negotiations must follow if full compliance is to be assured. The United States has indicated its willingness to consider alternatives. We trust that other countries, including the Soviet Union, will demonstrate the same readiness to be flexible when the negotiations resume in January 1985.

Mr. Michie asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the United Kingdom delegation to the Geneva committee on disarmament plans to propose further measures which might ensure that during the chemical weapons destruction process, production facilities remain completely inoperative.

Mr. Renton: Allied proposals for verification of non-operation and destruction of chemical weapons production facilities are already on the Geneva negotiating table. We await a detailed Soviet response. The United Kingdom stands ready to contribute to agreement on this aspect of verification, particularly in the light of its experience in the dismantling of its own pilot plant at Nancekuke in the 1970s.

The United Kingdom is considering tabling a further working paper in early 1985 on the related verification issue of the non-diversion of industrial chemicals to illicit military stockpiles.

Ethiopia

Mr. Maclean asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will raise with the United Nations Commission for Human Rights allegations of persecution of religious groups in Ethiopia.

Mr. Rifkind: We can find little evidence of any worsening of the situation of religious groups in Ethiopia, which has been unsatisfactory in certain areas for some time. Under the circumstances we have no plans to raise this matter with the United Nations Commission for Human Rights.

Mr. Maclean asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will raise with the Foreign Ministers of the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries the need for a concerted response by developed states to the famine in Ethiopia.

Mr. Rifkind: The United Nations has appointed a special co-ordinator to oversee national and international efforts to alleviate the famine in Ethiopia. He will, no doubt, be looking for contributions from all Governments in a position to help.

Embassies (London and Moscow)

Sir Brandon Rhys Williams asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made on the negotiations with the Soviet authorities on the reciprocal provision of sites for new embassy premises and staff accommodation in London and Moscow; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: Negotiations with the Soviet Government over the reciprocal provision of embassy sites in London and Moscow have taken place, intermittently, over many years. The current position is that we are considering two central sites in Moscow which the Russians have offered to us: one for the embassy offices and staff accommodation and one for the ambassador's residence. In London, the Soviet Government have been offered two sites: one at 1-7 Kensington Palace gardens, for new offices and some staff accommodation and the other at 245 Warwick road, for further staff accommodation and amenities. The normal planning procedures will be followed in developing these two sites. We are very conscious of the need for sensitive architectural treatment, particularly in relation to the Kensington Palace gardens site. The Soviet ambassador's existing residence at 13 Kensington Palace gardens will be retained, but we expect other properties leased by the Soviet Embassy in Kensington Palace gardens to be given up once the new offices and staff accommodation are occupied. Negotiations are continuing.

Israel (Arms Embargo)

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will set out in tabular form the date or dates on which *(a)* the European Community Council of Ministers imposed an arms sales embargo on Israel, *(b)* the United Kingdom announced its compliance with the embargo, *(c)* each other Community state did the same, *(d)* the embargo was lifted by the Community and *(e)* the embargo was announced to have been ended by any individual Community state.

Mr. Renton: Defence sales policy is determined by individual Governments. Following discussions at the European Council in Brussels on 28-29 June 1982 the Belgian Prime Minister in his role as President stated that no member was supplying arms to Israel. On 30 June 1982 we announced that approval of licences for the export of British military equipment to Israel would be withheld until further notice. We are not aware that any member state has announced the lifting of restrictions.

Hong Kong

Mr. Malone asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the further development of representative government in Hong Kong.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The Honk Kong Government have today published a White Paper on the further development of representative Government in the territory. Copies of this paper have been placed in the Library of the House.

After the publication on 18 July of the Green Paper on representative government, two months were allowed for public comment, which was received from a wide variety of sources. There was general support for the aims of the Green Paper and the gradual and progressive nature of the proposals made in it. The White Paper, which takes account of these views, sets out the Hong Kong Government's intentions for the 1985 elections to the Legislative Council.

The main points in it are:

(a) Twelve members (rather than six as proposed in the Green Paper) will be elected to the Legislative Council by an electoral college in 1985. Ten will be elected by groups of district board members, organised on a regional basis, and one each by the urban council and the proposed new regional council.

(b) Twelve members (instead of the six originally proposed) will be elected in 1985 from nine functional constituencies representing various important sectors of the community.

(c) The number of appointed members of the Legislative Council will be reduced in 1985 from the present total of 30 to

22 (instead of the 23 envisaged in the Green Paper) and the number of official members from the present 16 to 10 (instead of 13).

(d) As a result of the above changes the membership of the Legislative Council will increase from 46 to 56. 24 of these will be elected.

(e) A further review of progress towards representative government will be made in 1987 (rather than 1989 as envisaged in the Green Paper).

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Peace Education

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many complaints about the teaching of peace education he has received in the current year.

Mr. Dunn: Since the beginning of this year, 67 letters expressing concern about the teaching of peace studies have been received in the Department.

EMPLOYMENT

Training Opportunities Scheme

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle asked the Secretary of State for Employment what proportion of those trained under the Manpower Services Commission's training opportunities scheme in *(a)* skillcentres, *(b)* colleges of further education and *(c)* private institutions obtain jobs in the occupation for which they are trained.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Information is not available in the precise form requested. However, 46 per cent. of those who completed training opportunities scheme occupational courses at skillcentres in 1983-84 and 53 per cent. of those who completed such courses at other training institutions were in employment three months after completion of their training using the skills they had acquired.

Skillcentre Courses

Mr. Carttiss asked the Secretary of State for Employment what is the cost per trainee of *(a)* the most expensive and *(b)* the least expensive skillcentre courses; and how this compares with the cost of similar training by other providers.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The most expensive skillcentre course, which is not run by other providers, is boring, setting and machining at £233·15 per training place per week.

The least expensive skillcentre course under the training opportunities scheme is the new work-related skills and assessment course at £81 per training place per week. A comparable course in a college of further education would cost £59·25 per training place per week. The average cost among other providers is £68 per training place per week.

Youth Training Scheme

Mr. Mhrampbell asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many teenagers who have now concluded youth training schemes in Lancashire are currently unemployed.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Comprehensive information on the destinations of youngsters leaving the youth training scheme in Lancashire is not available. However, a recent sample survey of 3,500 young people in nine Manpower Services Commission areas who left individual programmes within the scheme between 1 April and 31 July 1984 showed that 58 per cent. of those leavers responding went into employment, 6 per cent. went into training or further education and 34 per cent. were unemployed. One fifth of this last group indicated an intention of going into full-time education or training. Most—64 per cent.—of the young people responding had left before completing a full year on the scheme, but subsequent surveys of destinations will cover larger proportions of youngsters who complete a full year. A copy of the paper containing the results of the sample survey has been placed in the Library.

Mr. Crowther asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list, by industry, the numbers and percentages of trainees placed in permanent jobs on completion of the first year of the youth training scheme.

Mr. Peter Morrison [*pursuant to his reply*, 20 November 1984, Vol. 68, c. *135*]: Information in the precise form requested is not available. However, a recent sample survey of 3,500 young people in nine Manpower Services Commission areas who left individual programmes within the scheme between 1 April and 31 July 1984 showed that 58 per cent. of those leavers responding went into employment, 6 per cent. went into training or further education and 34 per cent. were unemployed. One fifth of this last group indicated an intention of going into full-time education or training. Most—64 per cent.—of the young people responding had left before completing a full year on the scheme, but subsequent surveys of destinations will cover larger proportions of youngsters who complete a full year. A copy of the paper containing the results of the sample survey has been placed in the Library.

Asbestos

Mr. Michie asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many licences have been issued under the Asbestos (Licensing) Regulations 1983 to organisations with three prohibition or improvement notices issued against them under asbestos-related health and safety legislation, with two and with one prohibition or improvement notices issued against them under asbestos-related health and safety legislation.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The number of licensees who have had improvement and/or prohibition notices issued against them at some time for asbestos related offences is as follows:

(a) 3 notices — 4 licensees
(b) 2 notices — 5 licensees
(c) 1 notice — 42 licensees

Health and Safety

Mr. Michie asked the Secretary of State for Employment, in assessing the costs and benefits of health and safety legislation on small businesses, what weight he gives to the opinion of the Chief Inspector of Factories in the introduction to the 1983 report on manufacturing and service industries about the extent to which new small enterprises are alert to the hazards to which their

employees are exposed and the role of inspectors in exerting positive and continuing pressure to secure minimum standards.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: My right hon. Friend and I support the Chief Inspector of Factories in his view that there are many small enterprises where there are potential risks to health and safety and that a sustained effort is needed to ensure that the minimum standards required by health and safety legislation are achieved.

Employment Transfer Scheme

Mr. Neale asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will review the operation of the employment transfer scheme to ensure that it does not prevent the best eligible unemployed candidate from being offered and accepting a job opportunity away from his home area when local candidates have also applied for that job.

Mr. Peter Morrison: No. I do not believe it would represent a cost effective use of taxpayers' money to give financial assistance where a person moves to take up a job which could have been filled by a local unemployed person.

Disabled People

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Employment what is the number and percentage of firms which are, for the Manchester, Sheffield, London, Newcastle, Birmingham, Stoke on Trent, Leeds and Wakefield travel-to-work areas and nationally *(a)* included in the quota scheme, *(b)* meeting the quota scheme, *(c)* failing to employ the required quota and holding a permit, *(d)* failing to employ the required quota but not holding a permit and *(e)* issued with bulk permits not to employ disabled people.

Mr. Alan Clark: The information requested is in the table and relates to 1 June 1984.

Travel-to-work area	*Number of employers subject to the quota scheme (ie those with 20 or more workers*	*were meeting the 3 per cent. quota*		*Employers included in column (1) and who: were below quota but had been issued with permits in the previous 12 months*		*were below quota and had not been issued with permits in the previous 12 months*		*were below quota and had been issued with BULK permits in the previous 12 months**	
	Number	*Number*	*Percent.*	*Number*	*Percent.*	*Number*	*Percent.*	*Number*	*Percent.*
	(1)	*(2)*	*(3)*	*(4)*	*(5)*	*(6)*	*(7)*	*(8)*	*(9)*
Manchester	1,076	280	26·0	520	48·3	276	25·7	517	48·0
Sheffield	433	151	34·9	151	34·9	131	30·2	151	34·9
London	6,316	1,627	25·8	3,500	55·4	1,189	18·8	3,385	53·6
Newcastle	332	94	28·3	196	59·0	42	12·7	194	58·4
Birmingham	1,053	363	34·5	513	48·7	177	16·8	497	47·2
Stoke on Trent	310	131	42·3	124	40·0	55	17·7	124	40·0
Leeds	595	192	32·3	278	46·7	125	21·0	277	46·6
Wakefield	71	20	28·2	40	56·3	11	15·5	40	56·3
Great Britain	36,680	11,130	30·3	18,769	51·2	6,781	18·5	18,300	49·9

Notes:

(1) The issue of a permit does not exempt an employer from his duty under the Disabled Persons (Employment) Acts to employ a quota of registered disabled people. It authorises the engagement of a specific number of people who are not registered as disabled by an employer who is below quota.

(2) Employers who are below quota and who have not been issued with a permit (Cols. 6 and 7) are not necessarily breaking the law unless they have engaged workers who are not registered as disabled.

(3) The percentage figures in columns 3, 5, 7 and 9 are based on the total number of employers subject to quota in column 1.

* (included in the overall figure in column 4).

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Employment what assistance the Manpower Services Commission gives to the employment of disabled people.

Mr. Alan Clark: The Manpower Services Commission provides assistance to the employment of disabled people both through general services in which disabled people take part alongside able-bodied people and through specialist services, exclusive to disabled people.

The services especially relevant to disabled people include

occupational assessment and work preparation through public employment rehabilitation centres;

occupational assessment and work preparation through agency rehabilitation arrangements, for example, Rock Rehabilitation Workshop in Blackpool and the Spastics Society's Sherrards Training Centre in Walwyn;

skill training under the training opportunities scheme for which there are priority access arrangements for disabled people;

training at residential training colleges where appropriate;

individual training with an employer, where the employer is prepared afterwards to keep the trainee on the payroll;

extended training lasting more than a year to meet special needs;

vocational guidance and help in finding suitable employment, through the jobcentre service, through disablement resettlement officers, and through professional and executive recruitment;

training under the youth training scheme under preferential entry conditions;

temporary employment within the community programme, under relaxed entry conditions;

the provision of special aids to employment on indefinite loan to severely disabled people;

grants to employers towards the cost of adapting premises or equipment;

assistance with fares to work for those disabled people who are unable to use public transport;

grants to employers to induce them to take on disabled people

where the individual's suitability is in doubt;
help towards the cost of employing a personal reader to assist a blind or partially sighted worker;
financial help for disabled people to set up their own business if they are unable to work either in open or sheltered employment;
reminders to employers about and administration of the statutory duty to employ the 3 per cent. quota of registered disabled people, and to reserve entry into designated occupations for registered disabled people;
the provision of employment for severely disabled people in sheltered workshops;
promotion and provision for sheltered industrial groups also for severely disabled people;
promotion of the code of good practice on the employment of disabled people through the disablement advisory service;
promotion of disabled people's abilities through the fit for work campaign.

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the estimated and actual expenditure on special resettlement scheme grants for the employment of disabled people in the years 1982, 1983, 1984 on the job introduction scheme, adaptations to premises and equipment, assistance with fares to work, special aid to employment and business on own account; how many disabled people were helped on projects involved in each case; and what is the estimated expenditure on each of these schemes for 1985.

Mr. Alan Clark: The information, which is collected on a financial year basis, is as follows:

Job Introduction Schemes

	Estimated Expenditure £	*Actual Expenditure* £	*Beneficiaries*
1981-82	425,000	354,588	1,434
1982-83	531,500	439,861	1,295
1983-84	571,000	567,980	1,850
1984-85	635,000	—	—

Adaptations to Premises and Equipment

	Estimated Expenditure £	*Actual Expenditure* £	*Beneficiaries*
1981-82	150,000	71,469	93
1982-83	177,100	107,334	117
1983-84	208,000	134,412	170
1984-85	150,500	—	—

Assistance with Fares to work

	Estimated Expenditure £	*Actual Expenditure* £	*Beneficiaries*
1981-82	250,000	230,607	272
1982-83	295,400	273,019	296
1983-84	299,000	327,776	364
1984-85	330,000	—	—

Special Aids to Employment

	Estimated Expenditure £	*Actual Expenditure* £	*Beneficiaries*
1981-82	310,000	312,461	765
1982-83	751,800	529,379	1,067
1983-84	585,000	792,168	1,268
1984-85	800,000	—	—

Business on Own Account

	Estimated Expenditure £	*Actual Expenditure* £	*Beneficiaries*
1981-82	17,500	19,762	13
1982-83	23,400	24,085	7
1983-84	53,000	34,568	13
1984-85	60,000	—	—

Labour Statistics

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Employment at what rate, for each year since 1979 *(a)* disabled people and *(b)* able-bodied people have been placed in employment nationally and for the Manchester, Sheffield, London, Newcastle, Birmingham, Stoke on Trent, Leeds and Wakefield travel-to-work areas; what percentage has been placed through jobcentres; what percentage of disabled people has been placed through resettlement officers; what these figures are for disabled people registered as (i) section 1 and (ii) section 2; and how many disablement resettlement officers are employed in each area and nationally.

Mr. Alan Clark: The total number of labour market engagements in Great Britain in the relevant financial years is estimated to have been as follows:

	Engagements (millions)
1979-80	8·4
1980-81	6·1
1981-82	5·6
1982-83	6·3
1983-84	6·5

Separate figures for able-bodied and disabled people are not available nor is information for individual travel-to-work areas.

The total number of placings by jobcentres as a proportion of these total estimated engagements in the labour market for the relevant financial years was as follows:

	Percentage
1979-80	23
1980-81	25
1981-82	26
1982-83	24
1983-84	27

Before 1983-84, all separately identifiable placings of disabled people through jobcentres were made by disablement resettlement officers or their assistants. For 1983-84, the information required is set out in the table.

Placings by disablement resettlement officers as a proportion of total jobcentre placings of disabled people

percentage

	Section I	*Section II*
Great Britain	68·1	91·3
Travel-to-work areas		
Manchester	81·3	97·1
Sheffield	55·3	96·4
London	78·2	99·4

	Section I	Section II
Newcastle	36·6	91·2
Birmingham	98·3	100·0
Stoke-on-Trent	96·1	100·0
Leeds	53·0	94·1
Wakefield	77·5	100·0

Notes:

1. Placings of disabled people through self-service vacancy displays are not included in total placings for the purpose of this calculation.
2. The proportions in this table vary widely between the areas shown because general employment staff become involved in placing disabled people at different dates in different areas.

During 1984 there will be around 450 disablement resettlement officers nationally.

The numbers for each of the relevant travel-to-work areas, as at November 1984, is as follows:

Travel-to-work area	Number of DROs
Manchester	17
Sheffield	5
London	53
Newcastle	6
Birmingham	13
Stoke-on-Trent	4
Leeds	5
Wakefield	4

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Employment (1) how many and what percentage, for each year since 1979, of *(a)* able-bodied people and *(b)* registered disabled people have been unemployed nationally and in the Manchester, Sheffield, London, Newcastle, Birmingham, Stoke on Trent, Leeds and Wakefield travel-to-work areas for (i) over three months, (ii) over six months, (iii) over one year, (iv) over 18 months and (v) over two years; and what these figures are for disabled people registered as (i) section 1 and (ii) section 2 disabled;

(2) what, for each year since 1979, is *(a)* the unemployment rate, *(b)* the number of registered disabled people and *(c)* the unemployment rate for registered disabled people, nationally and for the Manchester, Sheffield, London, Stoke on Trent, Newcastle, Birmingham, Leeds and Wakefield travel-to-work areas; and what are these figures for disabled people registered (i) section 1 and (ii) section 2 disabled.

Mr. Alan Clark: I shall reply to the right hon. Member as soon as possible.

Community Programme

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he intends to discuss with the chairman of the Manpower Services Commission recent changes in community programme regulations as they affect married women; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Morrison: My right hon. Friend and I meet the chairman of the Manpower Services Commission frequently to discuss many matters including the community programme. We are satisfied that the recent changes will ensure that places go to those most in need of help.

Wages

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Employment what is the average adult wage for *(a)* Wales, *(b)* England and *(c)* the United Kingdom at the latest date for which figures are available.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The latest figures on the average earnings of full-time adult employees working a full week relate to April 1984. Separate details for Wales, for England and for Great Britain are given in tables 12 and 13 of "New Earnings Survey 1984, Part A", a copy of which is in the Library. Comparable 1984 figures for the United Kingdom are not yet available.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Royal National Throat, Nose and Ear Hospital

Mr. Pavitt asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what consultation has taken place on the proposed closure of the Golden Square hospital for ear, nose and throat services; if he has yet given his approval for this closure; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what plans he has to accommodate patients and staff of the Royal National throat, nose and ear hospital in Golden Square if the closure of this hospital takes place in three months' time.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Bloomsbury health authority issued a consultative document on 9 November on the proposed closure in February 1985 of the Golden Square branch of the Royal national throat, nose and ear hospital and the consolidation of the hospital's services in the Gray's Inn Road branch. The concentration of services on one site in Gray's Inn road was first proposed by the former board of governors of the RNTNE and the outline proposal was included in Bloomsbury health authority's November 1983 and February 1984 consultative documents on the district's overall strategy. The latest document sets out the authority's detailed proposals for accommodating services at Gray's Inn road and the staffing implications of the proposal. Because the proposals are currently the subject of consultation the question of my right hon. Friend's involvement does not yet arise.

Cervical Cancer

Mr. Cabora asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what has been the trend, in the last year, in the incidence of cervical cancer among women under the age of 35 years due to *(a)* fast-growing cancers and *(b)* endocervical adenocarcinomas.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Information relating to fast-growing cancers is not available. The extraction of the histological data needed to produce statistics on the incidence of endocervical adenocarcinomas could be undertaken only at disproportionate cost.

Supplementary Benefit

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) when his Policy Inspectorate's report on single payments for furniture will be published;

(2) when his Policy Inspectorate's report on single payments for furniture was made available to the Social Security Advisory Committee;

(3) when his Policy Inspectorate's report on single payments for furniture was completed.

Mr. Whitney: I refer the hon. Member to my hon. Friend's reply to the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) on 30 October, at column *965*. The report has not yet been given to the Social Security Advisory Committee.

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what change is to be made after the uprating on 26 November in the amount that is deemed to be paid by a trade union to its members on strike in the course of a dispute, which is then deducted from any supplementary benefit paid to such families.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to the reply*, 12 November 1984, c. *141*]: As in previous years the specified sum deducted from benefit in a trade dispute will increase from the uprating date in accordance with the formula set out in section 6(2) of the Social Security (No. 2) Act 1980. The figure produced by that formula this year is £16, and my right hon. Friend has accordingly today made an order stating that sum, as he is required to do by the same section. The deduction does not depend on the payment of strike pay. The increase from £15 to £16 will, of course, take place at the same time as supplementary benefit rates themselves are increased by the uprating so that, for example, the rates for an adult dependant will rise by £1, and for an adult dependant and two children under 11 by £1.90.

Social Security Advisory Committee

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he expects to announce the appointment of the chair of the Social Security Advisory Committee.

Mr. Newton: We hope to make an announcement about the chairmanship of the Social Security Advisory Committee in the near future.

Population Statistics

Mr. Coombs asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list the 30 English non-metropolitan districts which have shown the greatest percentage growth in their electorate since 1979; and what has been the percentage growth and actual figures in each case.

Mr. John Patten: The information requested is in the table.

Non-Metropolitan County District (ranked by percentage growth)	*Electorate 1979 Register*	*1984 Register*	*1979-1984 Growth Increase in Electorate*	*Percentage Increase*
Milton Keynes	75,229	98,496	23,267	30·9
Redditch	42,756	51,193	8,437	19·7
Bracknell	53,822	63,241	9,419	17·5
Wokingham	78,061	91,052	12,991	16·6
Crawley	54,924	63,917	8,993	16·4
Tamworth	40,561	47,179	6,618	16·3
Eastleigh	65,269	74,481	9,212	14·1
Peterborough	88,648	101,065	12,417	14·0
Wimborne	51,923	58,751	6,828	13·2
Thamesdown	103,842	117,232	13,390	12·9
Cherwell	69,723	78,461	8,738	12·5
Basingstoke & Deane	88,897	99,964	11,067	12·4
East Hampshire	63,104	70,942	7,838	12·4
Huntingdon	80,131	89,911	9,780	12·2
Basildon	105,217	117,819	12,602	12·0
Northampton	109,748	122,833	13,085	11·9
Hart	50,675	56,652	5,977	11·8
Aylesbury Vale	89,163	99,375	10,212	11·5
South Staffordshire	68,219	75,823	7,604	11·1
The Wrekin	83,532	92,819	9,287	11·1
Chelmsford	98,607	109,549	10,942	11·1
Fareham	62,441	69,328	6,887	11·0
Caradon	48,967	54,173	5,206	10·6
Uttlesford	43,096	47,655	4,559	10·6
Warrington	118,915	131,465	12,550	10·6
South Cambridgeshire	75,269	83,128	7,859	10·4
New Forest	108,466	119,673	11,207	10·3
Selby	57,393	63,305	5,912	10·3
Woodspring	117,893	130,037	12,144	10·3
Horsham	72,285	79,717	7,433	10·3

Whooping Cough Vaccine

Mr. Andrew Bowden asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many children have received the whooping cough vaccine since it was introduced by the National Health Service broken down between *(a)* boys and *(b)* girls.

Mr. John Patten: Whooping cough vaccination was first recommended as part of the childhood immunisation programme in 1957 and central collection of statistics of the number of children vaccinated against whooping cough started in 1958. Between 1958 and 1983 in England and Wales 12·9 million children were recorded as completing primary courses of vaccination against whooping cough. No analysis by sex is available.

Mr. Andrew Bowden asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many of the 798 vaccine damage children were damaged by whooping cough vaccine.

Mr. John Patten: 788 awards have been made under the Vaccine Damage Payments Act, 1979. Information is not available on how many of these have been made because my right hon. Friend is satisfied that severe disablement is the result of vaccination against whooping cough, but in 632 cases which resulted in an award, the claimants cited pertussis vaccine as the one they thought caused the severe disablement.

Severe Disablement Allowance

Mr. Fallon asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what moneys have been allocated by his Department to publicise the severe disablement allowance; what media advertising has been undertaken; what results have been achieved; and whether he is satisfied with the take-up.

Mr. Newton: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) on 23 October at column *570-71*. As a direct result of the publicity campaign we have already received over 38,000 requests for leaflets and claim forms and, as at 23 October, some 2,500 claims for severe disablement allowance had been received in the Department's local offices. The success of the advertising campaign is also reflected in the significant increase in the number of claims for the existing non-contributory invalidity pension and housewives' non-contributory invalidity pension.

The publicity campaign has been backed up by the special exercise to invite claims for non-contributory invalidity pension from those currently drawing supplementary benefit. As at 23 October, some 56,600 invitations had been issued, and 31,600 claims had been received of which 16,300 have so far resulted in awards of benefit.

Mr. Gerald Bowskill

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what were the reasons for the Civil Service appeals board recommendation to reinstate Gerald Bowskill as a staff nurse at the Rampton special hospital.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The appeals board held that the decision to dismiss Mr. Bowskill was unfair. Ministers are not responsible for the decisions and recommendation of the board.

Births

Ms. Richardson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will set out the number of births in England and Wales to resident girls aged 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15 years for each of the years from 1969 to 1983; and if he will also show the rate of births to these age groups per 1,000 girls.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The information is given in the table.

This information on live-births cannot be compared exactly to information on the number of abortions performed in England and Wales to resident girls of the same ages, as provided in my reply to another question by the hon. Member on 20 November at columns *128-129*. This is because live births occur on average nine months after conception whereas abortions take place on average three months after conception. The Office of Population Censuses and Surveys has, however, published detailed statistics on abortions and births combined, analysed by the age of the mother at conception, and these can be found in OPCS Monitor No. FMI 84/6 dated 17 July 1984, a copy of which is in the Library.

*Live births occurring to girls aged 11-15, 1969-1983, England and Wales**

Year of occurrence	*Age of mother* 11	12	13	14	15
			Number of births		
1969	3	11	32	204	1,236
1970	3	9	24	217	1,166
1971	1	4	32	229	1,248
1972	1	4	27	241	1,317
1973	1	7	38	271	1,361
1974	0	6	23	258	1,282
1975	1	3	35	232	1,259
1976	1	3	34	215	1,173
1977	0	3	22	208	1,074
1978	2	1	22	194	1,164
1979	2	2	26	208	1,138
1980	9	8	18	190	1,056
1981‡	10	0	20	190	960
1982	0	11	14	192	952
1983	0	3	22	174	1,050
			Births per 1,000 girls at each age†		
1969	0·01	0·03	0·10	0·65	3·82
1970	0·01	0·03	0·07	0·68	3·65
1971	—	0·01	0·09	0·68	3·80
1972	—	0·01	0·08	0·70	3·92
1973	—	0·02	0·10	0·76	3·93
1974	—	0·02	0·06	0·71	3·60
1975	—	0·01	0·09	0·61	3·45
1976	—	0·01	0·09	0·55	3·08
1977	—	0·01	0·05	0·53	2·76
1978	0·01	—	0·05	0·48	2·95
1979	0·01	0·01	0·07	0·51	2·81
1980	0·02	0·02	0·05	0·48	2·59
1981‡	0·02	—	0·05	0·48	2·40
1982	—	0·03	0·04	0·50	2·42
1983	—	0·01	0·06	0·49	2·92

* The figures may include a very small number of births to girls whose usual residence was outside England and Wales.

† All rates have been based upon estimates of the resident population revised following the 1981 Census. Rates per 1,000 have not been calculated where there is only one recorded birth in the age group.

‡ The 1981 figures are estimates based upon a 10 per cent. sample of births; small numbers are therefore subject to particular uncertainty.

War Widows (Pensions)

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the Government's total expenditure on war widows' pensions in the financial year 1983-84; and how the figure compares with that for each of the previous five years.

Mr. Whitney: The total expenditure on pensions, grants and allowances paid to war widows and dependants was £177 million in 1983-84. The corresponding figures for previous years are as follows:

Year	*£ million*
1978-79	117
1979-80	129
1980-81	146
1981-82	166
1982-83	174

One-parent Families

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give the latest available figures for the number of *(a)* one-parent families headed by a woman, *(b)* one-parent families headed by a man and *(c)* two-parent families who rely on (i) state benefits, (ii) earnings from employment, (iii) maintenance payments and (iv) other items as their main source of income.

Mr. Whitney: The latest available figures for the "Family Expenditure Survey 1981" for Great Britain, are:

Main source of income	*One parent families headed by:*		*Two parent families*
	Woman	*Man*	
State benefits	450,000	30,000	500,000
Earnings from employment	280,000	80,000	5,630,000
Maintenance payments	80,000	—	—
Other items	10,000	—	10,000

Note:
All figures have been rounded to the nearest 10,000 and are subject to sampling error.

Earnings Rule

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what proposals he has to relax the earnings rule for pensioners.

Mr. Whitney: From 26 November the amount that can be earned by a pensioner before his or her pension is reduced, will rise by 7·7 per cent. from £65 to £70. This compares with a rise in prices and pensions of 5·1 per cent. in the year to May 1984 and thus represents a further relaxation of the earnings rule.

The abolition of the earnings rule, to which the Government remain committed, depends on the availability of resources and competing priorities.

Mobility Allowance

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) for each of the past five years how many applicants who were claiming mobility allowance succeeded in their claim on their first application;

(2) how many claims for mobility allowance have been made for each of the past five years;

(3) in each of the past five years how many claims for mobility allowance in England and Wales have been made by or on behalf of physically handicapped people;

(4) over each of the past five years what was the average time required for each stage of a mobility allowance claim (physically and mentally handicapped) to be processed;

(5) how many applicants who claimed for mobility allowance did not appeal after an initial refusal during each of the past five years;

(6) how many applicants succeeded in their claims for a mobility allowance after an appeal to the Medical Board in each of the last five years;

(7) how many applicants succeeded in their claims for a mobility allowance after an appeal to the Medical Appeal Tribunal over each of the past five years;

(8) what guidance is given to the doctors who make assessments for mobility allowance;

(9) what proportion of applications for mobility allowance are successful, broken down by city or region in each of the last five years;

(10) how many claims for mobility allowance have been made by or on behalf of mentally handicapped people for each of the past five years.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 12 November 1984, c. *143-44*]: I regret that information is not available in the form requested. The information available for Great Britain is as follows. All figures relate to decisions given in the relevant years, not to the results of claims made in those years. It is not possible to provide separate figures by nature of disability or by region.

	Claims		*Appeals*			
	Number of Claims	*Decided in claimant's favour*	*Appeals and references decided by medical board*	*Decided in claimant's favour*	*Appeals decided by medical appeal tribunal*	*Decided in claimant's favour*
	(1)	*(2)*	*(3)*	*(4)*	*(5)*	*(6)*
1980	85,730	60,180	7,900	2,710	1,906	519
1981	60,770	41,440	7,120	2,270	2,454	691
1982	109,340	76,130	11,410	3,600	2,663	703
	*(21,240)	*(17,130)				
1983	126,300	86,300	12,970	3,890	3,070	1,000
	*(19,500)	*(16,450)				
1984 (to 12 November)	115,600	82,100				
	*(21,260)	*(17,700)	13,260	4,270	3,436	948

Notes: Columns (1) and (2) for 1980 and 1981 figures for renewal claims are not available. For 1982 onwards such figures are shown separately in brackets marked * but included in the total. The figures for 1983 correct those given in a reply to the hon. Member for Burnley on 25 April [*Official Report* Vol. 58 column *562*].
Columns (3) to (6)—Figures include renewal claims.

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Social Services over each of the past five years, what was the average time required for each stage of a mobility allowance claim (physically and mentally handicapped) to be processed.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 12 November 1984, c. *143-44*.]: The information is as follows:

	Average time in weeks				
	†1980	†1981	†1982	†1983	‡1984
Overall processing time	13·2	18·8	16·4	11·8	10
Receipt of claim to despatch to regional office for medical examination	*	*	2·6	2	1·2
Obtaining examining medical practitioner's report	*	*	6	4·2	4·6
Processing at mobility allowance unit	*	*	5·8	3·6	2·2
Determination of claim to receipt of payment (where appropriate)	2	2	2	2	2

* Separate figures are not available by stages prior to 1982.
† Quarter ending December.
‡ Four-week period ending 2 November.

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what guidance is given to the doctors who make assessments for mobility allowance.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 12 November 1984, c. *143-44*.]: The guidance is published in leaflet NI 213 "Mobility Allowance, Notes for Medical Practitioners", copies of which are in the Library.

Social Security Reviews

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many meetings, in addition to the formal hearings, have been held by each of the social security review teams.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 16 November 1984, c. *385-86*.]: In addition to oral hearings to hear evidence from individuals and organisations, the social security reviews have so far had 54 meetings:

	Meetings
Inquiry into provision for retirement	22
Reviews of benefits for children and young people	7
Supplementary benefit review	10
Housing benefit review	15

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if he will publish a list of the Government Departments that have given evidence or made representations to the social security reviews, either to individual review teams or to the review generally;

(2) if he will list the Departments represented on the social security teams;

(3) if he will list the names and numbers of advisers from outside Government, and civil servants from outside the Department of Health and Social Security, who are engaged in work for the social security reviews.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 16 November 1984; c. *985-86*]: The following people from outside Government are assisting in the work of the social security reviews:

Inquiry into provision for retirement
(Chairman: The right hon. Norman Fowler, MP).
Mr. Stewart Lyon, general manager (finance)—of Legal and General and president of the Institute of Actuaries.
Mr. Marshall Field, general manager and actuary of Phoenix Assurance and chairman of the occupational pensions schemes and joint working group.
Professor Alan Peacock, vice-chancellor of the university of Buckingham.
Mr. Mark Weinberg, director of Hambro Life.

Review of benefits for children and young people
(Chairman: The right hon. Norman Fowler, MP).
Mrs. Barbara Shenfield, chairman of the Women's Royal Voluntary Service.
Mr. T. G. Parry Rogers, director, personnel and Europe, of the Plessey Company.

Supplementary Benefits Review
(Chairman: Mr. Tony Newton MP).
Mr. Robin Wendt, chief executive of Cheshire county council and member of the social security advisory committee.
Mr. Basil Collins, CBE, chairman, Nabisco Brands Ltd.

Housing Benefit Review
(Chairman: Mr. Jeremy Rowe, CBE, chairman of the Peterborough Development Corporation and deputy chairman of the Abbey National building society).
Mr. Alan Blakemore, CBE, formerly chief executive of the London borough of Croydon.
Mrs. Rhea Martin, lecturer in Law at the Hatfield polytechnic and a vice-chairman of the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux.

Central Review Unit
Mr. J. Q. Thompson, consultant with Coopers and Lybrand Associates.

The membership of the inquiry into provision for retirement also included three Ministers — from the Treasury, the Department of Employment, and the Department of Trade and Industry—and the Government Actuary. No other Government Departments are represented on the review teams themselves. Officials from a number of Departments, however, have provided information and evidence to the reviews, and have attended meetings of the review teams when the chairmen have considered it appropriate. The names of civil servants in departments outside the Department of Health and Social Security who have been or are engaged in work connected with the reviews are not held centrally.

Prescription Charges

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he has any plans to extend eligibility for exemptions from paying prescription charges.

Mr. John Patten [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 November 1984, c. *68*]: The existing exemption arrangements together with the prepayment certificate system ensure that no one need be deprived of necessary medication on financial grounds; some 72 per cent. of prescribed items are dispensed free of charge and a further 6 per cent. are dispensed to holders of pre-payment certificates. While we have sympathy for anyone with continuing prescription needs who does not qualify for exemption we have no proposals for change.

Prescriptions

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what could be the saving per year to the National Health Service budget if generic prescribing were extended to all drugs.

Mr. John Patten [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 November 1984, c. *71*]: If doctors were required to prescribe

generically wherever possible the potential savings, based on present relative prices of generic and branded drugs, are estimated at about £35 million a year in England.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Salmon

Mr. William Ross asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many salmon were taken by anglers in the river Bush in each year since the Department of Agriculture Northern Ireland took over the river; and in each of those years how many salmon were taken in each of the specially designated sections and in the unrestricted section.

Dr. Boyson: The information is as follows:

Year	New Stretch	Town or Special Stretch	Leap or Restricted Stretch	Unrestricted (Reported)
1973	—	68	37	20
1974	—	129	89	30
1975	—	170	135	111
1976	—	73	39	34
1977	—	79	15	13
1978	—	30	18	19
1979	—	46	69	28
1980	—	125	45	30
1981	—	103	53	35
1982	—	96	63	30
1983	—	89	30	1
1984	14	42	9	12

Accurate angling catch returns are not available in respect of the unrestricted stretch of the River and the figures given represent only those catches reported to the Department of Agriculture.

*An additional stretch of the River, downstream of the special or town stretch, was acquired for angling in 1984.

Mr. William Ross asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many salmon grilse were taken in the Foyle fisheries area in each of the last five years and the current year by *(a)* anglers, *(b)* draft nets, *(c)* drift netting and *(d)* fixed nets; and what were the sums received by way of licences in each of those years from (i) anglers and (ii) netsmen.

Dr. Boyson: The final returns for the 1984 season are not yet available but the information for the previous five years is as follows:

	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983
Reported Angling Catch	966(11)	1,134 (6)	1,517(12)	2,125(19)	831 (7)
Draft Net Catch	17,363	16,438	11,781	20,304	15,481
Drift Net Catch	16,302	29,822	21,252	37,165	65,654
Fixed Net Catch	3,338	2,963	1,748	2,688	2,117
Angling Licence Revenue (£)	20,262	27,678	28,916	28,691	29,800
Commercial Licence Revenue (£)	21,740	23,257	25,375	27,338	32,763

The angling catch figures include only the number of salmon and grilse caught by those licensed anglers who made returns to the Foyle Fisheries Commission. The figures in brackets indicate the number of returns received as a percentage of the total number of angling licences issued for each year.

Cattle (Exports)

Mr. William Ross asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many cattle in each of the following categories have been exported from Northern Ireland and to where in each month to the latest available date since 1 January 1983: *(a)* bulls, *(b)* cows for slaughter, *(c)* milk cows, *(d)* maiden heifers, *(e)* in-calf heifers, *(f)* fat steers, *(g)* fat heifers and *(h)* dropped calves; and in each category how many were of recognised milk breeds.

Dr. Boyson: Customs and Excise data on the various categories of cattle exported from Northern Ireland in each month since 1 January 1983 are as follows: all exports were destined for the Republic of Ireland. Also given are numbers of the various categories of cattle shipped from Northern Ireland to Great Britain in each month over the same time period. Data for milk cows, maiden heifers and dropped calves are not separately available from export and shipping statistics while numbers of in-calf heifers are available only from shipping statistics. Further, "recognised milk breeds" are not separately identified in the collected statistics.

Cattle exported from Northern Ireland

	Bulls	Cows for slaughter	Pur bred breeding	Other than pure bred for breeding or dairy purposes		Fat steers	Fat heifers
				Cows	Heifers		
1983							
January	6	585	5	78	142	57	336
February	50	443	14	63	57	51	211
March	8	485	5	106	59	17	41
April	3	220	5	103	79	42	87
May	3	432	19	99	43	15	42
June	14	682	4	—	26	132	57
July	8	438	1	—	6	215	27
August	114	1,220	—	1	—	204	113
September	13	1,191	2	96	67	354	308
October	30	1,068	1	59	78	481	176
November	5	746	39	23	54	309	43

	Bulls	Cows for slaughter	Pur bred breeding	Other than pure bred for breeding or dairy purposes		Fat steers	Fat heifers
				Cows	Heifers		
December	—	762	4	33	36	170	63
Year	254	8,272	99	661	647	2,047	1,504
1984							
January	—	938	3	48	4	3	69
February	4	966	12	22	29	35	50
March	3	763	6	59	62	57	72
April	12	744	19	74	7	32	25
May	9	2,068	28	182	39	46	50
June	8	2,165	24	208	63	30	50
July	12	620	*9	37	44	85	21
August	112	1,255	—	60	16	220	35
Year to date	160	9,519	101	690	264	508	372

* Forty animals re-exported to France not included.

Home fed cattle shipped from Northern Ireland to Great Britain

	Bulls	Cows for slaughter	In-calf heifers	Fat steers	Fat heifers	Dairy and breeding cows
1983						
January	35	—	21	—	41	2
February	9	—	—	—	21	3
March	9	—	—	—	—	—
April	2	—	—	—	19	—
May	4	—	—	—	—	1
June	2	—	—	—	—	—
July	—	—	—	8	10	1
August	5	—	49	—	19	—
September	3	—	—	—	42	—
October	74	—	1	16	21	14
November	8	—	—	—	40	—
December	3	—	—	—	20	3
Year	154	—	71	24	233	24
1984						
January	23	—	—	—	40	11
February	—	—	—	—	20	—
March	3	—	—	—	21	—
April	—	—	—	—	—	—
May	7	—	—	—	—	—
June	1	—	—	—	38	—
July	1	—	—	—	94	—
August	2	—	—	20	79	—
September	1	—	—	—	139	4
October	66	—	—	—	195	3
Year to date	104	—	—	20	626	18

Health Centres (Union Flag)

Mr. William Ross asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether the Union flag is flown at health centres in Northern Ireland on the statutory days.

Mr. Chris Patten: By Her Majesty's command, the Union flag is flown on prescribed days from Government buildings. Health centres do not come within this category.

Timber

Mr. William Ross asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much timber, in hoppus feet, has been produced from Northern Ireland forests; how much has been used in Northern Ireland; how much has been exported; and how much timber was imported from the Republic of Ireland for use in Northern Ireland in each of the last 10 years.

Dr. Boyson: The available information is:

Imports from the Republic of Ireland		*Exports from Northern Ireland**	
Year	*Tonnes*	*Year*	*Tonnes*
1975	39,360	1975	Not available
1976	58,505	1976	Not available
1977	59,607	1977	Not available
1978	100,457	1978	Not available
1979	98,867	1979	23,440
1980	122,982	1980	19,038
1981	97,233	1981	17,901
1982	129,911	1982	34,445
1983	141,139	1983	25,711
1984†	78,532	1984‡	13,129

* To all countries (excluding Great Britain).
† January to July.
‡ January to August.

Wood Production from State Forests (Volumes in Cubic Metres)

Financial Year	Volume (m^2)
1974-75	45,722
1975-76	36,280
1976-77	41,213
1977-78	46,580
1978-79	50,382
1979-80	52,572
1980-81	60,304
1981-82	65,354
1982-83	80,811
1983-84	*106,425

* Provisional.

Details of the volume of timber produced from privately owned forests are not available.

Mr. William Ross asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the extent of private planting of trees for timber production in Northern Ireland in each of the last 10 years; and what sums were paid by the Government in grants in aid of private forestry in each of those years.

Dr. Boyson: The areas for which the first instalments of planting grants were paid and the sums paid in grant aid in each of the past 10 years were as follows:

Financial Year	First Instalment of Planting Grant—Area (hectares)	Total Grant Aid £
1974-75	137·3	16,449
1975-76	73·7	15,307
1976-77	34·1	9,269
1977-78	61·8	10,727
1978-79	24·2	9,329
1979-80	37·1	28,710
1980-81	125·3	33,804
1981-82	189·8	46,925
1982-83	33·4	19,242
1983-84	66·8	34,081

Statistics of areas planted without planning grants are not available.

Afforestation

Mr. William Ross asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what acreage of land has been purchased by the Department of Agriculture in each of the last 10 years for afforestation purposes; what was the reserve acreage in each of those years and at the present time; and how much of the reserve lands is in each county.

Dr. Boyson: The area acquired for afforestation and the plantable reserves in each of the past 10 years are set out below.

It is not possible to relate precisely acquisitions and new planting with the plantable reserve, for example acquisitions include unplantable and planted land as well as plantable land; some land is classified as unplantable on economic grounds due to its size and location but it will become plantable when adjoining land is acquired.

Areas acquired by Department of Agriculture from 1974 to 1984 (Hectares)

Financial Year	Area (Hectares)
1974-75	2,331
1975-76	1,250
1976-77	548
1977-78	445
1978-79	468
1979-80	1,162
1980-81	743
1981-82	294
1982-83	686
1983-84	424

Note: The above figures include those areas managed by the Department on behalf of other Government bodies.

Plantable Reserve by County (Hectares)

	Antrim	Armagh	Down	Londonderry	Tyrone	Fermanagh	Total
31 March 1974	1,029	289	112	1,041	2,696	1,465	6,632
31 March 1975	1,060	328	83	1,024	1,646	1,442	5,583
31 March 1976	908	321	106	875	1,474	1,707	5,391
31 December 1976	996	325	107	873	1,658	1,765	5,724
31 December 1977	1,097	262	373	777	1,640	1,725	5,874
31 December 1978	930	245	350	729	1,429	1,512	5,195
31 December 1979	1,673	207	295	646	1,310	1,327	5,458
31 March 1980	1,774	173	242	532	1,191	1,640	5,552
31 March 1982	1,646	172	180	478	1,168	1,090	4,734
31 March 1983	1,423	163	196	689	1,101	1,075	4,647
31 March 1984	1,266	185	194	667	1,023	1,095	4,430

Footnotes:

(a) Period 31 March 1974 to 31 March 1976
The figures show the reserve after planting in the spring of the year and the previous autumn has been deducted.

(b) Period 31 December 1976 to 31 December 1979
The figures show the reserve after planting in the autumn of the previous year and spring of the current year has been deducted.

(c) Period 31 March 1981 to 31 March 1984
The figures show the reserve without planting in the autumn of the previous year and spring of the current year having been deducted.

Mr. William Ross asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the extent of the forestry plantings by the Department of Agriculture in Northern Ireland in each of the last 10 years; and what has been the income from sales of forestry products by the Department in each of those years.

Dr. Boyson: Following is the information:

Department of Agriculture planting: Income from sales of forestry products

Planting season	*New planting hectares*	*Replanting hectares*	*Total planting hectares*	*Financial year*	*£'000*
1974-75	1,063	300	1,363	1974-75	651
1975-76	998	174	1,172	1975-76	484
1976-77	968	182	1,150	1976-77	506
1977-78	945	275	1,220	1977-78	814
1978-79	715	280	995	1978-79	714
1979-80	714	374	1,088	1979-80	727
1980-81	641	274	915	1980-81	762
1981-82	720	352	1,072	1981-82	633
1982-83	638	523	1,161	1982-83	694
1983-84	619	409	1,028	1983-84	917

Foyle and Craigavon Bridges

Mr. William Ross asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is now the average daily and hourly traffic flow across the new Foyle bridge and the Craigavon bridge, respectively; what are the daily and hourly capacities of these two bridges; and when he expects that capacity to be reached.

Mr. Chris Patten: The information is as follows:

	Average flow	*Design capacity*
Foyle bridge:		
vehicles per day	10,000	30,000
vehicles per hour	730	5,000
Craigavon bridge:		
vehicles per day	26,000	40,000
vehicles per hour	2,130	6,000

It is not expected that either bridge will reach its capacity before the end of the century.

Mr. William Ross asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the final construction cost of the new Foyle bridge; what further sums were expended on ancillary works such as approach roads and roundabouts; and how these sums compare with the various estimates made when the scheme was first proposed.

Mr. Chris Patten: The final accounts are not yet available but the costs are estimated to be £23·9 million for the bridge, and £3 million for approach roads. These figures represent a reduction in constant price terms from the pre-construction estimates.

Mr. William Ross asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what were the total sums or approximate sums spent on steelwork purchased for the new Foyle bridge; and, of these, how much was spent in Londonderry city.

Mr. Chris Patten: The total cost of fabrication, transportation and erection of steel for the Foyle bridge was approximately £10·4 million. It is not possible to quantify the proportion of this expenditure spent in Londonderry city.

Mr. William Ross asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many engineering firms in Londonderry city were invited to submit tenders for items required for the new Foyle bridge; and how many engineering firms from Londonderry city submitted tenders for such work.

Mr. Chris Patten: This is a matter for the contractors involved.

Mr. William Ross asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what preference was given to local firms in Londonderry city for the supply of items needed for the new Foyle bridge.

Mr. Chris Patten: The contractual arrangements between the main contractor for the Foyle bridge and the Department of Environment for Northern Ireland specified that preference should be given to the use of materials and fittings manufactured or originating in Northern Ireland, provided they complied with the contract specification and were readily available at competitive prices.

Richmond Centre

Mr. William Ross asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the final cost of the Richmond centre; and how this compares with the various estimates made since the scheme was first proposed.

Mr. Chris Patten: The Richmond project, including the office accommodation, will not be completed until April 1985; the estimated cost is £9·5 million compared with a pre-tender estimate of £11·1 million in November 1980.

Mr. William Ross asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what were the total sums or approximate sums spent in Londonderry on items and work needed for the Richmond centre; and in general terms what was the nature of the items and work so purchased.

Mr. Chris Patten: It is not possible to estimate the sums spent in Londonderry by the main contractor and the nominated sub-contractors in respect of the Richmond project. However, at least 17 domestic sub-contractors or nominated suppliers in or near to Londonderry city provided goods and services to the value of some £1·2 million; examples are general building materials, metal work, plaster work, painting and roofing.

Mr. William Ross asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many firms in Londerry city were invited to submit tenders for items required for the Richmond centre; and how many firms from the city submitted tenders.

Mr. Chris Patten: In respect of nominated sub-contractors, the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland invited two Londonderry city contractors to submit tenders. Both did so, but were unsuccessful. In

addition, nine nominated suppliers or domestic sub-contractors from Londonderry city supplied goods and services to the main contractor.

Mr. William Ross asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what preference was given to firms in Londonderry city for the supply of items needed in the construction of the Richmond centre.

Mr. Chris Patten: The contractual arrangements between the main contractor for the Richmond project and the Department of Environment for Northern Ireland specified that preference should be given to the use of materials and fittings manufactured or originating in Northern Ireland, provided they complied with the contract specification and were readily available at competitive prices.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 22 November 1984

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Small Claims Courts

Mr. Evennett asked the Attorney-General what consideration the Lord Chancellor has given to allowing small claims courts to sit during the evening or on Saturdays.

The Attorney-General: I understand that the possibility of providing evening hearings in the county court for small claims cases was considered under the previous Administration a few years ago, but that the idea was not pursued because preliminary inquiries did not suggest there was sufficient demand for it. Any fresh consideration of this idea would, of course, also have to take into account the resource implications.

Legal Aid

Mr. Evennett asked the Attorney-General if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's response to the report "Management Scrutiny of Legal Aid Administration."

The Attorney-General : Both the Government and the Law Society have welcomed the report as a valuable contribution to their consideration of the effectiveness of legal aid administration. Decisions on its main recommendations will be announced in due course.

Legal Aid Act 1974

Mr. Stephen Ross asked the Attorney-General whether Her Majesty's Government will now implement section 16 of the Legal Aid Act 1974.

The Attorney-General: There are no present plans to do so.

Consolidation of Enactments

Mr. Lawrence asked the Attorney-General whether he has considered the Report of the Statute Law Society working party on the consolidation of enactments; and whether he proposes to act upon the recommendations made therein.

The Attorney-General: Together with the Lord Chancellor, I have considered this report. However, I would not wish to propose amendments to consolidation procedure until we are both satisfied that the proposals have general parliamentary support.

Coal Industry Dispute

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Attorney-General how many stipendiary magistrates he intends to appoint in order to deal with cases arising from the miners' dispute; which authority will be responsible for paying them; and if he intends to meet the full cost of their salaries and of other supporting staff.

The Attorney-General: To date, 12 stipendiaries have been appointed by my noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor to sit between 22 November and 21 December at Birkenhead, Chesterfield, Pontefract, Rotherham, St. Helen's and Scunthorpe. The sittings are continuous at Chesterfield and Rotherham; elsewhere they are occasional or intermittent. Further appointments will be made if requested by the relevant magistrates' courts committees. The full cost of the salaries, fees and expenses of the stipendiaries is as always met by the Crown. If additional supporting staff is required, the cost will be included in the expenses of the magistrates' courts committee concerned in the normal way.

ENERGY

Nuclear Power

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Energy what is the equivalent in tonnes of coal of the current supply of nuclear electricity.

Mr. Goodlad: The latest issue of my Department's Energy Trends shows provisionally that, in August 1984, the supply of nuclear electricity sent out from the public supply system would have required the consumption of 1·15 million tonnes of coal in coal-fired power stations.

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Energy how much electricity, in terms of millions of tonnes of coal, each envisaged pressurised water reactor will produce.

Mr. Goodlad: The quantity of electricity produced by a PWR would depend on its capacity and the extent to which it is available for use.

Coal Industry Dispute

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the mining dispute.

Mr. David Hunt: Since 5 November over 11,000 former strikers have returned to work. 43 per cent. of those employed in the industry are now not on strike.

Gas and Electricity

Mr. Adley asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will indicate, for gas and electricity, the amount of assistance provided to small consumers, tabulating, for the latest date for which figures are available *(a)* the total amount of assistance provided for consumers of (i) gas and (ii) electricity, *(b)* the average payment and *(c)* the percentage of total consumers in each industry represented by these payments; and if he proposes to raise the levels of assistance available to compensate for inflation.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: Help with fuel costs is available under the social security system for those on supplementary benefit. Small consumers are covered by schemes operated by British Gas Corporation and the area electricity boards whereby standing charges are limited in small bills. In 1983-84 the total cost of these schemes to BGC was £41·7 million and to the electricity supply industry £14·6 million. Twenty-one per cent. of gas consumers and 11 per cent. of electricity consumers received some rebate under the schemes. The average

rebate was around £5 per quarterly bill for gas and about £2 for electricity. Decisions on the future of the schemes are a matter for the industries.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Newman College, Birmingham

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he expects to announce his decision on the future of Newman college, Birmingham.

Mr. Brooke: The future of Newman college is not currently under review.

EMPLOYMENT

Clothing and Footwear

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will give the number of people employed in the clothing and footwear manufacturing industries in each member country of the European Economic Community in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Alan Clark: The information requested is given in the following table.

Employees in employment in clothing and footwear industry

Thousand

	1974	*1975*	*1976*	*1977*	*1978*	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*
United Kingdom	480·8	459·8	431·1	434·8	427·0	426·2	411·5	358·1	338·6
Germany (Federal Republic)	409·7	395·8	379·8	370·5	361·2	361·2	356·9	341·2	312·4
France	415·4	367·3	348·9	345·1	330·5	324·1	320·5	296·6	282·8
Italy	501·7	517·6	555·9	565·3	555·4	547·3	552·2	547·1	543·2
Netherlands	51·7	42·4	39·4	35·5	33·3	32·0	30·3	26·4	23·5
Belgium	92·7	86·5	76·3	68·6	61·3	56·4	54·1	49·8	47·3
Luxembourg	1·2	1·2	1·0	1·0	0·9	0·9	0·9	0·9	—
Ireland	21·4	19·7	18·0	18·3	18·1	18·3	18·0	16·3	15·7
Denmark	23·0	18·9	21·6	25·3	23·5	22·8	22·0	19·1	19·5
EEC 9	1,997·6	1,902·2	1,872·0	1,864·3	1,811·2	1,789·3	1,766·3	1,655·4	1,583·9

Note: Figures are not available for other years, or for Greece.
Source: Eurostat 'Employment and Unemployment', Table 111/2: Employees in industry by NACE class.

Manchester

Mr. Silvester asked the Secretary of State for Employment (1) if he will list each ward in the Manchester travel-to-work area where the number of people working there exceeds the number of workers living there by 30 per cent. or more;

(2) if he will list each ward in the Manchester travel-to-work area where those living and working in the ward accounted for at least 55 per cent. of those working there.

Mr. Alan Clark: The census of population data used in the review of travel-to-work areas identify the following wards (as defined in 1981) in the Manchester travel-to-work area for which the number of people working there exceeds the number of workers living there by 30 per cent. or more.

In Manchester: Ardwick, Beswick, Bradford, Collegiate Church, Crumpsall, Hulme, Moss Side, Newton Heath, Northenden, Woodhouse Park

In Salford: Ward Nos 1, 9, 10, 12, 14 and 18

In Stockport: Brinnington, South Reddish

In Tameside: Ashton St. Michael's, Ashton St Peters', Hyde Newton

In Trafford: Altrincham, Broadheath, Davyhulme East, Longford, Park, Priory, Talbot

The same data identified Collegiate church in Manchester as a ward where those living and working in the ward accounted for at least 55 per cent. of those working there.

Mr. Silvester asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list those wards in the Manchester travel-to-work area combined to produce job foci as defined by paragraph 6(ii) of his review of travel-to-work areas of July.

Mr. Alan Clark: The Manchester travel-to-work area contains the following 10 job foci, as defined for the review of travel-to-work areas.

Focus 1: The Ardwick, Beswick, Bradford, Collegiate Church, Crumpsall, Hulme, Moss Side and Newton Heath wards of Manchester with Wards No. 9 and No. 12 of Salford.

Focus 2: The Northenden and Woodhouse Park wards of Manchester.

Focus 3: Ward No. 1 of Salford.

Focus 4: Ward No. 10 of Salford.

Focus 5: Ward No. 14 of Salford.

Focus 6: Ward No. 18 of Salford.

Focus 7: The Brinnington and South Reddish wards of Stockport.

Focus 8: The Ashton St Michael's and Ashton St Peters' wards of Tameside.

Focus 9: The Hyde Newton ward of Tameside.

Focus 10: The Altrincham, Broadheath, Davyhulme East, Longford, Park, Priory and Talbot wards of Trafford.

Mr. Silvester asked the Secretary of State for Employment what percentage of self-containment was accepted for the Manchester travel-to-work area.

Mr. Alan Clark: The self-containment ratios for the Manchester travel-to-work area are 92 per cent. on a residence base and 84 per cent. on a workplace base.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Winnick asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list in order the 40 parliamentary constituencies in England where unemployment has risen the most since May 1979; and if, in each case, he will give the percentage increase.

Mr. Alan Clark: This information is not available. The recently introduced analysis of unemployment data by parliamentary constituencies is only available back to June 1983.

Youth Training and Work Experience

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many young people aged between 16 and 25 years have been engaged on various youth training and work experience schemes since 1979; how many are currently without permanent employment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Information on the number of young people who have entered youth training and work experience schemes since 1979 is contained in the following table:

Scheme	*Period*	**Number of entrants*
Youth Oppportunities Programme	April 1979 to March 1984	1,699,500
Youth Training Scheme	April 1983 to October 1984	647,500
Special Temporary Employment Programme	April 1979 to March 1981	‡21,000
Community Enterprise Programme	April 1981 to Septenber 1982	†24,000
Community Programme	October 1982 to October 1984	†138,000
Community Industry	April 1979 to October 1984	50,000

* The figures quoted in this column will include a number of young people who have entered the respective scheme more than once.
† This figure relates to entrants aged 18 to 24.
‡ This figure relates to entrants aged 19 to 24.

Comprehensive information on the destination of leavers from these schemes is not available.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Rooker asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the availability of unemployment statistics on a parliamentary constituency basis to professional bodies and other external organisations.

Mr. Alan Clark: The recent development to provide unemployment data by parliamentary constituencies was publicised in an article in the September 1984 edition of *Employment Gazette*, which included the figures for August. As indicated in that article, these statistics are made available to those who request them.

Wages (Underpayment)

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many wages council establishments in Wales were found to be underpaying in 1983-84; how many workers were involved; and what was the amount of arrears paid.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: In 1983, the latest period for which figures are available, 722 establishments inspected in Wales were found to have underpaid 1,714 workers. Arrears totalling £189,614 were paid.

PRIME MINISTER

"Britain's Undefended Frontier"

Q22. **Sir John Biggs-Davison** asked the Prime Minister if she has studied the Institute for European Defence and Strategic Studies' publication, "Britain's Undefended Frontier", a copy of which has been sent to her.

The Prime Minister: I have read this, and other recent documents on Northern Ireland, with interest. Our policy is to encourage the constitutional parties in Northern Ireland to seek a political way forward which is likely to command widespread acceptance throughout the community.

Taoiseach (Talks)

Sir John Biggs-Davison asked the Prime Minister if she will consider in advance of her forthcoming meeting with the Taoiseach, the recommendations made by the Macrory Report, on "Britain's Undefended Frontier", for the improvement of local administration in Northern Ireland on a basis acceptable to all sides of the community and for the maintenance of good relations with the Government of the Republic of Ireland; and if she will take into account the Kilbrandon enquiry into Northern Ireland and in particular the minority report of her right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell), Dr. Gillian Peele, and Dr. A. T. Q. Stewart, contained in chapter 13 of that report.

The Prime Minister: I took note of the proposals in these and other published documents before I met the Taoiseach on 18 and 19 November.

Engagements

Mr. Skinner asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 22 November.

Mr. Parry asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 22 November.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 22 November.

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 22 November.

Mr. Pike asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 22 November.

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Local Government Reform

Mr. Ground asked the Prime Minister if she will list the Departments whose expenditure will be affected by the proposals in the document "Abolition of the Greater London Council and the Metropolitan County Councils", published by Her Majesty's Government in July; if she will give, by Department and in total the effects on public expenditure, including local government spending; and if she will place the details of the calculations in the Library.

The Prime Minister: Estimates of the public expenditure effects of the proposals are being published in the explanatory and financial memorandum to the abolition Bill.

Paymaster General (Sermon)

Mr. Ewing asked the Prime Minister if any Civil Service time was involved in writing the sermon preached by the hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) on 18 November.

The Prime Minister: No.

Data Protection

Dr. Marek asked the Prime Minister how she envisages Ministers exercising the powers granted by section 27 of the Data Protection Act 1984; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: Section 27 provides that personal data are totally exempt from the provisions of the Act if an exemption is required for the purpose of safeguarding national security. Personal data are also exempt from the non-disclosure provisions in any case in which the disclosure is for the same purpose. It will be for a Minister of the Crown—who must be a member of the Cabinet, the Attorney-General or the Lord Advocate — to determine whether the exemption is or was required at any time and a certificate signed by him will be conclusive evidence of that fact. Any determination that an exemption is required under the Act will, of course, be made only after the most careful consideration.

EC Foodstuffs (Surpluses)

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Prime Minister if she will publish the location of centres for the denaturation of surplus European Economic Community foodstuffs in Britain; and what has been the type of produce and the amount denatured in the past year in each location.

The Prime Minister: There are no Government denaturing centres. In the year ended 31 October 1984, 25,000 tonnes of wheat and 117,000 tonnes of skimmed milk power were denatured for animal feed at commercial premises. The quantities treated at particular locations are not recorded.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Illegal Radio Stations

66. **Mr. Teddy Taylor** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he is taking to prevent the operation of illegal radio stations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Butcher: The Radio Investigation Service is continuing to trace land-based stations and, where possible, the operators are prosecuted. So far this year transmitters have been traced on over 100 occasions and 37 people have been prosecuted. More prosecutions are pending.

The offshore stations operate from vessels anchored in international waters, and this raises issues of jurisdiction. However, information about contraventions in this country of the Marine, etc., Broadcasting (Offences) Act 1967 is investigated with a view to prosecution, where appropriate, by the Director of Public Prosecutions.

Invest in Britain Bureau

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will publish in the *Official Report* his letter of 28 June to West Yorkshire metropolitan county council concerning the co-ordination of responses to requests from the Invest in Britain Bureau for details of industrial sites in the West Yorkshire region.

Mr. Trippier: The letter was sent not by the Secretary of State, but by an official of the Department's regional office in Leeds. It concerned a point of administrative procedure, and a copy has been placed in the Library.

Minerals

Mr. Skeet asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement of the policy of Her Majesty's Government in relation to the problems arising for mining companies seeking mineral rights from the perplexity of mineral ownership.

Mr. Trippier: Mineral operators obtain the privately held mineral rights they need by negotiation with the owners. Where this is not practicable, the Mines (Working Facilities and Support) Acts 1966 and 1974 are designed to allow mineral operators to apply through the Secretary of State to the High Court for the compulsory grant of the right sought. Should the mineral industry generally find the current position unsatisfactory, I should be prepared to consider co-ordinated and well supported representations from them. Mineral rights is a complex issue affecting a number of interests. As part of my consideration I would need to seek the views of all those concerned.

Mr. Skeet asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he proposes to make a statement on grants to aid exploration for minerals in the United Kingdom, pursuant to powers granted in section 1 of the Mineral Exploration and Investment Grants Act 1972.

Mr. Trippier: In the next few weeks.

Mr. Skeet asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which countries in Western Europe retain a stockpile of strategic minerals.

Mr. Trippier: Of the countries of western Europe, only Finland, France, Sweden and Switzerland are known by my Department to maintain a stockpile of strategic minerals.

Mines Working Facilities and Support Acts

Mr. Skeet asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he proposes to make changes in the Mines Working Facilities and Support Acts 1966 to 1974.

Mr. Trippier: I have no plans to do so.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Bulmer asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many members of his Department of the rank of assistant secretary or above have held a job in industry or commerce for at least a year; of these, how many have held a profit accountable job in industry; and what proportions these represent in each case.

Mr. Butcher: I shall reply to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

British Telecom

Mr. Nicholas Baker asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry why shares in British Telecom are not to be issued on the Paris and Frankfurt Stock Exchanges.

Mr. Butcher: I shall reply to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

Privatisation

Mr. Gould asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list those enterprises for whose privatisation his Department has been responsible since 1979; and if he will specify in each case the form which privatisation took.

Mr. Butcher: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

European Regional Development Fund

Mr. Gould asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proportion of the funds allocated to the United Kingdom from the European regional development fund so far in the current year has gone to British Telecom; how much it has received in sterling terms; for what purposes it has received such assistance; and what account was taken in making this allocation of British Telecom's new status as a privately-owned enterprise.

Mr. Lamont: The commitments so far allocated to the United Kingdom under the "quota" section of the European regional development fund for industrial and infrastructure projects for this year total £145,491,621, of which £29,732,120 is for British Telecom projects. The proportional assistance for British Telecom is, however, likely to be very much lower by the end of the year as a further £203,239,514 has been sought by the United Kingdom, none of which concerns British Telecom. The payments will be made as the projects progress.

The projects can in the main be described as modernisation and replacement of obsolescent networks. A full list of all projects given commitment this year is in *British Business* 25 May 1984 and 21 September 1984.

Allocations of European regional development fund resources are a matter for the European Commission, but the Government have thought it right to continue to make use of European regional development fund assistance available for British Telecom projects and applications have been approved by the Commission.

Mr. Corbett asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what consideration is given to the present profitability of a firm applying for a grant from the European regional development fund before his Department comments on it.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Firms in the United Kingdom allocated grants under the European regional development fund for industrial projects must first be in receipt of United Kingdom regional aid and must therefore already have satisfied the financial criteria of the regional aid schemes.

Mr. Corbett asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will estimate the number of new jobs which will be created, and in which industries and areas, from the grant of £15 million from the European regional development fund to improve roads and telecommunications links in the west midlands.

Mr. Norman Lamont: In order to qualify for European regional development fund aid, an infrastructure project must contribute to the development of the region concerned. The project will help to bring about the level of infrastructure required to enable industrial users to create or maintain employment, but it is not possible to estimate the number of jobs created by this.

Mr. Corbett asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he sought or received any assurances from British Telecom on redundancies before commenting on its application for grant from the European regional development fund.

Mr. Norman Lamont: No. The European regional development fund rules provide that British Telecom projects may qualify for assistance if they contribute to the development of the region and the aim is to provide the level of infrastructure necessary to enable industrial users to create or maintain employment.

Mr. Corbett asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will estimate the number of jobs likely to be created by the allocation of £7·42 million to British Telecom from the European regional development fund to improve telecommunications in the west midlands.

Mr. Norman Lamont: It is not possible to estimate the number of jobs created by this allocation.

DEFENCE

Cruise Missiles

Mr. Michie asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will give the total cost to Her Majesty's Government of the basing of ground-launched cruise missiles at RAF Molesworth.

Mr. Stanley: The bulk of the cost of basing ground-launched cruise missiles at RAF Molesworth will be met from NATO infrastructure funds, to which the United Kingdom contributes 12 per cent. The detailed costs in this case have yet to be finalised. Equally, it is not possible to say at this stage what additional host nation costs will fall directly on Her Majesty's Government.

Mr. Terlezki asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will assess the impact on North Atlantic Treaty Organisation policy of the decision of the Dutch Government to defer deployment of cruise missiles.

Mr. Stanley: The Netherlands Government have undertaken important positive commitments in the decision announced on 1 June and subsequently endorsed by the Dutch Parliament. The Dutch have spelt out very clearly the circumstances in which they could deploy their full share of cruise missiles and that they would do so, if required, within the existing five-year schedule of the NATO programme.

NATO Meetings

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Defence why the agenda for the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation ministerial meetings is confidential.

Mr. Stanley: Because the agendas for both the ministerial meetings of the defence policy committee and of the nuclear planning group carry NATO security classifications.

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will seek to make it the practice for the communiqué issued after each North Atlantic Treaty Organisation ministerial meeting to refer to all items on the agenda at the meeting.

Mr. Stanley: No.

Nuclear Tests (British Personnel)

Mr. Strang asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will ensure that an independent survey is carried out into any possible genetic effects of the Australian and Christmas Island nuclear weapon tests on British personnel.

Mr. Butler: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 31 October 1984, at columns 1120-21.

Mr. Strang asked the Secretary of State for Defence if the survey being carried out by the National Radiological Protection Board into the health of British personnel who took part in the Australian and Christmas Island nuclear weapons tests includes the children of such personnel.

Mr. Butler: No.

Mr. Strang asked the Secretary of State for Defence what progress the National Radiological Protection Board is making in its health survey of British personnel who took part in the 1950's south Pacific nuclear weapons tests.

Mr. Butler: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 22 October 1984, at column 497.

Mr. Strang asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will now consider the possibility of seeking to establish a British Royal Commission of Inquiry into the effects of 1950s south Pacific nuclear weapon tests on British personnel.

Mr. Butler: I am always prepared to consider the possibility of inquiries beyond those currently in hand, but do not consider that a British Royal Commission is appropriate at this moment, whilst the independent study by the National Radiological Protection Board is in train.

Mr. Strang asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is his latest estimate of the number of British personnel who took part in the 1950's Australian and Christmas Island nuclear weapons tests.

Mr. Butler: The estimate of the number of United Kingdom personnel involved in the atmospheric tests of about 20,000 has not changed since the figure given in the debate in the House on 12 March 1984, at column 196, by my predecessor, the hon. Member for Chertsey and Walton (Mr. Pattie).

Service Children (Education)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received from education authorities requesting a transfer of funds from his Department to local education authorities to meet the additional costs of educating service children; and what response he has sent.

Mr. Stanley: In the time available we have not been able to identify any such representations.

General Belgrano

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) pursuant to his answer of 15 November, *Official Report*, column *345*, in which documents, other than the captain's account, the information relating to *(a)* the time at which the General Belgrano was first sighted, *(b)* the course of the General Belgrano, *(c)*the time at which the General Belgrano was attacked, *(d)* the damage caused to the General Belgrano, *(e)* the time of signals to and from HMS Northwood and *(f)* the contents of signals to and from HMS Northwood is contained;

(2) if the information contained in the signals log of HMS Conqueror is contained and available in any other document.

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Member appears not to understand the nature of a signals log.

It consists of a chronological record of all signals traffic to and from the submarine, irrespective of its importance. Some of those signals will be important, others routine and some of a personal nature for crew members. The communications department not only records the receipt and dispatch of classified signals, but keeps a copy of every message. However, its task is to forward all messages to the appropriate person. As I have explained to the hon. Member, it is not necessary to keep this information for more than a limited period and the log itself is regularly destroyed. All operational messages of importance are recorded in Flag Officer Submarines war diary. In addition, the captain's narrative account and report of proceedings gives a full account of the part played by HMS Conqueror in the Falklands campaign. Both these documents are available to my Department.

HMS Conqueror

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Defence if the signals log of HMS Conqueror has been seen by any officials of his Department.

Mr. Heseltine: Officials have access to other sources, including copies of relevant signals and would have no need to refer to the signals log of HMS Conqueror. But I would refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 19 November, at column 84.

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Defence, if copies of the signals log of HMS Conqueror are available to him.

Mr. Heseltine: As I have already explained to the hon. Member, signals logs of submarines are destroyed as a matter of routine. If the logs have been destroyed they are not available to me. Until they have been destroyed they are available to me.

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Defence if the signals log of HMS Conqueror contains *(a)* the times of signals to and from Northwood and *(b)* the contents of signals to and from Northwood.

Mr. Heseltine: The signals log of a submarine contains copies of all signals sent and received by the submarine. All signals include the times of despatch.

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list all formal reports, documents and logs aboard

HMS Conqueror during the Falklands conflict and for each one indicate *(a)* whether it is available to him, *(b)* where it is kept, *(c)* whether it has been seen by Ministers and *(d)* whether it has been seen by any officials in his Department.

Mr. Heseltine: It will require a detailed check to establish this information and I shall write to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Defence when he now expects to receive the report of the board of inquiry into the disappearance of the log of HMS Conqueror.

Mr. Heseltine: I hope in the near future.

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Defence on whose authority the board of inquiry into the loss of the log of HMS Conqueror was set up.

Mr. Heseltine: Commander-in-Chief Fleet.

Signals Logs

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place a specimen copy of a signals log in the Library.

Mr. Heseltine: A signals log consists of a record of each classified signal received and sent together with copies of all signals themselves. I have placed a specimen log in the Library.

Boards of Inquiry

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the boards of inquiry which have taken place under the auspices of his Department since May 1979.

Mr. Heseltine: There has been no change in the practice relating to boards of inquiry since May 1979. The position under this Government remains as under the last Government.

Boards of inquiry are convened to investigate a wide range of matters, each being staffed at a level appropriate to its content. There is no central register of such boards and preparation of a list as requested would require disproportionate effort.

Lance Corporal A. A. Allen

Mr. Redmond asked the Secretary of State for Defence where Lance Corporal A. A. Allen, No. 24618552, of the Second Regiment of the Royal Military Police, has served on duty since 1 October; and if he has been engaged on duties connected with the mining dispute since that date.

Mr. Stanley: We do not publish details of individuals movements in the course of their duties. As stated previously, some police brought in from other areas have made temporary use of service accommodation and messing facilities, but no members of the armed forces have been used in police operations in the miners' dispute.

Tornado

Mr. Speed asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many Tornado aircraft have been destroyed or seriously damaged in accidents since its introduction into operational service; and how that figure compares with the expected attrition rate at this stage.

Mr. Stanley [*pursuant to his reply*, 14 November 1984, c. *345*]: Seven RAF Tornado aircraft. This is comparable to the accident rate for other RAF combat aircraft at an equivalent stage in their introduction into service.

WALES

Chronic Diseases

Mr. Colvin asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish in the *Official Report* the annual figures since 1970 showing the number of cases in the following categories *(a)* leukaemias, *(b)* myeloid leukaemia, *(c)* Hodgkin's disease, *(d)* lymphosarcoma, *(e)* all diagnoses of cancer and *(f)* abnormalities at birth, for Wales.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: I shall write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Food Hygiene

Mr. Gregory asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will estimate expenditure incurred for training in food hygiene by health authorities in Wales in each year since 1978; and what is the planned expenditure for 1984 and 1985.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The information is not collected centrally.

Hospital Kitchens

Mr. Gregory asked the Secretary of State for Wales how much expenditure took place on modernising hospital kitchens in Wales in each year since 1978; and what is the planned expenditure for 1984 and 1985.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: This information is not available centrally.

School Leavers

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many school leavers who left full-time secondary education in July 1984 in *(a)* Mid-Glamorgan, *(b)* Clwyd, *(c)* Gwent and *(d)* Wales have so far (i) found full-time permanent employment, (ii) been placed on the youth training scheme and (iii) are registering unemployed; and if he will give the figures in each case for males and females.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given to the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) on 9 November, at column *11*.

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of 18-year-old school leavers from Welsh schools continued their education at universities and polytechnics in each of the years 1980-81 to 1984-85.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: The percentage of school leavers aged 18 and over who intended to begin a full-time course at a university, polytechnic or higher and further education establishment in the years in question was as follows:

	1980-81	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*
Degree courses	47	47	43	43

	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84
Other full-time higher and further education courses	18	18	20	20

Information for 1984-85 is not yet available.

Youth Training

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales what are the current mode B schemes approved and in operation within Wales; which of them are fully subscribed; and how many youth training scheme students are enrolled on each one.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: I shall write to the hon. Gentleman and will place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Waiting Lists

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales which Welsh health authorities have the longest waiting lists for *(a)* ear, nose and throat and *(b)* orthodontic treatment.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Information on waiting lists by specialty is contained in the publication entitled "Bed Use Statistics". A copy of the latest edition is available in the Library and gives list figures for 31 March 1984.

M4 (Signposts)

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects the name of Pontarddulais to be added to the signposts at junction 48 on the M4.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: The manufacture of the necessary signs is in hand and it is expected that they will be erected shortly.

Mental Illness

Mr. Hooson asked the Secretary of State for Wales whether he has received a further report of the review group on mental illness services in Dyfed.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: We received the latest report of the review group during the summer recess. The report indicates that the group has been generally encouraged by continued progress in developing mental illness services in Dyfed. It is also evident that the commitment to progress must be sustained at all levels in order to ensure that the remaining problems are tackled effectively, and that the implementation of joint strategic planning between the authorities involved is placed on a firm footing for the future. This confirms the impression which my right hon. Friend took away from his visit to St. David's hospital in the spring. The review group has begun to look ahead to the conclusion of its work. We have asked the chairman to give clear guidance in the next and probably final report on arrangements for monitoring developments in services for the mentally ill after the group has disengaged from the process of major improvement to which it has made such a significant contribution. A copy of the report has been placed in the Library.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Turkey

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what arrangements have been made for the repayment by Turkey of programme aid provided from 1980 onwards.

Mr. Raison: The 1980 and 1981 programme aid loans, each for £15 million provide for the repayment of capital by biannual instalments over 20 years, starting on the 29 November 1985 and 20 January 1987, respectively. Biannual repayments of accrued interest on drawings, at 6 per cent. per annum, began on the 29 November 1980 and 20 January 1982 respectively.

St. Helena (Visit)

Dr. Marek asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the visit to St. Helena by Sir Neil Marten was paid for by public funds.

Mr. Raison: Yes.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Offenders (Cautions)

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will give a breakdown of the number of occasions on which cautions were given in each of the last five years to *(a)* all offenders, *(b)* offenders aged over 25 years, *(c)* offenders aged 20 to 25 years, *(d)* offenders aged 18 to 20 years and *(e)* offenders under 18 years.

Mr. Scott: The Royal Ulster Constabulary does not keep a detailed breakdown of statistics in the form requested. However, the number of juveniles—persons under 17 years of age—and adults—persons of 17 and over — who have received cautions for indictable offences in each of the last five years is set out in the table:

Year	Juvenile	Adults	Total
1979	505	114	619
1980	825	177	1,002
1981	895	194	1,089
1982	979	218	1,197
1983	1,378	288	1,666

Prison Chaplains

Mr. William Ross asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether his Department gives any financial support to the provision of prison chaplains in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Scott: Under paragraph 9 of the Prison Act (Northern Ireland) 1953 the Secretary of State has appointed a number of prison chaplains who receive payment for hours spent on these duties and for travelling expenses to Northern Ireland's penal establishments including the young offenders centre.

The same Act allows for a minister of any denomination to visit prisoners of his denomination in a prison to which no minister of that denomination has been appointed. Ministers are paid for such visits.

TRANSPORT

Greater London Council (Roads)

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of the financial and manpower implications that would result from the transfer of responsibility for 80 miles of road from the Greater London Council to his Department in the event of the implementation of Cmnd. 9063.

Mrs. Chalker: With the transferred 65 miles of GLC metropolitan roads; my Department will take over the cost of completing any schemes in hand on them at that time, together with £3 million annual maintenance costs currently falling on ratepayers. The extra work arising from this transfer will be handled within the Department's existing staff complement.

Street Furniture

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for Transport if, in view of the contribution of permanent roadside obstacles to road accidents, he will take steps to draw the attention of highway authorities to the potential of effective siting and design of street furniture.

Mrs. Chalker: Most street furniture contributes to overall road safety and, as the Department has already issued relevant advice to highway authorities, I cannot see any special reason at the present time to remind them again about their responsibilities. If the hon. Member has a particular situation in mind, perhaps he would write to me.

A1 (Wetherby Roundabout)

Mr. Batiste asked the Secretary of State for Transport when it is proposed that work will begin on the improvement to the A1 at the Wetherby roundabout.

Mrs. Chalker: The Wetherby roundabout improvement is part of the Department's proposals for the Kirkhamgate-Dishforth scheme. My right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Transport and for the Environment are now considering the inspector's report on the 13-month public inquiry. We hope to announce our decision in the early part of 1985.

The start of work is, of course, dependent on the decision on the scheme.

Sidcup Bypass

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for Transport what was the programmed start date for the main works on the Sidcup bypass trunk road scheme when the project was being handled by the Greater London council as agents for his Department; and what is the current programmed start date now that control of the project has passed back to his Department.

Mrs. Chalker: When the GLC notified the Department in January 1983 that it was unwilling to continue as agents for this scheme, it was revealed that it was already well behind the planned programme start date of mid-1983. Given this and the delays involved in the handover and tendering processes, the current expected start date is next March.

Bypasses

Mr. Stephen Ross asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a list of those bypasses at present under construction and those which have passed all stages of approval and now await the necessary financing.

Mrs. Chalker: The following bypasses, including diversions and relief roads, are at present under construction on trunk roads in England:

A1 Alnwick bypass stage 2
A6 Chapel-en-le-Frith bypass
A10 Ely/Littleport bypass
A12 Chelmsford bypass
A17 Swineshead bypass
A39 Bideford bypass
A39 Marshgate diversion
A40 Ross-on-Wye relief road
A43 Broughton diversion
A45 Ipswich bypass western section
A45 St. Neots bypass
A46 Lincoln relief road
A47 Great Yarmouth bypass
A56 Accrington eastern bypass
A57 Aston relief road
A57 Worksop southern bypass
A61 Chesterfield inner relief road
A66 Darlington bypass
A69 Greenhead diversion
A339 Basingstoke bypass

There are no trunk road bypass schemes which, having passed all stages of approval, are now awaiting the necessary financing. Information about similar schemes on roads other than trunk roads is not held centrally.

Mr. Skeet asked the Secretary of State for Transport which towns of a size about that of Bedford remain to be bypassed in *(a)* England and *(b)* East Anglia.

Mrs. Chalker: The following English towns with a population of 70,000 to 80,000* situated on trunk roads remain to be bypassed:

Bath, Bedford, Cheltenham, Chesterfield, Hastings and Lincoln.

There are no other such towns in east Anglia. Corresponding information for towns situated on roads other than trunk roads is not held centrally.

* *Source:* "Census 1981, Preliminary Report for Towns", published by HMSO, 1981.

Mr. Skeet asked the Secretary of State for Transport why further delays have been experienced in the completion of the project for bypassing Bedford.

Mrs. Chalker: Good progress is being made on preparatory work for a Bedford bypass. This has brought to light some change in the traffic patterns. Since this could affect the choice of alternative routes, further traffic studies are being carried out and it has been necessary to postpone public consultation about routes from this autumn to next summer. However, subject to the satisfactory completion of the statutory procedures, we still expect to be able to begin construction in 1989.

London Buses (Privatisation)

Mr. Skeet asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether it is his intention to include London buses in his privatisation plans; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: My right hon. Friend has the power to require LRT to dispose of the whole or any part of the undertaking of any of its subsidiaries. He has no plans at present to exercise this power.

Driving Test Examiners

Mr. Freud asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many driving test examiners have been dismissed from their posts as a result of complaints received about their conduct during driving tests *(a)* nationally and *(b)* in East Anglia in each of the last four years.

Mrs. Chalker: One driving examiner has been dismissed in the past four years—in July 1984—as a result of complaints about his conduct during driving tests. The examiner in question was not stationed in East Anglia.

Mr. Freud asked the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how many complaints he has received *(a)* nationally and *(b)* in East Anglia about the conduct of driving test examiners in each of the last four years;

(2) how many investigations into allegations of intimidation by driving test examiners have been carried out by his Department *(a)* nationally and *(b)* in East Anglia in each of the last four years.

Mrs. Chalker: I regret that this information is not readily available, but I am writing to the hon. Member.

Malaysian Airline System

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement outlining the reasons why he has refused the request from Malaysian Airline System to increase the frequency of its flights from Kuala Lumpur to Heathrow.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Under our air services arrangements with Malaysia additional frequencies can be approved whenever this is justified by the traffic carried on the existing services. The agreed conditions for approving an additional frequency by Malaysian Airline System have not yet been met.

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has any evidence of Malasian Airline System having subsidies to promote its activities in competition with British carriers.

Mr. Michael Spicer: No.

Barking Relief Road

Mr. Leighton asked the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what plans there are to compensate householders and allotment holders in the vicinity of the south Woodford to Barking relief road;

(2) what levels of noise and air pollution are expected to be generated from traffic using the south Woodford to Barking relief road as it passes through Newham, both before and after the opening of the east London river crossing;

(3) whether the decision to proceed with the overhead route for the south Woodford to Barking relief road takes into account the effect of additional traffic when the east London river crossing is opened;

(4) what representations he has received from residents of Newham about the proposal to build a viaduct over the Liverpool Street to Southend railway line for the south Woodford to Barking relief road;

(5) what consideration he gave to the aesthetic effect, and effect on local amenities, of building a viaduct for the south Woodford to Barking relief road; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: I will answer these questions shortly.

M25

Mr. Leighton asked the Secretary of State for Transport what parts of the M25 are placed in cuttings.

Mrs. Chalker: There are considerable numbers of cuttings, of varying lengths and types, on all parts of the M25. It would be impracticable to identify them individually. If the hon. Member has a particular area in mind, perhaps he will write to me.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

European Assembly (Elections)

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether, under the proposals for Spanish accession to the European Communities, the Arab people of Oeuta and Melilla will have the same rights of franchise in European Assembly elections as will be available to the people of Spain; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: Electoral procedures for the European Parliament have not been fully harmonised in the European Community. It will be for the Spanish authorities in due course to decide the precise arrangements under which the representatives of the people of the kingdom of Spain are elected to the European Parliament.

Tristan da Cunha (Generators)

Dr. Marek asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the maximum power that can be generated by the diesel generators on Tristan da Cunha owned by Tristan Investments Ltd.

Mr. Renton: Tristan Investments Ltd. has three 140-kilowatt generators and a standby generator of 48 kilowatts.

Dr. Marek asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the maximum power that can be generated by the small emergency generator on Tristan da Cunha.

Mr. Renton: The small emergency generator owned by the Government of Tristan da Cunha has a maximum capacity of 11 kilowatts.

Dr. Marek asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will give the specifications of the wind-powered electricity generator that was blown down on Tristan da Cunha.

Mr. Renton: The generator was of 45 kilowatt capacity, with a 12 metre diameter rotor mounted on a 12 metre high bolted tower.

St. Helena

Dr. Marek asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will estimate the number of wirebirds left on St. Helena; and whether their number is declining.

Mr. Renton: It is estimated that between 100 and 300 pairs of wirebirds at present inhabit St. Helena. Numbers have fallen off since the 1960s, for no particular identifiable reason, but it is not thought that the wirebird is threatened with extinction.

Iran-Iraq War

Mr. David Atkinson asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent initiatives Her Majesty's Government have taken or supported at the United Nations to end the Iran-Iraq war.

Mr. Renton: We wish to see the earliest possible end to the tragic and wasteful conflict in the Gulf. We fully supported UN Security Council resolution No. 552 of 1 June, which called on all states to respect the right of free navigation in the Gulf, and the UN Secretary-General's call on 9 June to refrain from attacks on civilian population centres, which has largely been observed. We will continue to support any measures designed to limit the scope of the conflict.

Iran

Mr. David Atkinson asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations have been made by Her Majesty's Government at the United Nations to press the Iranian Government to end the torture and execution of political prisoners.

Mr. Renton: We have persistently made clear to the Iranian Government our disquiet about violations of human rights in Iran. We co-sponsored the resolution on this question at this year's UN Commission on Human Rights. The resolution, which was adopted on 14 March, urged Iran to respect its obligations as a State party to the international covenant on civil and political rights.

Foreign Affairs Council

Mr. Lawrence asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Foreign Affairs Council of 20 November.

Mr. Renton: An extra Foreign Affairs Council was held in Brussels on 20 November in advance of the scheduled political co-operation ministerial meeting. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development and my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Pentlands (Mr. Rifkind) represented the United Kingdom. Ministers had a further discussion of outstanding issues in the enlargement negotiations, including fisheries, wine and Spanish agriculture, in advance of the regular Foreign Affairs Council on 26-28 November, which is to be followed by an extended negotiating conference with Spain and Portugal.

Agreement was also reached on a revised figure for the sixth European development fund of 7·5 billion ecu—about £4,465 million. Of this, 7·4 billion ecu—about £4,405 million—will go to the African Caribbean and Pacific—ACP—countries and 100 million ecu—about £60 million—to the dependent territories of member states — OCT. These figures take account of the expected contributions of Spain and Portugal to the sixth EDF. Ministers also agreed on a text on human rights, and on the breakdown of EDF expenditure between different headings. A meeting is taking place today, 22 November, between EC and ACP co-presidents, at which it is hoped the negotiations can be completed thus paving the way for signature of the new convention in Lomé on 8 December.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Coal Industry Dispute

Mr. Pawsey asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what is the total amount of all benefits paid to families of striking miners since the commencement of the strike;

(2) what is the total weekly amount of all benefit paid to the families of striking miners;

(3) how many different benefits are available to families of striking miners; and if he will detail them together with their individual take-up.

Mr. Fowler: The total amount of supplementary benefit paid to families of striking miners since the strike began had reached about £23 million by 6 November. The weekly total paid has fluctuated but is now about £738,000. In addition recipients of supplementary benefit will, where applicable, have their rent and rates paid in full through housing benefit. The amount of supplementary benefit paid takes account of the fact that any family with children will continue to receive child benefit.

Depending on circumstances and on the satisfaction of relevant conditions either a striker or a member of his family may be entitled to receive other benefits including:

One-parent benefit;
Family Income Supplement;
Disablement benefits and related allowances;
War pensions and related allowances;
Mobility allowance;
Maternity allowances;
Sickness and other incapacity benefits.

Payment of some of these benefits is taken into account in assessing entitlement to supplementary benefit. Information about expenditure on these benefits for striking miners or their families is not recorded separately.

Children Act 1975

Mr. Hayes asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he will make a report to Parliament on the operation of the Children Act 1975 in accordance with section 105 of the Act.

Mr. Fowler: I have today published the second report to Parliament on the operation of the Children Act 1975. (House of Commons Paper No. 20.) The Act represents a major landmark in children's legislation because of the way in which it safeguards and promotes the welfare and interests of children who need adoptive families and children in care. Substantial progress has been made in implementing the Act since the last report to Parliament in 1979. Part I of the Act provides a framework for professional adoption services centred on the welfare needs of children. This part is now largely in force and we are discussing with the local authority associations our intention to bring in the only unimplemented sections, namely those requiring every local authority to provide an adoption service in its area. Most authorities already do so. We plan to bring part II of the Act into force next spring. This will enable foster parents and relatives who have looked after a child for some time to apply for a custodianship order. The whole of part III which introduced new rights and safeguards for children in care and for both children and parents in court proceedings, is now in force.

The report also describes the benefits which are already flowing from the Children Act. For example, many

children who were once thought to be unsuitable for adoption—because they are handicapped or of school-age or need to find a home together with brothers and sisters—are now being found new families in which to grow up.

The adoption allowance schemes which have been introduced will mean that more children will be able to find security in families which would otherwise be unable to afford to adopt.

Secure Psychiatric Units

Mr. Kilroy-Silk asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he is satisfied with the policy of the Oxford regional health authority towards providing regional secure psychiatric units.

Mr. John Patten: At discussions with the Department earlier this year, the regional health authority announced a review of its regional secure unit policies which had not hitherto satisfied the Department. My right hon. and learned Friend is to meet the RHA on 12 December for its regional review when this subject will be on the agenda. He hopes that the region will then report that they are taking early steps to meet all the region's needs for secure accommodation.

Bed and Breakfast (Charges)

Mr. Hill asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what arrangements he has to monitor conditions and charges made to his Department for bed and breakfast and guest house accommodation used by his Department for families who are in receipt of benefit; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: Data on supplementary benefit payments to all people in board and lodging accommodation collected routinely as part of the "Annual Statistical Enquiry" which covers all supplementary benefit payments. As I have indicated in answer to the hon. Member for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale) today, my right hon. Friend will shortly be publishing proposals for longer-term arrangements and for consultation with the Social Security Advisory Committee.

Dentists

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give the number of dentists whose patients were interviewed by regional dental officers in 1983, and the number of dentists whose patients were not so interviewed.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: During the year 1983, 9,910 dentists in England had one or more of their patients examined by dental officers of our Department. This represents some 65 per cent. of dentists in contract with family practitioner committees on 30 September of that year.

Supplementary Benefit (Birkenhead)

Mr. Frank Field asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the average length of time it took to hear supplementary benefit claimants' appeals in Birkenhead in 1980, 1981, 1982 and 1983 and at the latest available date.

Mr. Whitney: Precise information is not available because of the effects of current industrial action within the Department. It is estimated that the present waiting time for supplementary benefit appeals in the Birkenhead area is about 10 weeks. Times for previous years, recently estimated, are as follows:

	Weeks
1980	4·7
1981	7·8
1982	8·9
1983	13·9

Prescription Charges

Mr. Maude asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will estimate the annual cost if private patients, who at present pay the full cost of the drugs prescribed for them, were in future to receive drugs on the same basis as National Health Service patients; and what proportion this would be of the present National Health Service drugs bill.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: There is no reliable information on the number of prescriptions issued to private patients and we cannot therefore estimate the annual cost of drugs supplied in this way. Supply by the National Health Service would, however, inevitably add to the drugs bill which already stands at £1,400 million a year.

Supplementary Benefit

Mr. Gale asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he expects to give details of his proposals concerning supplementary benefit payments for board and lodging.

Mr. Newton: We are today laying before the House the Supplementary Benefit (Requirements) Amendment and Temporary Provisions Regulations 1984, which will enable us to control local limits governing board and lodging payments. My right hon. Friend shall shortly be publishing proposals for longer-term arrangements and for consultation with the Social Security Advisory Committee.

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services why he has not given a substantive answer to the question put down by the hon. Member for Oldham, West for priority written answer on 12 November regarding the uprating of the £15 deemed strike pay for strikers' families claiming supplementary benefit.

Mr. Newton: I replied to the hon. Member yesterday.

Pensions

Mr. Gorst asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give the latest available figures showing comparisons between old-age pensions paid to women over the age of 60 years and men over the age of 65 years in all member countries of the European Community.

Mr. Whitney: I refer my hon. Friend to section IV of the Department's publication, "Tables of Social Benefit Systems in the Member States of the European Communities, Portugal and Spain (Position at 1 January 1984)", a copy of which is in the Library.

Cigarette Advertising

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will now seek to make all cigarette advertising illegal.

Mr. John Patten: Cigarette advertising is at present controlled by means of a voluntary agreement between the Government and the tobacco industry. That agreement will continue to apply until March 1986.

Salmonella Poisoning

Mr. Eastham asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what guidance he issues to local authorities about measures taken to inspect premises in the prevention of salmonella poisoning.

Mr. John Patten: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Cardiac Surgery Service

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list in the *Official Report* the number of health authorities in England which are proposing to close the cardiac surgery service in hospitals; and what steps are being taken to provide alternative facilities.

Mr. John Patten: The Department has been notified by two health authorities, Victoria health authority and the National Heart and Chest hospitals special health authority, that they are undertaking formal consultation on proposals for the permanent closure or change of use of health buildings which involve services for cardiac surgery. My hon. Friend may wish to consult these authorities direct for further details.

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the estimated cost of operating a cardiac surgery service in a hospital; and if he has made any study of the effect of the closure of such a unit where no alternative facilities exist in close proximity.

Mr. John Patten: It is not possible to provide a general estimate since total revenue costs will vary according to such factors as the size and location of the department and the numbers and types of cases treated. Studies of the effects of closures are matters for health authorities, which are responsible for ensuring that there are adequate alternative facilities.

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will estimate the number of patients in England who would benefit from cardiac surgical facilities but who are prevented from being operated on for heart surgery due to the lack of cardiac surgery services and the effect on such numbers of the proposed closure of the cardiac surgery service at Westminster hospital.

Mr. John Patten: The number of coronary artery by-pass grafts performed in the United Kingdom increased by 91 per cent., from 3,538 to 6,766, between 1979 and 1982, the latest date for which figures are available. Although no firm estimate of need has been established health authorities have been asked to give priority to the development of services for coronary artery surgery.

With regard to the proposed closure of the cardiac service at Westminster hospital I understand that the authority considers that there is sufficient spare capacity in other near-by cardiac surgery units to absorb the surgical workload that it currently undertakes.

Cervical Cancer

Ms. Richardson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the incidence of cervical cancer for the female population under the age of 35 years in England and Wales for the most recent period available.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The latest available figures for England and Wales for newly diagnosed cases of cervical cancer are shown in the table.

Numbers of newly diagnosed cases of cancer of the cervix uteri and carcinoma in situ of cervix uteri and rates per 100,000 female population for ages under 35 years, 1981
England and Wales

Age groups	*Number*	*Rate*
Cancer of cervix uteri		
Total under 35	611	5·0
Under 15	—	—
15 to 19	1	0·0
20 to 24	42	2·3
25 to 29	209	12·5
30 to 34	359	19·4
Carcinoma in situ of cervic uteri		
Total under 35	3,237	26·3
Under 15	—	—
15 to 19	12	0·6
20 to 24	385	20·8
25 to 29	1,260	75·4
30 to 34	1,580	85·6

Mr. K. Bales

Mr. Terry Davis asked the Secretary of State for Social Services why he has refused to confirm the appointment of Mr. K. Bales as general manager of the West Midlands regional health authority.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Discussions about the appointment of individual officers are — and should remain—confidential.

Artificial Limb Centres

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he has any plans to privatise artificial limb centres.

Mr. Newton: Some of the services of artificial limb and appliance centres are currently provided by private contractors. We have no plans to introduce changes in these services; but, when it has reported, we shall of course consider any proposals which may be made by the working party whose terms of reference and membership I announced in reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Sir H. Rossi) on 10 April at c. *209*.

Cigarettes (Children)

Mr. Lofthouse asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what information he has about the action taken during the past six months by the tobacco industry, the Tobacco Council and other related bodies, in conjunction with his initiatives, to discourage illegal sales of cigarettes to children; if he will list all the steps that have been taken in this campaign; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: The Tobacco Advisory Council, representing the United Kingdom tobacco manufacturing

industry, launched a nationwide campaign in July aimed at increasing awareness of the law on illegal sale of cigarettes to children and encouraging its observance among shopkeepers and staff. I understand that as part of their initiative about 250,000 action packs containing explanatory brochures and adhesive warnings notices for display in shops have been distributed to retailers. Special notices for use on vending machines have also been issued. The Government support the aims of this campaign and earlier this year, following consultation with retail bodies, published separate guidelines to discourage illegal sale of cigarettes to children.

Social Security Reviews

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement of the next stages of the work of the social security review teams following the public hearings.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 16 November 1984, c. *385*]: The review teams are assessing the evidence they have received, and are aiming to report by the end of this year. We shall then seek to draw the results together with a view to publishing our conclusions and proposals in the early part of next year.

Kidneys

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many National Health Service patients have received transplants of kidneys imported from the United States of America; and at what costs these were supplied.

Mr. John Patten [*pursuant to his reply*, 20 November 1984, c. *127*]: The United Kingdom Transplant Service has been notified of four NHS patients during 1983 and four so far during 1984 who received a kidney imported from the United States of America. Any cost of supplying the kidney would only be to cover transport and the procurement costs incurred by the American hospital which provided it, since payment to the relatives or estate of a donor is contrary to a Council of Europe resolution to which this country is a signatory. The costs would be a matter for the health authority concerned; details are not recorded either by the Department or the United Kingdom Transplant Service.

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what new initiatives he has to encourage more United Kingdom citizens to become kidney donors.

Mr. John Patten [*pursuant to his reply*, 20 November 1984, c. *127*]: The Government continue to support local initiatives to increase organ donation and to promote the donor card scheme. We will be evaluating the impact of the first year of the present national publicity campaign next March, and will decide at that point whether any major central initiatives are needed to maintain the campaign's momentum. The number of kidney transplants performed in the United Kingdom during the first 10 months of this year was 1,264, compared with 1,160 for the whole of 1983.

Civil Defence Planning

Mr. Stern asked the Secretary of State for Social Services to what extent current civil defence planning allows for the existence of isolation hospitals and secure infectious disease units in each region of the United Kingdom to cope with the possible outbreak of infectious disease following the use of chemical or biological weapons.

Mr. John Patten [*pursuant to his reply*, 20 November 1984, c. *128*]: Existing facilities for handling communicable diseases are planned to meet present peacetime demands. Possible civil defence requirements would be different and planning has to be flexible, making the best use of whatever health facilities are available.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Coal Industry Dispute

14. **Mr. Tony Banks** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many metropolitan police officers have been involved in duties associated with the dispute in the mining industry; and what was the cost involved.

Mr. Brittan: Between 14 March and 17 November the number of officers deployed on mutual aid and associated duties each week has averaged 930. The cost involved is estimated at some £11 million, almost all of which will be recovered from the aided forces.

48. **Mr. Brandon-Bravo** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will make a statement about the policing of the disorder associated with the coal dispute.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Major policing operations have continued to be necessary to ensure that people who wish to go to work may do so, and to prevent or deal with acts of intimidation. Between 13 March and the morning of 22 November inclusive, 1,195 police officers were injured while performing duties related to the dispute. In the same period 8,242 people were arrested for offences in connection with the dispute.

50. **Mr. Latham** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the current total of persons *(a)* arrested, *(b)* charged, *(c)* convicted and *(d)* acquitted for alleged participation in incidents of public disorder arising from the coal miners' dispute.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Between 13 March and 20 November inclusive, 8,174 people were arrested in connection with the miners' dispute. 6,876 of these people have been charged with a variety of offences and 2,626 have been convicted. There have been 704 acquittals. The information available centrally does not distinguish between offences committed in incidents of public disorder and those committed on other occasions.

55. **Mr. Wood** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what support he is providing for the police during the mining dispute.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I would refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest (Sir J. Biggs-Davison) earlier today.

62. **Mr. Barron** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will initiate a public inquiry into the use of the police during the current coal mining dispute.

Mr. Giles Shaw: No.

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the total amount of Government money so far spent on policing the miners' strike.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Information on the total costs of policing the dispute to date is not available. Up to 8 November the Home Office had paid advances of police grant and of the special payment which my right hon. and learned Friend is making available to police authorities on expenditure totalling some £89 million.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will provide details of the occupations of all persons arrested in connection with the mining dispute since 6 March;

(2) if he will give a breakdown of all service men arrested in connection with the mining dispute since 6 March between *(a)* firemen, *(b)* members of the armed forces, by service and *(c)* others.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The information available centrally about the occupations of those arrested relates to the period 13 March to 13 November inclusive and is as follows:

Occupations given by pesons arrested between 13 March and 13 November inclusive

Occupation	*Number*
Miners	7,359
Retired miners	5
MPs (including MEP)	4
Transport workers	14
Students	64
Medical workers	5
Non-manual workers	26
Manual workers	173
Firemen	10
Members of HM Forces	1
Housewives	40
Unemployed	152
Retired (non-miners)	2
Not known/given	75
	7,930

I refer my hon. Friend also to the reply I gave to a question from him on 16 November at c. *366*.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers have been *(a)* arrested and *(b)* charged with offences in connection with the mining dispute or while providing mutual aid in police areas other than their own.

Mr. Giles Shaw: None.

Mr. Yeo asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers have been injured while maintaining order on miners' picket lines since 1 August.

Mr. Giles Shaw: In the period from 1 August to 21 November inclusive 618 police officers were injured while carrying out duties in connection with miners' dispute.

Criminal Offences (Statistics)

17. **Mr. Squire** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has national figures for the trend in reported criminal offences since the deployment of police in mining areas.

Mr. Mellor: The diversion of police effort for public order duties arising from the miners' dispute began in the middle of March. The number of notifiable offences recorded in the second quarter of 1984, seasonally adjusted, was about 1½ per cent. higher than in the immediately preceding quarter. This was broadly in line with the general trend.

Civil Defence

18. **Sir Kenneth Lewis** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what study he has made of the costings of a 40-year civil defence shelter programme.

Mr. Giles Shaw: No detailed study has been made. The cost would vary according to the protection provided and whether the programme depended on adaption of existing buildings or purpose-built structures.

21. **Mr. Madden** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about the change in his Department's planning assumptions for civil defence.

64. **Mr. Frank Cook** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will make a statement about the change in his Department's planning assumptions for civil defence.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The planning assumptions issued in Home Office circular No. ES.1/1984 in July expand on but do not change those issued in circulars ES.1/1981 and 2/1981. The new circular gives more details about the dangers of a conventional attack upon the United Kingdom, and further information on the effects of a nuclear attack.

22. **Sir Edward Gardner** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any plans to seek to amend the Civil Defence Act 1948.

Mr. Giles Shaw: It remains this Government's intention, as we undertook in our 1983 manifesto, to seek an opportunity to amend the Civil Defence Act 1984 to enable civil defence funds to be used in safeguarding against peacetime emergencies as well as against hostile attack. It follows that we would support any private Member who introduced such a measure.

28. **Sir Anthony Kershaw** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department which local authorities include limited evacuation for the civil population living close to military targets in their civil defence plans.

Mr. Giles Shaw: This information is not readily available.

35. **Mr. Speed** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he intends to present the results of the local authority civil defence questionnaire in published form to the House.

58. **Mr. Hunter** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he hopes to announce the results of the civil defence questionnaire sent to local authorities.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I would refer my hon. Friends to the reply given earlier today to a Question from my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey).

36. **Mr. Robert Banks** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many volunteers have been recruited and have received training since the passage of the Civil Defence Regulations 1983.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The information sought has not so far been systematically collected. However, a recent informed estimate put the total number of volunteers recruited and trained as over 17,000.

37. **Mr. Aspinwall** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has consulted any universities in North Atlantic Treaty Organisation countries involved in civil defence research projects.

Mr. Giles Shaw: With the agreement of the United States Government, the University of New Mexico has been consulted on its experience of high explosives trials simulating the blast effects of nuclear explosions.

49. **Mr. Neil Thorne** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what films, audio-visual programmes and publications are available from Government sources for training community civil defence volunteers in chemical warfare defence and protective measures.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Whilst the Government believe that the best way of dealing with this threat is to obtain a comprehensive international ban on such weapons, they are examining ways of detecting and monitoring the presence of chemical agents and of warning the population who may be in danger. They are also considering what protective measures can be taken and what advice given to the population on precautions that can be taken in the home. Training material will be considered when this work is complete.

59. **Mr. Speller** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made in initiating light rescue training for civil defence volunteers.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Under the 1983 regulations, local authorities are required to plan for a wartime rescue service which could inter alia involve civil defence volunteers. Information about local authority progress is not collected centrally, but it is intended that development of detailed guidance on training will be included in the tasks of the Home Office working party on standardisation of volunteer training.

61. **Dr. Michael Clark** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will examine the results of the simulated nuclear explosions research carried out in the United States of America with a view to establishing whether his Department's blast and casualty figures will require major changes.

Mr. Giles Shaw: These results have indeed been used in the revision of the blast and radiation casualty notes which we expect to publish early next year.

Mr. Greg Knight asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to receive the report of the working party looking at the training of civil defence volunteers; and whether he will make their recommendations available to the House.

Mr. Giles Shaw: My right hon. and learned Friend has received the report of the working party on the standardisation of training of civil defence volunteers and a copy has been placed in the Library of the House. It recommends a standard pattern and syllabus of training, and the production of standardised instructional material by the Home Office. We welcome this. We are arranging for the report to be sent to the local authority associations for their information and comments, and subsequently to local authorities for their guidance.

Drugs

19. **Mr. Peter Bruinvels** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress is being made to counteract drug abuse.

Mr. Mellor: I would refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave earlier today to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, North (Mr. Eggar).

26. **Mr. Key** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what priority his Department gives to the prevention and detection of drug trafficking.

32. **Mr. Maude** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures he intends to introduce so as to increase the effectiveness of action against drug traffickers.

43. **Mr. Allan Roberts** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what special provision his Department is making to combat the hard drug problem.

52. **Mr. Gale** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans his Department has to tackle drug abuse.

Mr. David Mellor: I would refer the hon. Members to the reply I gave earlier today to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, North (Mr. Eggar).

Kerb Crawling

20. **Mr. Parry** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made towards introducing legislation to make kerb crawling an offence; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: My right hon. and learned Friend very much hopes that a way will be found shortly to give effect to the Criminal Law Revision Committee's recommendations on kerb crawling and related matters. We would be prepared to offer our full support to a private Member who wished to introduce such a measure.

Shotguns

23. **Mr. Baldrey** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he is satisfied that the present controls on shotguns are adequate.

Mr. Giles Shaw: We have no plans at present to introduce amending legislation, but my right hon. and learned Friend will continue to keep the law on shotguns under close review.

Drug Trafficking

24. **Mr. Sackville** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he proposes to introduce legislation to provide for the confiscation of assets of drug traffickers, including assets acquired as a consequence of criminal activities earlier than those for which the individual is convicted.

Mr. Mellor: My right hon. and learned Friend intends to seek an opportunity for legislation during the life of the

present Parliament for the purpose of depriving offenders, including drug traffickers, of the proceeds of their crimes. The nature and scope of the proposed powers are being considered in the light of the recommendations of the Hodgson committee.

Fine Defaulters

25. **Mr. Alex Carlile** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many fine defaulters have been sent to prison during 1984; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: About 16,400 fine defaulters were received into custody in England and Wales in the first nine months of 1984.

Iranian Nationals

27. **Mr. David Atkinson** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his Department's policy towards Iranian nationals who apply for asylum on the grounds of a well-founded fear of persecution because of the length of time they have remained in the United Kingdom since the Iranian revolution.

Mr. Waddington: Every application for asylum is carefully considered in accordance with the immigration rules and the 1951 United Nations convention relating to the status of refugees. Where an applicant expresses a fear of return to Iran but does not qualify for asylum here, he may be allowed to remain in this country exceptionally, outside the immigration rules. Officials have instructions to consider applications from Iranians sympathetically and cases of continuing doubt are referred to me, but there are, nevertheless, occasions where it would be inappropriate to grant exceptional treatment.

Cable Authority

29. **Mr. Bruce** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will establish a Cable Authority under the terms of the Cable and Broadcasting Act.

Mr. Giles Shaw: On 12 November, at column 70, my right hon. and learned Friend announced in reply to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson Smith) the appointment of the deputy chairman and three other members of the authority to serve alongside the chairman, whose appointment was announced in August. He has now signed a commencement order under the Cable and Broadcasting Act 1984, by means of which the Cable Authority will come into existence as a statutory corporation on 1 December and assume its licensing powers on 1 January.

Picketing (Offences)

30. **Mr. Waller** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any proposals to speed up the rate at which alleged offences committed on or near picket lines are being dealt with in the magistrates' courts.

Mr. Mellor: My noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor has appointed stipendiary magistrates to help deal with the increased workload of courts in a number of places affected by the miners' dispute, and he has indicated his willingness to meet any other requests for such an appointment from magistrates' courts. My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has taken action to encourage and facilitate local arrangements for the transfer of business to less hard pressed courts; the use of additional accommodation for courtrooms; and the loan of staff from other areas. He will continue to take action of this kind.

Sunday Trading

31. **Mr. Montgomery** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish the report of the committee of inquiry into proposals to amend the Shops Act 1950.

46. **Mr. Fallon** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to publish the Auld report on the Shops Act 1950.

47. **Mr. Michael Morris** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will publish the report of the Committee of Inquiry into the proposals to amend the Shops Act 1950.

41. **Mr. Lyell** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has to amend the Shops Act 1950.

Mr. Mellor: I would refer my hon. Friends and my hon. and learned Friend to the reply given earlier today to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown).

56. **Mr. John Hunt** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to be in a position to announce the Government's response to the recommendations of the Auld committee on possible amendments to the Shops Act 1950.

Mr. Mellor: My right hon. and learned Friend will not be in a position to make such a statement until we have given careful consideration to the recommendations of the Auld committee and to the reactions to this report.

Mr. Michael Colvin asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) when he will repeal or amend section 47 of the Shops Act 1950 in order to permit Sunday trading;

(2) what proposals he has to amend the Shops Act 1950.

Mr. Mellor: I refer my hon. Friends to the reply given to a question from my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Warrington, South (Mr. Carlisle) on 21 November, at column *174*.

Magistrates' Courts

33. **Mr. Greg Knight** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he is satisfied with the speed at which justice is done in the magistrates' courts.

Mr. Mellor: The speed with which cases are dealt with in the magistrates' courts varies from place to place and depends on a number of factors, including the practices of prosecution and defence. We believe that there is room for improvement within the resources available. My right hon. and learned Friend has recently issued a circular to courts urging on them a number of measures which can reduce

unnecessary waiting time, and the Prosecution of Offences Bill contains provisions enabling time limits to be imposed on criminal proceedings.

Vietnamese Refugees

34. **Mr. Freeman** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will broaden the categories of relatives of Vietnamese political refugees, now settled in the United Kingdom, who may be admitted to the United Kingdom so as to include all members of the immediate family.

Mr. Waddington: No. We already agree to the admission of the spouse and minor dependent children of refugees who are settled in the United Kingdom. All other applications are examined carefully on a case by case basis.

Licensing Laws

38. **Mr. Hicks** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has any proposals to reform the licensing laws; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: We have no immediate plans to introduce legislation to reform the licensing law, but my right hon. and learned Friend is keeping the matter under review.

Betting, Gaming and Lotteries (Amendment) Act 1984

39. **Mr. Sumberg** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress he has made in framing the regulations under the provisions of the Betting, Gaming and Lotteries (Amendment) Act 1984.

Mr. Mellor: We intend to issue a consultation document soon.

Teenage Courts

40. **Mr. Alexander** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will consider the introduction of teenage courts on the lines of those working on an experimental basis in the United States of America.

Mr. Mellor: I am not clear what exactly my hon. Friend has in mind, but perhaps he could let me have details and I should then be glad to consider them.

School Premises (Entertainments)

42. **Mr. Patrick Thompson** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department when his Department will be in a position to issue guidance to local authorities on the extent to which entertainments on school premises are subject to licensing requirements.

Mr. Mellor: A Home Office circular offering guidance on this matter will be issued to district councils next week.

Metropolitan Police

44. **Mr. Maclennan** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has reviewed the current establishment levels and deployment of the Metropolitan police; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw: My right hon. and learned Friend has told the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that the Metropolitan police will be allowed an additional 50 police and 132 civilian posts during the financial year 1985-86. This will bring the police establishment to 27,165 and the civil staff ceiling to 13,882, representing increases of 576 and 832 respectively since 1982. On 30 September 1984 the police strength was 26,779 and the civil staff strength was 13,301.

The deployment of officers is a matter for the Commissioner, but he agrees an overall policing strategy for the metropolis with the Home Secretary as police authority.

Television (Concessionary Licences)

45. **Mr. Phillip Oppenheim** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he is satisfied with the present television concessionary licensing system.

Mr. Giles Shaw: We recognise that the present concessionary licence arrangements are anomalous in a number of respects. The concessionary scheme for retired people in residential care was modified earlier this year to enable disabled people to qualify on the same terms as retirement pensioners, but my right hon. and learned Friend has not ruled out the possibility of further examination.

Civil Defence College

51. **Mr. McQuarrie** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action has been taken to update and expand the library service of the civil defence college.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Expenditure on books and periodicals has risen from £1,635 in 1983-84 to an estimated £3,000 in 1984-85. Further improvements are planned, including structural alterations and arrangements for accessing data from other sources.

Mr. Sayeed asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many directing and tutorial staff are currently employed at the Civil Defence college; and how many of these have had a full-time career in the services or police.

Mr. Giles Shaw: There are 17 directing and tutorial staff; of these 10 have had full-time careers in the services or the police and a further two are on secondment.

Immigration

53. **Mr. Tony Lloyd** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will indicate the number of fiancés who were refused entry clearance to enter the United Kingdom in the last 12 months on the grounds that their primary purpose was other than marriage.

Mr. Waddington: The information requested is available only for the Indian sub-continent, for which the latest quarterly figures are given in the following table:

Fiances refused entry clearance in the Indian subcontinent solely or partly because the primary purpose of the marriage was to obtain admission to the United Kingdom.

Number

	Solely	*Partly*
1983		
3rd quarter	140	50
4th quarter	240	30

	Solely	*Partly*
1984		
1st quarter	190	30
2nd quarter	170	20

Departmental Staff

54. **Mr. Lewis Stevens** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many staff there are in the F6 division of his Department; and how many of them have visited local authorities during 1984.

Mr. Giles Shaw: There are thirty-seven in F6 Division. Numerous visits have been paid to local authorities by the four staff most closely involved.

Emergency Planning Staff

57. **Mr. Gerald Bowden** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has received any representations to bring local authority emergency planning staff into a common national grading and salary structure.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Representations to this effect from the County Emergency Planning Officer's Society are currently receiving consideration.

Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis

60. **Mr. Cohen** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will dismiss the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis.

Mr. Brittan: The Commissioner is appointed by Her Majesty The Queen on my recommendation. He has my full confidence.

National Reporting Centre

63. **Dr. Mawhinney** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers man the national reporting centre daily; how many are on the roster for service there; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The president of the Association of Chief Police Officers, colleagues in the association and one of Her Majesty's inspectors of constabulary are at various times at the National Reporting Centre, which is co-ordinating responses to requests for assistance from chief officers of police in England and Wales. During the daytime they have at present the help at the centre of six police officers and two civilian staff. Overnight the staffing is normally at a lower level. Duties are arranged on a week to week basis; there is no regular roster.

Miss Hilda Murrell

65. **Mr. Dalyell** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the chief constable for Salop about the conduct of the police investigation into the death of Miss Hilda Murrell; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I understand from the chief constable of West Mercia constabulary that an investigation into Miss Murrell's death began on 24 March 1984 and is continuing. An inquest is expected to take place next month.

Firearms

Mr. Gwilym Jones asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many weapons classified under firearms during 1983, coming into police possession, appeared in constabularies' annual reports under the heading *(a)* voluntary surrender or confiscation by the courts, *(b)* voluntary surrender and *(c)* confiscation by the courts, respectively;

(2) how many centre-fire cartridges, excluding shotgun and 0·22 rim-fire cartridges in 1983, were *(a)* voluntarily surrendered to the police, *(b)* seized by the police, with the owners subsequently agreeing to police disposal, or *(c)* confiscated by the courts (i) from persons not holding or who have never held part (1) firearms certificates, (ii) from the holders of current part (1) firearms certificates, (iii) from the holders after expiry of part (1) firearms certificates, who had not been issued with temporary certificates to enable them legally to dispose of the ammunition and (iv) from the holders after expiry of part (1) firearms certificates, who had been issued with temporary certificates to enable them legally to dispose of the ammunition;

(3) how many 0·22 calibre rim-fire cartridges were *(a)* voluntarily surrendered to the police, *(b)* seized by the police, with the owners subsequently agreeing to police disposal, or *(c)* confiscated by the courts (i) from persons not holding or who have never held part (1) firearms certificates, (ii) from the holders of current part (1) firearms certificates, (iii) from the holders after expiry of part (1) firearms certificates, who had not been issued with temporary certificates to enable them legally to dispose of the ammunition and (iv) from the holders after expiry of part (1) firearms certificates who had been issued with temporary certificates to enable them legally to dispose of the ammunition, during 1983;

(4) how many shotgun cartridges were *(a)* voluntarily surrendered to the police, *(b)* seized by the police, with the owners subsequently agreeing to police disposal, or *(c)* confiscated by the courts (i) from persons not holding or who have never held shotgun certificates, (ii) from the holders of current shotgun certificates, (iii) from the holders after expiry of shotgun certificates, who had not been issued with temporary certificates to enable them legally to dispose of the ammunition and (iv) from the holders after expiry of shotgun certificates who had been issued with temporary certificates to enable them legally to dispose of the ammunition, during 1983;

(5) how many part (1) firearms that were defined as humane killers, were *(a)* voluntarily surrendered to the police, *(b)* seized by the police, with the owners subsequently agreeing to police disposal, or *(c)* confiscated by the courts (i) from persons not holding or who have never held part (1) firearms certificates, (ii) from the holders of current part (1) firearms certificates, (iii) from the holders after expiry of part (1) firearms certificates, who had not been issued with temporary certificates to enable them legally to dispose of the weapons and (iv) from the holders after expiry of part (1) firearms certificates, who had been issued with temporary certificates to enable them legally to dispose of the weapons, during 1983;

(6) how many air-weapons classified as part (1) firearms, were *(a)* voluntarily surrendered to the police, *(b)* seized by the police, with the owners subsequently agreeing to police disposal or *(c)* confiscated by the courts

(i) from persons not holding or who never have held part (1) firearms certificates, (ii) from the holders of current part (1) firearms certificates, (iii) from the holders after expiry of part (1) firearms certificates, who had not been issued with temporary certificates to enable them legally to dispose of the weapons and (iv) from the holders after expiry of part (1) firearms certificates, who had been issued with temporary certificates to enable them legally to dispose of the weapons, during 1983;

(7) how many shotguns classified as part (1) firearms with barrel lengths of less than 24 inches, including sawn-off shotguns, were *(a)* voluntarily surrendered to the police, *(b)* seized by the police, with the owners subsequently agreeing to police disposal or *(c)* confiscated by the courts (i) from persons not holding or who have never held part (1) firearms certificates, (ii) from the holders of current part (1) firearms certificates, (iii) from the holders after expiry of part (1) firearms certificates, who had not been issued with temporary certificates to enable them legally to dispose of the weapons and (iv) from the holders after expiry of part (1) firearms certificates, who had been issued with temporary certificates to enable them legally to dispose of the weapons, during 1983;

(8) how many shotguns with barrel lengths greater than 24 inches were *(a)* voluntarily surrendered to the police, *(b)* seized by the police, with the owners subsequently agreeing to police disposal or *(c)* confiscated by the courts (i) from persons not holding or who have never held shotgun certificates, (ii) from the holders of current shotgun certificates, (iii) from the holders after expiry of shotgun certificates, who had not been issued with temporary certificates to enable them legally to dispose of the weapons and (iv) from the holders after expiry of shotgun certificates who had been issued with temporary certificates to enable them legally to dispose of the weapons, during 1983;

(9) how many part (1) firearms that were classified as rifles, excluding 0·22 calibre rim-rifles, were *(a)* voluntarily surrendered to the police, *(b)* seized by the police, with the owners subsequently agreeing to police disposal or *(c)* confiscated by the courts (i) from persons not holding or who have never held part (1) firearms certificates, (ii) from the holders of current part (1) firearms certificates, (iii) from the holders after expiry of part (1) firearms certificates, who had not been issued with temporary certificates to enable them legally to dispose of the weapons and (iv) from the holders after expiry of part (1) firearms certificates, who had been issued with temporary certificates to enable them legally to dispose of the weapons, during 1983;

(10) how many part (1) firearms that were classified as 0·22 calibre rim-fire rifles, were *(a)* voluntarily surrendered to the police, *(b)* seized by the police, with the owners subsequently agreeing to police disposal or *(c)* confiscated by the courts (i) from persons not holding or who have never held part (1) firearms certificates, (ii) from the holders of current part (1) firearms certificates, (iii) from the holders after expiry of part (1) firearms certificates, who had not been issued with temporary certificates to enable them legally to dispose of the weapons and (iv) from the holders after expiry of part (1) firearms certificates, who had been issued with temporary certificates to enable them legally to dispose of the weapons, during 1983;

(11) how many part (1) firearms that were classified as handguns (revolvers and pistols) were *(a)* voluntarily surrendered to the police, *(b)* seized by the police, with the owners subsequently agreeing to police disposal or *(c)* confiscated by the courts (i) from persons not holding or who have never held part (1) firearms certificates, (ii) from the holders of current part (1) firearms certificates, (iii) from the holders after expiry of part (1) firearms certificates, who had not been issued with temporary certificates to enable them legally to dispose of the weapons and (iv) from the holders after expiry of part (1) firearms certificates who had been issued with temporary certificates to enable them legally to dispose of the weapons, during 1983;

(12) how many new applications, during 1983, for the issue of part (1) firearms certificates that were refused, resulted in appeals to the court that were *(a)* withdrawn, *(b)* dismissed, *(c)* allowed and *(d)* held over;

(13) how many part (1) firearms certificates, during 1983, were cancelled *(a)* as a result of the death of the holder, *(b)* due to holder emigrating and *(c)* due to the certificate holder transferring to another force area;

(14) how many part (5) firearms certificates were current and in force on 1 January 1983;

(15) how many part (5) firearms certificates remained current and in force on 31 December 1983;

(16) how many new applications, during 1983, for the issue of part (5) firearms certificates were *(a)* granted and *(b)* refused.

(17) how many *(a)* new applications and *(b)* renewal applications during 1983 for the issue of part (5) firearms certificates were subsequently withdrawn by the applicants prior to either the grant of or refusal to issue the certificate being given;

(18) how many applications during 1983 to renew the issue of part (5) firearms certificates were *(a)* granted and *(b)* refused;

(19) how many applications, during 1983, for the grant of part (1) firearms certificates resulted in the total number of weapons originally requested in that application being granted;

(20) how many applications during 1983 for the grant of part (1) firearms certificates were not proceeded with to either a grant being issued or a written refusal being given, due to the applicant providing insufficient evidence in support of the application in order to comply with the requirements of the Firearms Act 1968;

(21) how many new applications during 1983 for the issue of part (1) firearms certificates that were refused resulted in *(a)* notice of appeal against the decision of the appropriate chief officer of police, *(b)* settlement prior to hearing, and on what terms of settlement and *(c)* a hearing by the court;

(22) how many new applications were submitted during 1983 for the grant of part (1) firearms certificates;

(23) how many applicants during 1983 submitted requests for new grants of part (1) firearms certificates that the applicants subsequently withdrew prior to either a grant or a written refusal being given;

(24) how many applications during 1983 there were for the transfer of part (1) firearms certificates to another force area that were subsequently granted;

(25) how many applications during 1983 for the transfer of part (1) firearms certificates to another force area were subsequently cancelled by the new issuing authority on or prior to the first renewal;

(26) how many part (1) firearms certificates during 1983 were revoked;

(27) how many part (1) firearms certificates during 1983 were revoked resulted in *(a)* notice of appeal against the decision of the appropriate chief officer of police, *(b)* settlement prior to hearing and on what terms the settlement and *(c)* a hearing by the court;

(28) how many part (1) firearms certificates during 1983 that were revoked by chief officers of police resulted in appeals to the court that were *(a)* withdrawn, *(b)* dismissed, *(c)* allowed and *(d)* held over;

(29) how many applications were submitted during 1983 for the variation of part (1) firearms certificates; and how many were granted;

(30) how many applicants during 1983 submitted requests for the variation of part (1) firearms certificates that the applicants subsequently withdrew prior to either a variation or a written refusal being given;

(31) how many applications during 1983 for the variation of part (1) firearms certificates resulted in the total number of weapons originally requested in that application being granted;

(32) how many applications during 1983 for the variation of part (1) firearms certificates were not proceeded with to either a grant of the variation or a written refusal being given due to the applicant providing insufficient evidence in support of the application in order to comply with there requirements of Firearms Act 1968;

(33) how many applications for the variation of part (1) firearms certificates were refused during 1983;

(34) how many applications during 1983 for the variation of part (1) firearms certificates that were refused, resulted in *(a)* notice of appeal against the decision of the appropriate chief officer of police, *(b)* settlement prior to hearing and on what terms of settlement and *(c)* a hearing by the court;

(35) how many applications during 1983 for the variation of part (1) firearms certificates that were refused resulted in appeals to the court that were *(a)* withdrawn, *(b)* dismissed, *(c)* allowed and *(d)* held over;

(36) how many applications were submitted during 1983 for the renewal of part (1) firearms certificates; and how many were granted;

(37) how many part (1) firearms certificates during 1983 were cancelled on expiry with no application to renew being submitted;

(38) how many applicants, during 1983 submitted requests for the renewal of part (1) firearms certificates that the applicants subsequently withdrew prior to either a renewal being granted or a written refusal being given;

(39) how many applications during 1983 for the renewal of part (1) firearms certificates resulted in the total number of weapons originally requested in that application being granted;

(40) how many applications during 1983 for the renewal of part (1) firearms certificates were not fully proceeded with either to the grant of the renewal or a written refusal being given, due to the applicant providing insufficient evidence in support of the application in order to comply with the requirements of the Firearms Act 1968;

(41) how many applications during 1983 for the renewal of part (1) firearms certificates that were refused resulted in *(a)* notice of appeal against the decision of the appropriate chief officer of police, *(b)* settlement prior to hearing and on what terms of settlement and *(c)* a hearing by the court;

(42) how many applications during 1983 for the renewal of part (1) firearms certificates that were refused resulted in appeals to the court that were *(a)* withdrawn, *(b)* dismissed, *(c)* allowed and *(d)* held over;

(43) how many temporary certificates were issued to those possessing part (1) firearms during 1983;

(44) on how many occasions temporary certificates were re-issued on a continuation basis to those possessing part (1) firearms during 1983, giving the quantity issued to each individual holder;

(45) how many temporary certicates were issued to those possessing part (1) firearms during 1983 whose weapons held were subsequently *(a)* seized by, *(b)* voluntarily surrendered to or *(c)* confiscated by the police;

(46) how many part (1) firearms certificate holders on expiry of their certificate with no temporary certificate issued during 1983 had their weapons *(a)* seized by, *(b)* voluntarily surrendered to, or *(c)* confiscated by, the police;

(47) how many new applications were submitted during 1983 for the grant of shotgun certificates; how many were granted; and how many were refused;

(48) how many applicants during 1983 submitted requests for new grants of shotgun certificates that the applicants subsequently withdrew prior to either a grant or a written refusal being given;

(49) how many new applications during 1983 for the issue of shotgun certificates that were refused resulted in *(a)* notice of appeal against the decision of the appropriate chief officer of police, *(b)* settlement prior to hearing and on what terms of settlement and *(c)* a hearing by the court;

(50) how many new applications during 1983 for the issue of shotgun certificates that were refused resulted in appeals to the court that were *(a)* withdrawn, *(b)* dismissed, *(c)* allowed and *(d)* held over;

(51) how many shotgun certificates during 1983 were cancelled as a result of the death of the holders;

(52) how many shotgun certificates during 1983 were cancelled due to the holders emigrating;

(53) how many temporary certificates were issued to those possessing shotguns during 1983 whose weapons held were subsequently *(a)* seized by, *(b)* voluntarily surrendered to, or *(c)* confiscated by, the police;

(54) how many part (1) firearms certificate holders on expiry of their certificate with no temporary certifcate issued during 1983 had their weapons *(a)* seized by, *(b)* voluntarily surrendered to, or *(c)* confiscated by the police;

(55) how many applicants during 1983 submitted requests for the renewal of shotgun certificates that were refused;

(56) how many applications during 1983 for the renewal of shotgun certificates that were refused resulted in *(a)* notice of appeal against the decision of the appropriate chief officer of police, *(b)* settlement prior to hearing and on what terms of settlement and *(c)* a hearing by the court;

(57) how many applications during 1983 for the renewal of shotgun certificates that were refused resulted in appeals to the court that were *(a)* withdrawn, *(b)* dismissed, *(c)* allowed and *(d)* held over;

(58) how many temporary certificates were issued to those possessing shotguns during 1983;

(59) on how many occasions temporary certificates were re-issued on a continuation basis to those possessing shotguns during 1983, giving the quantity issued to each individual holder;

(60) how many shotgun certificates during 1983 that were revoked by chief officers of police resulted in appeals to the court that were *(a)* withdrawn, *(b)* dismissed, *(c)* allowed and *(d)* held over;

(61) how many applications were submitted during 1983 for the renewal of shotgun certificates;

(62) how many shotgun certificates during 1983 were cancelled on expiry with no application to renew being submitted;

(63) how many applicants during 1983 submitted requests for the renewal of shotgun certificates that the applicants subsequently withdrew prior to either a renewal being granted or a written refusal being given;

(64) how many shotgun certificates during 1983 were cancelled because of the certificate holder transferring to another force area;

(65) how many applications during 1983 there were for the transfer of shotgun certificates to another force area that were subsequently granted by the new issuing authority;

(66) how many applications during 1983 for the transfer of shotgun certificates to another force area were subsequently cancelled by the new issuing authority on or prior to the first renewal;

(67) how many shotgun certificates during 1983 were revoked;

(68) how many shotgun certificates during 1983 that were revoked resulted in *(a)* notice of appeal against the decision of the appropriate chief officer of police, *(b)* settlement prior to hearing and on what terms of settlement and *(c)* a hearing by the court;

(69) how many registered firearms dealers' certificates were current and in force on 1 January 1983;

(70) how many registered firearms dealers' certificates remained current and in force on 31 December 1983;

(71) how many new applications were submitted during 1983 for the grant of registered firearms dealers' certificates;

(72) how many new applications were granted during 1983 for the issue of registered firearms dealers' certificates;

(73) how many applicants submitted requests for new grants of registered firearms dealers' certificates that the applicants subsequently withdrew prior to either a grant or a written refusal being given during 1983;

(74) how many applications during 1983 for the grant of registered firearms dealers' certificates were not proceeded with to either a grant being issued or a written refusal being given, due to the applicant providing insufficient evidence in support of the application in order to comply with the requirements of the Firearms Act 1968;

(75) how many new applications were refused during 1983 for the issue of registered firearms dealers' certificates;

(76) how many new applications during 1983 for the issue of registered firearms dealers' certificates that were refused resulted in *(a)* notice of appeal against the decision of the appropriate chief officer of police, *(b)* settlement prior to hearing and on what terms of settlement and *(c)* a hearing by the court;

(77) how many new applications during 1983 for the issue of registered firearms dealers' certificates that were refused resulted in appeals to the court that were *(a)* withdrawn, *(b)* dismissed, *(c)* allowed and *(d)* held over;

(78) how many registered firearms dealers' certificates, during 1983 were cancelled as a result of the death of the holders;

(79) how many registered firearms dealers' certificates were cancelled during 1983 due to the holders emigrating;

(80) how many registered firearms dealers' certificates were cancelled during 1983 due to the certificate holder transferring to another force area;

(81) how many applications there were during 1983 for the transfer of registered firearms dealers' certificates to another force area that were subsequently granted;

(82) how many applications during 1983 for the transfer of registered firearms dealers' firearms certificates to another force area were subsequently cancelled by the new issuing authority, on or prior to the first renewal;

(83) how many registered firearms dealers' certificates were revoked during 1983;

(84) how many registered firearms dealers' certificates that were revoked during 1983 resulted in *(a)* notice of appeal against the decision of the appropriate chief officer of police, *(b)* settlement prior to hearing and on what terms of settlement and *(c)* a hearing by the court;

(85) how many registered dealers' certificates that were revoked during 1983 by chief officers of police resulted in appeals to the court that were *(a)* withdrawn, *(b)*dismissed, *(c)* allowed and *(d)* held over;

(86) how many applications were submitted during 1983 for the renewal of registered firearms dealers' certificates;

(87) how many applications for the renewal of registered firearms dealers' certificates were granted during 1983;

(88) how many registered firearms dealers' certificates were cancelled on expiry with no application to renew being submitted during 1983;

(89) how many applicants during 1983 submitted requests for the renewal of registered firearms dealers' certificates that the applicants subsequently withdrew prior to either a renewal being granted or a written refusal being given;

(90) how many applications for the renewal of registered firearms dealers' certificates during 1983 were not fully proceeded with either to the grant of the renewal or a written refusal being given due to the applicant providing insufficient evidence in support of the application in order to comply with the requirements of the Firearms Act 1968;

(91) how many applicants during 1983 submitted requests for the renewal of registered firearms dealers' certificates that were refused;

(92) how many applications during 1983 for the renewal of registered firearms dealers' certificates that were refused resulted in *(a)* notice of appeal against the decision of the appropriate chief officer of police, *(b)* settlement prior to hearing and on what terms of settlement and *(c)* a hearing by the court;

(93) how many applications during 1983 for the renewal of registered firearms' dealers certificates that were refused resulted in appeals to the court that were *(a)* withdrawn, *(b)* dismissed, *(c)* allowed and *(d)* held over;

(94) how many registered firearms dealers' certificates were removed from the register during 1983;

(95) how many *(a)* shotguns with a barrel length greater than 24 inches, *(b)* shotguns with a barrel length less than 24 inches defined as saddle-guns, but excluding sawn-off shotguns, *(c)* shotguns with barrel length less tha

24 inches defined as smooth bored rifle-type, but excluding saddle-guns or sawn-off shotguns, and *(d)* shotguns with barrel length less than 24 inches defined as sawn-off shotguns, were voluntarily surrendered to the police during 1983, excluding weapons confiscated by the courts;

(96) how many *(a)* shotguns with barrel length greater than 24 inches, *(b)* shotguns with barrel length less than 24 inches defined as saddle-guns, but excluding sawn-off shotguns, *(c)* shotguns with barrel length less than 24 inches defined as smooth bored rifle-type, and excluding saddle-guns or sawn-off shotguns, and *(d)* shotguns with barrel length less than 24 inches defined as sawn-off shotguns, were confiscated by the courts during 1983;

(97) how many weapons classified as firearms, not including air-weapons which are not defined as firearms, were voluntarily surrendered to the police during 1983 excluding weapons confiscated by the courts;

(98) how many weapons classified as firearms, excluding air-weapons which are not defined as firearms were confiscated by the courts during 1983;

(99) how many weapons classified as air-weapons, excluding air-weapons classified as firearms, were voluntarily surrendered to the police in 1983, excluding weapons confiscated by the courts;

(100) how many weapons classified as air-weapons, excluding air-weapons classified as firearms, were confiscated by the courts during 1983;

Mr. Giles Shaw: The information requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Gwilym Jones asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many new applications during 1983 for the issue of part (1) firearms certificates were *(a)* refused and *(b)* granted;

(2) how many part (1) firearms certificates were current and in force on 1 January 1983;

(3) how many part (1) firearms certificates remained current and in force on 31 December 1983;

(4) how many applicants during 1983 submitted requests for the renewal of part (1) firearms certificates that were refused;

(5) how many shotgun certificates were current and in force (i) on 1 January 1983 and (ii) 31 December 1983;

(6) how many applications during 1983 for the renewal of shotgun certificates were granted.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I shall write to my hon. Friend with such information as is available.

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement regarding the standard territorial conditions as proposed by his working party into the administration of the Firearms Act 1968, dated April 1984, for use in the case of firearm certificate holders with access to a number of different locations for the use of weapons.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Chief constables have been asked to adopt the working party's recommendation, and my right hon. and learned Friend proposes to review the position next summer.

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he is considering taking to control the purchase and use of O.410, and other, smooth-bored shotguns with fitted sound moderators (silencers) and the purchase and use of sound moderators as accessories in line with the current controls in force on sound moderators as accessories for fitment, according to part (1) of the Firearms Act 1968.

Mr. Giles Shaw: At present, none.

Prostitution

Mr. Tom Cox asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many fines imposed on people convicted of prostitution at the South Western magistrates' court during the last 12 months have been under £10, under £20, between £20 and £50, between £50 and £100, over £100, over £200, over £300, over £400 and over £500, respectively.

Mr. Mellor: The available information is given in the following table and covers offences of soliciting for the purposes of prostitution by both males and females.

Persons fined for offences of soliciting for the purpose of prostitution at the South Western Magistrates' Court by amount of fine. 1983

Number of persons

Amount of fine	*Number of persons fined*
Under £10	14
£10 and under £20	29
£20 and under £50	319
£50 and up to and including £100	60
Over £100	—

Mr. Tom Cox asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the number of *(a)* women and *(b)* men charged with offences concerning prostitution at the South Western magistrates' court in each month of each of the last three years.

Mr. Mellor: The information available to me, which may be incomplete, is given in the table, and covers offences associated with prostitution. To produce figures for 1981 also would involve a disproportionate cost.

*Persons proceeded against for offences concerning prostitution South Western Magistrates' Court by sex of defendant and month of appearance**

Number of persons

	1982		*1983*	
Month	*Males*	*Females*	*Males*	*Females*
January	1	17	—	18
February	1	10	2	51
March	1	7	3	54
April	2	15	3	29
May	—	13	—	29
June	—	25	1	28
July	—	16	—	33
August	3	30	2	35
September	2	13	—	61
October	2	27	1	58
November	5	25	—	45
December	4	5	1	35
TOTAL	21	203	13	476

* The offences relating to prostitution are:
Detention of female in brothel.
Person responsible for girl under 16 causing her prostitution.
Living on the earnings of a prostitute.
Procuring, permitting, etc. prostitution of a female defective.
Man or woman living wholly or in part on the earnings of prostitution.
Soliciting by a man.

Brothel keeping.
Allowing child to be in brothel.
Permitting licensed premises to be the habitual resort of prostitutes.
Permitting licensed premises to be used as a brothel.
Persons keeping licensed premises or refreshment house to be the resort of prostitutes or reported thieves.
Offences by prostitutes.
Persons aiding and abetting offences by prostitutes.

Criminal Statistics

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will give a breakdown by year of the numbers of females aged 14 years but under 21 years who were *(a)* found guilty of or *(b)* cautioned for, indictable offences per 100,000 of population in each of the last 15 years;

(2) if he will give a breakdown by year of the numbers of males aged 14 years and under 21 years who were *(a)* found guilty of or *(b)* cautioned for, indictable offences per 100,000 of population in each of the last 15 years.

Mr. Mellor: The readily available information is published in tables 5.18 and 5.19 of "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales, 1983" (Cmnd. 9349) and in the corresponding tables in the publications for earlier years.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give a breakdown by region of the numbers of juvenile offenders *(a)* found guilty of or *(b)* cautioned for offences of burglary, criminal damage and theft in each of the last five years for which figures are available.

Mr. Mellor: The readily available information is published in "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales" for the years 1980 to 1983 in supplementary tables, vol. 3, tables S3.2(B), S3.2(C), S3.4(B), S3.4(C), S3.7(B) and S3.7(C); and for 1979 in the Command Paper (Cmnd. 8098), tables 3*(b)*, 3*(c)*, 7*(b)*, 7*(c)*, 34*(b)* and 34*(c)*.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will give a breakdown by age of offender in years of the total number of offences committed by females under 25 years of age which resulted in either cautions or convictions for each of the last three years for which figures are available;

(2) if he will give a breakdown by age of offender in years of the total number of offences committed by males under 25 years of age which resulted in either cautions or convictions for each of the last three years for which figures are available.

Mr. Mellor: The readily available information is published in "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales, 1983" (Cmnd. 9349) (table 5.19 for indictable offences and supplementary tables, vol. 4, table S4.1(B) and S4.1(D) for summary offences).

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what research he has carried out on the results of the application of the short sharp shock treatment on young offenders; and on what basis of research he has made his decision to introduce this system in all young offender establishments.

Mr. Mellor: On 24 July my right hon. and learned Friend announced the publication of a report by the young offenders psychology unit evaluating the experiment with tougher regimes in selected detention centres and a programme of work to establish a consistent regime for the whole detention centre system. Much but not all of the experimental regime will be incorporated into the new regime on a permanent basis. Full account is being taken of the evaluation findings, experience of running the experimental regimes, and the way in which detention centres generally have geared their regimes to the new sentencing structure introduced in May 1983; and the prison service unions are being fully consulted. The new regime will come into operation next year.

Police Officers (Cautions)

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the total number of cautions given by police officers in England and Wales in each of the last three years.

Mr. Mellor: The information requested is published in table 5.3 of "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales, 1983" (Cmnd. 9349).

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give a breakdown by police force in England and Wales of the number of occasions on which cautions are given to *(a)* all offenders, *(b)* offenders aged over 25 years, *(c)* offenders aged 20 to 25 years, *(d)* offenders aged 18 to 20 years and *(e)* offenders aged under 18 years.

Mr. Mellor: The readily available information is published in "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales" supplementary tables 1983, vol. 3 (tables S3. 8(A)—indictable offences—and S3. 8(B)—summary offences).

Remand

Mr. Pike asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average time spent on remand in remand centres awaiting trial.

Mr. Mellor: Information is not available on the average time spent on remand in different types of establishment. The information available centrally relates to the average time spent on remand in custody by all untried prisoners and is published annually in "Prison Statistics, England and Wales" (table 2*(g)* of the latest issue for 1983, Cmnd. 9363).

Charities

Mr. Greenway asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will introduce legislation to regulate the methods by which charities raise funds; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: My right hon. and learned Friend has no plans at present to do so. Legislation already exists to control charitable collections in the street and from house to house; and the provisions of the criminal law relating to fraud and deception apply where appropriate.

Paedophilia

Mrs Jill Knight asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will now introduce legislation to enable him to proscribe all organisations whose declared aim is to campaign for the freedom of adults to have sexual relationships with children.

Mr. Mellor: We will be considering carefully what lessons may be learned from the recent trial of leading members of the Paedophile Information Exchange. My

right hon. and learned Friend would prefer to complete that consideration before reaching any conclusion about the adequacy of the existing law protecting children from the sexual attentions of adults.

Mr. Roy Meads

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will review the remand category on which Mr. Roy Meads has been held at Her Majesty's prison, Winson Green, Birmingham, since his arrest on 12 July.

Mr. Mellor: Mr. Mead's security category has been reviewed and it has been decided that he should continue to remain provisionally in security category A.

Released Prisoners (Accommodation)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has for the provision of further hostel accommodation for released prisoners.

Mr. Mellor: Earlier this year my right hon. and learned Friend made available additional resources to enable some 600 new after-care hostel places to be funded by the end of 1984-85. He also put in hand a review of the voluntary after-care accommodation scheme, with a view to assessing need and effectiveness more accurately, and to achieving economies and greater efficiency. The review should be completed early next year, and he will then consider the future of the scheme.

Motorways

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) on how many occasions and in how many places it has been necessary for the police to restrain the passage of motorists on exits and entrances to motorways since 6 March;

(2) on how many occasions it has been necessary to divert the flow of traffic on motorways for reasons other than those connected with road traffic accidents and road works since 1 March.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The information requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Longmoor Base, Hampshire

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the chief constable of Hampshire police as to how many people were detained by police in a pit at Longmoor base firing range between 15 November and 20 November.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The chief constable tells me that no one was detained in a pit.

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the chief constable of Hampshire police as to how many police were involved in the operation to guard the cruise missile convoy which entered Longmoor base, Liss, Hampshire, between Thursday 15 November and Tuesday 20 November;

(2) if he will call for a report from the chief constable of Hampshire police as to why police involved in the operation to guard the cruise missile convoy based at Longmoor base have blocked A and B roads leading in and out of Greatham village.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The chief constable tells me that no police were used to guard the convoy to which the hon. Member refers. Some A and B roads were blocked for a few minutes in order to facilitate the passage of the convoy and for the safety of other road users.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the chief constable of Hampshire police as to how many persons have been arrested by the police at demonstrations outside and inside Longmoor camp and on which days; and how many were charged.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Mr. Edward Hopson

Mr. Greenway asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will establish an inquiry to consider whether the arrangements for supervising and reporting on Mr. Edward Hopson after his discharge from Broadmoor were carried out satisfactorily.

Mr. Mellor: My right hon. and learned Friend is inquiring into the efficacy of the arrangements made for supervising Mr. Hopson and he has asked for reports from those responsible. In the light of the reports he will consider whether any further action is required.

Prisoners (Statistics)

Mr. Bermingham asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners of European nationality are currently detained in Her Majesty's prisons having been convicted of criminal offences; and if he will give a breakdown of the figures by individual countries of origin.

Mr. Mellor: The available information is given in the following table. Information is not recorded centrally on the nationality of persons held in prison department establishments in England and Wales. Information on their country of birth is recorded centrally but is reasonably complete only for sentenced prisoners; of the total of 32,700 sentenced prisoners on 30 September 1984, information on country of birth was not available for 1,500.

Sentenced prisoners recorded as born in Europe in prison department establishments in England and Wales on 30 September 1984: by country of birth.

	*Estimated number
United Kingdom, Channel Islands, Isle of Man	28,130
Irish Republic	620
Austria	5
Belgium/Luxembourg	5
Cyprus	80
Denmark	5
Federal Republic of Germany	120
France	15
Gibraltar	5
Greece	5
Holland	30
Hungary	15
Italy	45

	*Estimated number
Malta	20
Poland	15
Spain	20
Other Europe (excluding USSR)	30

* Rounded figures. The figures are those recorded centrally and are approximate; detailed checking of individual cases would involve disproportionate cost.

Repatriation of Prisoners Act 1984

Mr. Bermingham asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he proposes to lay the statutory instruments referred to in section 9(2) of the Repatriation of Prisoners Act 1984; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: My right hon. and learned Friend hopes that an order under section 9(2) of the Act, bringing the Act into force, will be made early in the new year.

Trent RHA (Premises)

Miss Maynard asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the chief constable of south Yorkshire under section 30(1) of the Police Act 1964 into *(a)* the policing of the premises of Trent regional health authority on 1 October, *(b)* the number of people charged and the offences with which they were charged and *(c)* the number of people who subsequently required hospital treatment.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The chief constable tells me that on 1 October a small number of police officers were sent to the Trent regional health authority's premises in Old Fulwood road, Sheffield, because there was reason to believe that members of the National Union of Public Employees would be demonstrating against the employment of contract cleaners, who were due to begin work there that day. When the contract cleaners arrived for work, a number of demonstrators tried to prevent them entering the premises. Four people were arrested. Three of them were charged, with (i) assault on the police and conduct likely to cause a breach of the peace, (ii) obstructing a police officer and (iii) assault on the police. The fourth, who was arrested for obstructing a police officer and assault on the police, was reported for process by way of summons.

Two people, including a police officer, required hospital treatment.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Milk Quotas

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many applications he has received for compensation as a result of the introduction of milk quotas; what is his estimate of the number likely to qualify for compensation and the resultant cost to the taxpayer; and whether compensation will be payable regardless of the means of the applicant and the profitability of the farming enterprise as a whole.

Mr. MacGregor: Some 2,747 of the 4,826 producers in England and Wales who originally expressed an interest in the outgoers scheme were invited to commit themselves to the scheme at the beginning of October. As soon as it became clear that a significant proportion of these producers were not going out of production after all we sent out a further 380 invitations to make good the shortfall. On both occasions we gave priority to the smallest producers, as we will if we have to repeat the process in the future.

It is not yet possible to estimate how many producers will finally join the scheme, but on the basis of present indications the figure is unlikely to exceed 2,000. The aim of the scheme is to take in 289 million litres of quota in England and Wales. The total cost in England and Wales is expected to be £37·5 million, spread over five years.

We have not inquired into the means of applicants or the profitability of their farm enterprises by giving priority to the smallest producers we have tried to assist those who are most in need. Additionally, we have excluded a small number of producers because milk is only a relatively small part of their overall farming enterprises.

Forestry Commission (Sites of Special Interest)

Dr. Cunningham asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish the guidance he gives to the Forestry Commission regarding its management of forests in England containing sites of special scientific interest and, in particular, that part of a forest notified as a site of special scientific interest; if he is satisfied that the commission is following this guidance regarding its management of Salcey Forest, Northamptonshire; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Fenner: We have not given any specific guidance to the Forestry Commission regarding the management of its forests where these contain sites of special scientific interest. The commission does, however, consult the Nature Conservancy Council on the management of all SSSIs on its land.

There is a very good working relationship between the commission and the Nature Conservancy Council. Salcey forest has been managed since the late 1960s to a plan agreed with the council and the two local naturalist trusts. A new management plan was prepared recently.

Beef Producers

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he plans to make to the French Government concerning its proposals to introduce national aid to beef producers.

Mr. MacGregor: We share my hon. Friend's concern about the French Government's proposed national aids and we made our views plain at last week's Agricultural Council. The European Commission is responsible for implementing the state aid rules under the EEC treaty. It was made clear to the French and the Council that, in accordance with their obligations under the treaty, they must properly notify their proposed measures to the Commission immediately to enable the Commission to assess their compatibility with the treaty. We made it quite clear that we would not agree to any measures which were not so compatible.

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what safeguards he intends to introduce in order to maintain the competitive position of British beef producers in the event that other member states introduce national aids to their own beef producers.

Mr. MacGregor: United Kingdom beef producers already receive substantial support from a number of measures, including the beef variable premium scheme, intervention and private storage arrangements and payments for suckler cows and hill cows.

The European Commission is responsible for deciding whether a national aid is compatible with the EEC treaty. In the case of any national aids to the beef sector being introduced by another member state, we have urged, and will continue to urge, the Commission to take immediate and positive action to ensure that the state aid rules under the treaty are observed.

Common Agricultural Policy

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing for each of the commodities covered by the common agricultural policy, including rapeseed, olive oil and so on *(a)* the amounts currently in surplus, *(b)* the target/intervention/threshold price in the United Kingdom, *(c)* the corresponding central price for the European Economic Community, *(d)* the corresponding price for West Germany, *(e)* the levy in the United Kingdom at the latest available date and *(f)* the world price.

Mr. Jopling: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Northern Agricultural Trade Board

Miss Maynard asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give the figure of those in the Northern Agricultural Trade Board area completing youth training schemes who are kept on as part of the work force after their period of training, who were not employed at the same work place before participating in the youth training scheme, either as employees or as members of the employers' family.

Mrs. Fenner: I regret that the information requested is not available.

Poultry

Mr. Colin Shepherd asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress has been made in his consideration of the development of a new welfare code for poultry.

Mr. Jopling: I met the Farm Animal Welfare Council recently, when I explained that revisions to the codes would be laid before Parliament after the Council of Minister had received and considered the report on laying hens in battery cages due from the European Commission by 1 January 1985.

Scotch Whisky

Mr. John Heddle asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he intends to introduce legislation to control the sale of Scotch whisky.

Mr. Jopling: Together with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland, I have withdrawn the proposals that we made last year for new whisky regulations because we are advised that it would not be appropriate to use food legislation to impose a minimum strength requirement. We are however considering ways and means of improving the labelling requirements for understrength spirits and we expect to make fresh proposals on this matter shortly. We will also be making proposals for regulations defining whisky to replace the definition in the Finance Act 1969, as amended.

We shall continue to press for progress in the Council of Ministers on the proposal for a Community regulation defining spirituous beverages, which includes a requirement that Scotch whisky shall be not less than 40 per cent. alcohol by volume.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Share Ownership and Profit Sharing

Mr. Murphy asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will give consideration to introducing incentives for firms to provide employees with opportunities for share ownership and profit sharing; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moore: The Government welcome employee shareholding and profit sharing schemes, which give employees a direct financial interest in the fortunes of their employers. It is for that reason that tax concessions were introduced in the 1980, 1982 and 1983 Budgets to encourage profit sharing schemes and in the 1980, 1982 and 1984 Budgets to encourage share option schemes.

Companies (Taxation)

Mr. Maude asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he is satisfied that no inconvenience is being or will be caused to taxpayers by the Inland Revenue's intention to deal with the affairs of a group of companies from a single tax office.

Mr. Moore: Handling the tax affairs of the larger groups of companies in a single tax office is the most effective and efficient way of doing the job, and I am satisfied that it will not in general cause problems for taxpayers. The Inland Revenue will be glad to look into any cases where it is claimed that inconvenience will be caused.

Isle of Man

Mr. Skeet asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether Her Majesty's Government will compensate the Isle of Man for loss sustained due to the extension of United Kingdom territorial jurisdiction for tax purposes to cover areas of the Isle of Man pursuant to section 38 of the Finance Act 1973.

Mr. Moore: No part of the Isle of Man or the territorial waters around the island falls within the area specified by section 38 of the Finance Act 1973. The question of compensation for this does not therefore arise.

Companies (Christmas Entertainment)

Mr. Best asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the cost to the Inland Revenue of allowing companies to spend a maximum of £35 on Christmas entertainment for employees.

Mr. Moore: I assume that my hon. Friend has in mind the potential loss of income tax from not treating certain

expenditure of this kind as a taxable benefit-in-kind. I regret that information on which to base a reliable estimate is not available.

Correspondence

Mr. Bulmer asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects to write to the hon. Member for Wyre Forest as promised in the reply by the Minister of State on 1 August, *Official Report*, column 394.

Mr. Hayhoe: I wrote to my hon. Friend yesterday and apologise for the delay.

Clothing and Footwear Industries

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the total income tax revenue generated from employees in the clothing and footwear manufacturing industries in each of the last five years.

Mr. Moore: The available information relates to the amounts of income tax deducted from the earnings of employees under the pay-as-you-earn system. Employees are classified to the industry in which the majority of those paid from a particular location are engaged. Estimates for the last five tax years for which information is available are as follows:

Tax Year	*Total deducted £ million*
1977-78	145
1978-79	155
1979-80	165
1980-81	180
1981-82	200

Children's Clothing and Footwear (VAT)

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what information his Department has collected concerning the effect of the imposition of value added tax on children's clothing and footwear on sales of those products.

Mr. Hayhoe: All aspects of consumers' expenditure are kept under review. Although some information is available on the likely relationship between price and sales for clothing and footwear in general, there is very little specifically on children's clothing and footwear.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list those European Economic Community member countries which collect value added tax or an equivalent from sales of children's clothing or footwear; and in which year this taxation was introduced in those countries.

Mr. Hayhoe: The following EC member states apply VAT at a positive rate to children's clothing and footwear, and have done so, according to the available information, since they first introduced the tax:

	Date of introduction of VAT
Belgium	1.1.1971
Denmark	3.7.1967
France	*1.1.1968
W. Germany	1.1.1968
Italy	1.1.1973
Luxembourg	1.1.1970
Netherlands	1.1.1969

* Date of the extension of VAT to cover retail transactions.

Greece has not yet introduced VAT, but applies a variety of indirect taxes, including turnover tax, to all clothing and footwear.

EC (Value Added Tax)

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects that the European Court will make a decision on the proposition from the Common Market Commission that the United Kingdom should levy value-added tax on children's shoes, newspaper advertising and fuel supplies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hayhoe: The EC Commission has sent the United Kingdom Government a reasoned opinion under article 169 of the treaty of Rome, alleging that certain aspects of the VAT zero rates in force in the United Kingdom are contrary to the provisions of the sixth VAT directive. The opinion includes newspaper advertising, and fuel and power when supplied to businesses, but does not include children's shoes. The United Kingdom Government do not accept the Commission's views. The issue of a reasoned opinion does not necessarily mean that the matter will be put to the European Court; that is for the Commission to decide in the light of the United Kingdom Government's response: as to implementation of decisions of the court, we are of course bound by our treaty obligations.

Mortgages (Tax Relief)

Mr. McTaggart asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what has been the annual cost of tax relief on mortgage interest in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* the United Kingdom in each of the last five years for which figures are available;

(2) what is the average subsidy per owner occupier through tax relief on mortgage interest in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* the United Kingdom, in the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Moore: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Double Taxation Agreement

Mr. Wareing asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to prevent the abuse of double taxation agreements between the United States and the United Kingdom by international companies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moore: I am not aware of any abuse by international companies of the double taxation convention between the United Kingdom and the United States. If the hon. Member has some particular aspect in mind, I suggest that he should write to me about it.

Channel Islands and Isle of Man (Tax Liability)

Mr. Foulkes asked the Chancellore of the Exchequer if he will introduce legislation to make United Kingdom citizens resident in the Channel Islands and Isle of Man liable to United Kingdom taxes.

Mr. Moore: Residents of the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands are already liable to United Kingdom tax on income and gains derived from the United Kingdom, in accordance with the Taxes Acts and subject to the terms of double taxation agreements.

Personal Incomes

Mr. Fisher asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will update the statistics given in tables 5 and 6 and chart 1 of the survey of personal incomes 1979-80 for all the subsequent financial years for which statistics are available.

Mr. Moore: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Income Tax

Mr. Fisher asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of total income tax was paid by people with the highest *(a)* 5 per cent., *(b)* 10 per cent. and *(c)* 20 per cent. of incomes in each of the last 10 financial years for which statistics are available.

Mr. Moore: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Departmental Costs

Mr. Colin Shepherd asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what measures are being taken to improve control of the running costs of Government Departments; and what are the latest figures available, broken down by Departments, wages and salaries, personnel overheads, accommodation costs, office services and other services.

Mr. Peter Rees: The table shows how running costs have increased since the Government took office:

Percentage increase

	1979-80 to 1980-81	*1980-81 to 1981-82*	*1981-82 to 1982-83*	*1982-83 to 1983-84*
Running costs	19·2	11·5	*9·4	*6·3
			†7·6	†6·9
Inflation‡	18·7	9·9	6·8	4·7

* Figures for 1982-83 for the Ministry of Defence are distorted by the Falklands conflict.

† Excluding Ministry of Defence.

‡ GDP deflator.

Comparison between 1982-83 and 1983-84 is complicated by factors outside the Department's control; especially changes in the basis of accommodation costs and an increased notional allowance for pensions. Correcting for these factors reduces the figure of 6·9 per cent. to about 5·5 per cent. Ministers are continuing to take a personal interest in controlling the costs of their Departments and continuing savings of £60 million per annum have been identified from a wide variety of measures including up to £22 million per annum from a review of staffing allowances in the unemployment benefit service, £12 million per annum from contracting out cleaning and catering in the Ministry of Defence, and £4 million per annum from a new method for collecting and delivering mail in the Department of Health and Social Security.

The following table shows forecast outturn for 1983-84 for each Department. The figures for the Ministry of Defence cover military and civilian running costs which cannot be separated with precision.

Gross Running Costs—1983-84 Forecast Outturn

Department	*Wages and Salaries*		*Personal Overheads*		*Accommodation Costs*		*Office Services*		*Other Services*		*Total Running Costs*
	£ million	*Percentage of total running costs*	*£ million*	*Percentage of total running costs*	*£ million*	*Percentage of total running costs*	*£ million*	*Percentage of total running costs*	*£ million*	*Percentage of total running costs*	*£ million*
Ministry of Defence (including Armed Forces)	6043·7	69·6	597·0	6·9	1,655·6	19·1	218·6	2·5	165·1	1·9	8,680·1
Foreign and Commonwealth Office	197·0	54·3	27·9	7·7	84·8	23·4	42·6	11·7	10·4	2·9	362·7
Overseas Development Administration	24·4	57·3	2·1	5·0	7·5	17·5	3·7	8·7	4·9	11·5	42·6
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food	138·8	66·6	13·8	6·5	41·1	19·7	12·6	6·0	2·1	1·0	208·4
Department of Trade and Industry	159·9	60·7	7·9	3·0	54·0	20·5	33·6	12·7	8·2	3·1	236·6
Department of Energy	16·2	52·3	1·3	4·2	6·0	19·3	5·9	19·1	1·6	5·1	31·0
Department of Employment	246·9	72·1	8·5	2·5	55·9	16·3	25·6	7·5	7·5	1·7	342·7
Manpower Services Commission	216·5	64·7	11·0	3·3	60·2	18·0	40·0	11·9	6·9	2·1	334·6
Department of Transport	141·1	54·0	8·8	3·4	33·0	12·6	29·0	11·1	49·5	18·9	261·4
Department of the Environment	97·1	60·1	5·2	3·2	34·9	21·6	16·9	10·5	7·4	4·6	161·4
Property Services Agency (excluding Crown Suppliers)	320·7	66·7	13·3	2·8	35·7	7·4	17·3	3·6	93·9	19·5	481·1
Home Office	517·2	78·5	26·5	4·0	68·5	10·4	23·9	3·6	22·3	3·4	658·5
Lord Chancellor's Department	114·2	63·9	6·8	3·8	39·2	21·9	15·5	8·6	5·2	1·8	178·9
Department of Education and Science	33·8	64·9	2·9	5·6	10·3	19·7	4·5	8·6	0·6	1·2	52·2
Department of Health and Social Security	826·4	58·2	25·2	1·8	142·6	10·0	115·1	8·1	311·8	21·9	1,421·1
Her Majesty's Treasury (including CSICO)	46·2	67·6	2·0	2·9	9·6	14·1	5·4	7·9	5·2	7·6	68·3
Customs and Excise	284·2	75·6	18·0	4·8	45·7	12·1	22·3	5·9	5·8	1·5	375·9
Inland Revenue	672·9	74·6	19·4	2·1	128·9	14·3	63·9	7·1	17·1	1·9	902·2
Department of National Savings	61·7	41·1	1·2	0·8	10·7	7·1	22·4	14·9	54·4	36·2	150·4
Cabinet Office	23·9	48·8	2·6	5·4	11·8	24·1	7·3	14·9	3·4	6·8	49·0
Paymaster General's Office	7·0	56·3	0·1	0·3	1·2	9·6	2·1	17·3	2·0	15·9	12·4
Scottish Office	120·6	72·9	6·4	3·9	24·6	14·9	9·4	5·7	4·4	2·6	165·4
Welsh Office	24·3	58·4	1·5	3·6	5·7	13·8	3·2	7·6	6·9	16·6	41·6
Northern Ireland Office and Northern Ireland Departments	328·6	77·9	15·9	3·8	35·1	8·3	18·5	4·4	23·6	5·6	421·8

Department	Wages and Salaries		Personal Overheads		Accommodation Costs		Office Services		Other Services		Total Running Costs
	£ million	Percentage of total running costs	£ million	Percentage of total running costs	£ million	Percentage of total running costs	£ million	Percentage of total running costs	£ million	Percentage of total running costs	£ million
Total Main Departments	10,663·3	68·1	825·5	5·3	2,602·6	16·6	759·3	4·8	816·5	5·2	15,667·5
Total Other Departments	260·1	68·0	17·0	4·4	56·2	14·7	26·6	7·0	22·8	6·0	382·4
Total All Departments	10,923·4	68·1	842·5	5·2	2,658·8	16·6	785·9	4·9	839·3	5·2	16,049·9

NB Calculations are based on actual not rounded figures.

Notes:

Wages and Salaries = wages, salaries, overtime payments, employers' National Insurance contributions and notional cost of accruing liability for pensions of serving staff;

Personnel overheads = travel, subsistence, removals, entertainment, catering support, protective clothing and training;

Accommodation costs = rates, heating, lighting, utilities, furniture and fittings, and notional market rental values for Crown and leased property;

Office services = postage, telecommunications, stationery, printing, binding, publication, library services, current expenditure on computers, office machinery and vehicles, and publicity and advertising;

Other costs = services provided by the Post Office, other agencies, and other departments.

Fuel Duty Rebate

Mr. Skeet asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether the fuel duty rebate will continue to operators of buses after privatisation.

Mr. David Mitchell: I have been asked to reply. Yes.

SCOTLAND

Council House Sales

Mr. Hirst asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list details of sales of council housing to sitting tenants up to the latest convenient date, by district within regional sub-totals; and if he will indicate the percentage of the relevant housing stock sold.

Mr. Ancram: The details requested on sales of council housing by local authorities new towns and the Scottish Special Housing Association are set out in the following table. The information given covers the period from 1 April 1979 to 30 September 1984.

Sales of Public Sector Houses to Sitting Tenants
1 April 1975 to 30 September 1984

Area Local Authority sales	Stock at 30 September 1979	Number of sales	Sales as a percentage of stock
Borders	15,741	1,217	7·7
Berwickshire	2,865	247	8·6
Ettrick and Lauderdale	4,982	426	8·6
Roxburgh	6,266	376	6·0
Tweeddale	1,628	168	10·3
Central	56,322	3,038	5·4
Clackmannan	9,652	510	5·3
Falkirk	33,530	1,928	5·8
Stirling	13,140	600	4·6
Dumfries and Galloway	20,801	1,823	8·8
Annandale and Eskdale	4,958	*319	6·4
Nithsdale	8,589	683	8·0
Stewartry	2,545	349	13·7
Wigtown	4,709	472	10·0
Fife	57,792	5,985	10·4
Dunfermline	23,200	2,428	10·5
Kirkcaldy	26,593	2,297	8·6
North East Fife	7,999	1,260	15·8
Grampian	71,246	4,927	6·9
Aberdeen City	38,268	1,785	4·7
Banff and Buchan	12,651	1,020	8·1
Gordon	6,095	793	13·0
Kincardine and Deeside	3,626	399	11·0
Moray	10,606	930	8·8
Highland	25,548	2,032	8·0
Badenoch and Strathspey	1,071	144	13·4
Caithness	4,302	404	9·4
Inverness	7,013	601	8·6
Lochaber	3,367	169	5·0
Nairn	1,109	118	10·6
Ross and Cromarty	6,255	380	6·1
Skye and Lochalsh	700	69	9·9
Sutherland	1,731	147	8·5
Lothian	108,789	6,816	6·3
East Lothian	16,248	1,163	7·2
Edinburgh City	56,848	3,594	6·3
Midlothian	13,162	1,181	9·0
West Lothian	22,531	*878	3·9
Strathclyde	460,040	11,582	2·5
Argyll and Bute	8,300	417	5·0
Bearsden and Milngavie	1,817	220	12·1
Clydebank	11,825	233	2·0
Clydesdale	9,661	128	1·3
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	4,385	134	3·1
Cumnock and Doon Valley	10,351	*251	2·4
Cunninghame	23,564	*752	3·2
Dumbarton	13,115	*226	1·7
East Kilbride	1,624	122	7·5
Eastwood	2,029	224	11·0
Glasgow City	174,996	3,032	1·7
Hamilton	22,856	573	2·5
Inverclyde	20,056	546	2·7
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	18,188	499	2·7
Kyle and Carrick	18,341	976	5·3
Monklands	28,540	339	1·2
Motherwell	39,912	613	1·5
Renfrew	39,511	1,658	4·2
Strathkelvin	10,959	639	5·8
Tayside	70,998	3,729	5·3
Angus	14,579	1,114	7·6
Dundee City	40,117	828	2·1
Perth and Kinross	16,303	1,787	11·0
Orkney	1,450	*155	10·7
Shetland	2,424	202	8·3
Western Isles	2,390	*312	13·1
Total Local Authorities	893,541	*41,818	4·7

Area Local Authority sales	Stock at 30 September 1979	Number of sales	Sales as a percentage of stock
Scottish Special Housing Association	92,558	10,172	11·0
New Towns			
Cumbernauld	10,918	2,452	22·5
East Kilbride	18,843	3,683	19·5
Glenrothes	8,985	2,060	22·9
Irvine	4,204	229	5·4
Livingston	10,218	1,010	9·9
Total New Towns	53,168	9,434	17·7
Total Public Sector	1,039,267	*61,424	5·9

* Based on incomplete returns.

Forestry Commission

Sir Peter Mills asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if the figure of £100 million is the final amount the Government require from the sale of Forestry Commission assets.

Mr. John MacKay: The figure of £100 million is not a target imposed by the Government, but is the Forestry Commission's estimate of the total amount they expect to receive from the sale of assets during the eight year period to 31 March 1989. The question of sales by the Commission will be reviewed in a few years' time.

Agriculture (Expenditure Cuts)

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has any plans to meet the president of the National Farmers Union of Scotland to discuss the Government's proposed expenditure cuts on agriculture.

Mr. John MacKay: My right hon. and noble Friend, the Minister of State is seeing the president of the union today, and they will be discussing, among other things, the question of Government support for agriculture.

Local Authorities (Capital Allocations)

Mr. McTaggart asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish in the *Official Report* the capital allocations to *(a)* Glasgow district council and *(b)* Scottish local authorities in each year since 1979-80, all expressed at November 1984 prices.

Mr. Ancram: The information is set out in the following table. The figures include capital receipts which automatically enhance capital allocations. The cash figures have been adjusted to a cost basis by means of the GDP deflator (1983-84=100).

£'000

	Housing	General Services	Total
Glasgow District Council			
1979-80	108,788	20,555	129,683
1980-81	94,073	14,299	108,372
1981-82	89,145	16,659	105,804
1982-83	89,883	19,106	108,989
1983-84	*103,426	9,992	113,418

	Housing	General Services	Non-district Services	Total
All Scottish Local Authorities				
1979-80	405,723	134,096	383,735	923,555
1980-81	356,507	94,377	327,103	777,988
1981-82	364,007	96,643	353,885	814,535
1982-83	402,879	111,681	319,689	834,249
1983-84	*408,625	89,724	314,637	812,986

* Authorities were permitted, subject to certain conditions, to exceed allocations on the non-HRA block as necessary to meet expenditure on home improvement and repairs grant.

Local Authorities (Expenditure)

Mr. McTaggart asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish in the *Official Report* the actual capital spending of *(a)* Glasgow district council and *(b)* all Scottish local authorities in each of the last five years for which figures are available, all expressed at November 1984 prices.

Mr. Ancram: The information is set out in the following table. The figures exclude capital expenditure met from current revenue which does not count against capital allocations. The cash figures have been adjusted to a cost basis by the GDP deflator (1983-84=100).

£'000

	Housing	General Services	Total
Glasgow District Council			
1979-80	112,217	17,467	1289,683
1980-81	97,697	15,459	113,156
1981-82	88,657	15,506	104,163
1982-83	91,183	18,403	109,586
1983-84	142,852	9,202	152,754

	Housing	General Services	Non-district Services	Total
All Scottish Local Authorities				
1979-80	402,122	125,280	374,964	902,366
1980-81	355,949	93,909	315,236	765,094

	Housing	*General Services*	*Non-district Services*	*Total*
1981-82	339,386	90,419	330,567	760,372
1982-83	362,792	107,970	302,657	773,419
1983-84	495,774	88,562	306,292	890,628

Housing Stock

Mr. McTaggart asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish the proportion of the housing stock belonging to *(a)* Glasgow district council, *(b)* Edinburgh district council, *(c)* Aberdeen district council and *(d)* Dundee district council which consists of non-trading dwellings (i) built prior to 1960 and (ii) built after 1960.

Mr. Ancram: The information requested is not held centrally.

Housing Subsidies

Mr. McTaggart asked the Secretary of state for Scotland what is the average subsidy per council tenant through housing support grant allocations to local authorities in Scotland in the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Ancram: The information is as follows:

Average Housing support grant per council tenant

Authority	*1984-85* £
Berwickshire	141
Ettrick and Lauderdale	—
Roxburgh	163
Tweeddale	—
Clackmannan	—
Falkirk	—
Stirling	—
Annandale and Eskdale	281
Nithsdale	—
Stewartry	109
Wigtown	12
Dunfermline	—
Kirkcaldy	—
North East Fife	—
Aberdeen	46
Banff and Buchan	115
Gordon	288
Kincardine and Deeside	199
Moray	123
Badenoch and Strathspey	383
Caithness	170
Inverness	149
Lochaber	315
Nairn	165
Ross and Cromarty	465
Skye and Lochalsh	475
Sutherland	233
East Lothian	—
Edinburgh	—
Midlothian	—
West Lothian	—
Argyll and Bute	232
Bearsden and Milngavie	—
Clydebank	120
Clydesdale	—
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	—
Cumnock and Doon Valley	—
Cunninghame	—
Dumbarton	—
East Kilbride	—
Eastwood	—
Glasgow	152
Hamilton	—
Inverclyde	30
Kilmarnock and Loudon	—
Kyle and Carrick	—
Monklands	41
Motherwell	—
Renfrew	—
Strathkelvin	—
Angus	—
Dundee	—
Perth and Kinross	—
Orkney	471
Shetland	955
Western Isles	674
Scotland	61

Based on local authority returns of housing stocks to Scottish Development Department.

House Building

Mr. McTaggart asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish the number of non-traditional houses *(a)* built before 1960 and *(b)* built after 1960 which have been demolished since 1979; and if he will list the housing authorities which carried out such demolitions, showing the number of dwellings each authority demolished in each or any year since 1979 and the cost to the authority of such demolition in that year.

Mr. Ancram: The information requested is not held centrally.

Roads

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if, in view of the number of fatal and other accidents on the A92 Aberdeen to Fraserburgh road and the A952 Toll of Burness to Peterhead road, he will now investigate the possibility of providing dual carriageways on these roads.

Mr. Ancram: The A92 between Toll of Burness and the A952 junction south of Rathen is a non-trunk route and is therefore the responsibility of Grampian regional council.

Improvements to dual carriageway standards are planned for the trunk route section of A92 at Tipperty; between Murcar and Balmedie; and on the southern section of the Ellon bypass. Traffic volumes and accident records do not suggest that additional dual carriageway standard improvements are needed on A92 or A952 at present.

Forestry

Mr. Donald Stewart asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list in the *Official Report* the names and locations of forest land in Scotland which have been sold under the Forestry Act 1981, giving the acreage in each case and the price paid in each case.

Mr. Younger: I refer the right hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) on 25 July 1984, at columns 665-83, which listed forest areas sold by the Forestry Commission between the passing of the Forestry Act 1981 and 21 June 1984.

From 22 June 1984 until 21 October 1984—the latest date for which information is available—further sales of forest land have taken place in Scotland as shown in the following table.

I am not in a position to give details of the prices paid; the recommendation made on this matter by the Public Accounts Committee in its eighteenth report is still being considered.

Forest areas sold in Scotland between 22 June 1984 and 21 October 1984

Name of Property	*Area (ha)*	*Region*
Land at Eshiels	2·2	Borders
Pilmuir and Dipper Woods	30·9	Borders
Barend Wood	15·0	Dumfries and Galloway
Dalskeirth (East)	8·0	Dumfries and Galloway
Crossford	16·0	Dumfries and Galloway
Caitloch	26·0	Dumfries and Galloway
Strathmilligan	28·0	Dumfries and Galloway
Kirkland (part)	0·8	Dumfries and Galloway
Land adjoining Sheep Park Lodge, Barnbarroch	0·3	Dumfries and Galloway
Goat Quarry No. II	13·3	Fife
Drumgoudrom	73·4	Grampian
Tore and Glackmore (part)	22·3	Highland
Cluny Plantation (East)	17·0	Highland
Craggie	48·0	Highland
South Strathy (part)	940·0	Highland
Lawhead	5·8	Lothian
Dungavel Plantation	1,311·5	Strathclyde
Kilmichael Beg (part)	36·4	Strathclyde
Howgate	188·0	Strathclyde
A88 Castleton Road Improvement	1·0	Strathclyde
Carfin	36·0	Strathclyde
Loggish and Dochroyal	167·1	Strathclyde
Sightline Clearance at Kilmichael Beg	0·5	Strathclyde
Tamano Wood	14·0	Tayside
West Shurrach	4.0	Tayside

Land Sales

Mr. Donald Stewart asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what acreages of land have been sold off by *(a)* the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland and *(b)* the Highlands and Islands Development Board in each of the past five years.

Mr. Younger: The figures for each of the past five years for which information is complete are:

	Hectares	*Acres*
1. *Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland*		
1979	4,044	(9,993)
1980	8,900	(21,992)
1981	5,675	(14,023)
1982	14,564	(35,988)
1983	8,104	(20,025)
2. *Highlands and Islands Development Board*		
1979-80	nil	
1980-81	nil	
1981-82	0·4	(1·0)
1982-83	4·5	(11·4)
1983-84	nil	

Highlands and Islands Development Board figures are held by financial year.

TRANSPORT

Channel Tunnel

Mr. Adley asked the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will make a statement about the new arrangements he has agreed with his French counterpart on the channel tunnel;

(2) if he will make a statement on the revised arrangements for the channel tunnel political guarantees vis-à-vis the public sector borrowing requirement pursuant to arrangements recently agreed between the French Government and Her Majesty's Government.

Mr. Ridley: The basis of my agreement with French Ministers on 14 November, was that the two Governments remain willing to take the necessary steps to facilitate the construction of a link if a satisfactory proposal comes forward that can be financed without support from public funds or Government financial guarantees. It was agreed to set up a working group of officials to prepare guidance to potential promoters. I have placed a copy of the communiqué issued on that occasion in the Library.

The Governments consider that political guarantees would be necessary to cover the possibility of failure by either Government to permit the project to proceed to completion. The giving of such guarantees would not affect the public sector borrowing requirement.

ENVIRONMENT

Untreated Sewage

Mr. Terlezki asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the locations in England and Wales at which water authorities discharge untreated sewage into the sea.

Mr. Macfarlane: This information is not available centrally. However, I would draw my hon. Friend's attention to the report by the Water Research Centre on the quality of beaches and bathing waters in England and Wales which was sent to the Library on 1 November. This will provide much of the information he seeks.

Maltby Common

Mr. Barron asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what evidence he obtained, prior to the public inquiry in 1982 concerning Maltby common, to satisfy him on the ownership question.

Mr. Macfarlane: The evidence consisted of various documents including title deeds, and the opinion of Mr. Francis Ferris, QC, which was obtained by Rotherham metropolitan borough council.

Third London Airport (Siting)

Mr. Cartwright asked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what steps he proposes to take to encourage public debate on the report of the inspector on the siting of a third London airport;

(2) whether he has received the report of the inspector on the siting of a third London airport;

(3) whether he proposes to publish the report of the inspector on the siting of a third London airport.

Mr. Macfarlane: My right hon. Friends have not yet received the Inspector's report. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport promised when he moved the Second Reading of the Civil Aviation Bill, the inspector's report will be published as soon as possible after it has been received because of the relationship with the British Airways prospectus. The House will then have an opportunity to give its views before my right hon. Friends announce their decision.

System-built Dwellings (Demolition)

Mr. McTaggart asked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will *(a)* publish the number of industrialised and system-built dwellings built after 1960 which have been demolished since 1979 and *(b)* list the housing authorities which carried out such demolitions, showing the number of dwellings each authority demolished in each year since 1979 and the cost to the authority of such demolition in that year;

(2) if he will *(a)* publish the number of non-traditional dwellings built before 1960 which have been demolished since 1979 and *(b)* list the housing authorities which carried out such demolitions, showing the number of dwellings each authority demolished in each year since 1979 and the cost to the authority of such demolition in that year.

Sir George Young: The Department does not have this information.

Merseyside (Financial Provision)

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for the Environment in what form he is hoping to hold talks with representatives of the county council and district councils on Merseyside about financial provision and other matters; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I am quite prepared to meet representatives of the county and district councils on Merseyside about financial provision in respect of abolition if they ask to see me.

St. George's Hall, Liverpool

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many representations he has received concerning the future of St. George's hall in Liverpool; if he has plans to discuss the matter with interested parties; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I refer the hon. Member to my reply of 29 October to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mr. Parry) at c. *868*. Since then I have received a representation from Professor Basil Smallman of Liverpool university.

I have no plans at present to hold discussions on the future of St. George's Hall. I am still waiting to hear from Liverpool city council who are considering a number of possible uses. I have made it clear to them that I shall be happy to discuss their proposals as soon as they are ready.

Rates Act 1984 (Press Campaign)

Mr. Norman Atkinson asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the estimated cost of the public presentation of the Rates Act 1984 and the estimated cost of the press campaign *(a)* in the London borough of Haringey, *(b)* all the rate-capped authorities and *(c)* nationally, in promoting the Government's campaign explaining the purpose of rate-capping.

Mr. Waldegrave: The estimated total cost of the advertisements and leaflets issued in respect of the rate limitation provisions in the Rates Act 1984 was £418,630. Of this, £148,630 was the cost of the preparation and delivery of the information leaflet to 5 million households in the areas covered by rate limited authorities. Advertisements in local newspapers in these areas and in certain national newspapers cost a further £270,000. It is not possible to break down the total cost between different geographical areas.

"Protecting the Ratepayer"

Mr. Norman Atkinson asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the estimated cost of preparation, printing and delivery of the leaflet "Protecting the Ratepayer" in *(a)* the London borough of Haringey and *(b)* all the rate-capped authorities.

Mr. Waldegrave: The estimated cost of preparation, printing and delivery of the leaflet "Protecting the Ratepayer" in all ratecapped authorities is £148,630. It is not possible to break down the cost into individual areas.

Mr. Norman Atkinson asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if, in view of the implications of the advice in the leaflet "Protecting the Ratepayer" for the

level of spending by authorities for which he has determined a rate ceiling for 1985-86, he will withdraw the leaflet.

Mr. Waldegrave: No.

GLC and ILEA

Mr. Spearing asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the approximate number of persons employed by the Greater London council and the Inner London education authority in the year 1984; and if he will tabulate the future distribution of such persons into the various bodies envisaged in his legislative proposals under the respective headings and named services *(a)* continued on an all-London elected or joint basis, *(b)* becoming the responsibility of London boroughs, *(c)* becoming the employees of another statutory body and *(d)* surplus to future requirements, together with the respective totals.

Mr. Waldegrave: According to figures supplied by the Greater London council for the June 1984 joint manpower watch, the council employs about 110,000 staff, of whom about 88,000 are allocated to the ILEA. My right hon. Friend hopes to publish shortly a paper about the staffing aspects of our proposals, which will expand on what paragraph 4.3 of the White Paper (Cmnd. 9063) said about staff transfers. But decisions on future staffing will, in general, be a matter for the successor bodies.

Mr. Spearing asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what will be the expected expenditure of the Greater London council, including the Inner London education authority, for its principal purposes for the financial year 1984-85 under the headings related to his legislative proposals for London local government services, namely *(a)* continuing on an all-London elected or joint basis, *(b)* becoming the responsibility of London boroughs, *(c)* becoming the responsibility of another statutory body and *(d)* to be discontinued, together with the respective totals for each category.

Mr. Waldegrave: Following is the available information about the GLC and ILEA 1984-85 budgeted net current expenditure:

	£ million
(a) (i) on services continuing on an all-London elected or joint basis	*127
(ii) ILEA	900
(b) on a services becoming the responsibility of London boroughs and on services to be discontinued	†380-400
(c) on services becoming the responsibility of another statutory body	‡203-223

* Fire and civil defence joint board.

† It will be for the boroughs to decide on the extent of continued spending on discretionary services.

‡ Passenger transport revenue support, land drainage and flood protection, expenditure on some roads becoming the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Tranpsort and some expenditure on Historic Buildings and the Arts. Estimates of these (apart from the first two) are not available from budget returns and an approximate range has therefore been quoted.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest (Scotland)

Mr. Donald Stewart asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list all sites of special scientific interest in Scotland along with their respective acreages.

Mr. Waldegrave: There are approximately 1,000 sites of special scientific interest in Scotland. A detailed list is being prepared and I will write to the hon. Member with this information as soon as it is available, and will arrange for a copy to be placed in the Library of the House.

Empty Dwellings

Mr. Shersby asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will publish the results of his Department's exercise to examine the problem of long-term empty dwellings in the local authority sector.

Mr. Gow: The meetings with the 30 participating authorities have been completed, and a report has today been placed in the Library. Copies have been made available to the participating authorities and the local authority associations.

My right hon. Friend has decided to take the following initial steps as a result of the report—

a. to issue a Circular to local authorities setting out ways in which better management practices can reduce the number of empty dwellings. The Local Authority Associations will shortly be consulted about a draft of the Circular;

b. to examine the scope for restoring eligibility for Housing Association grant (Mini-HAG) to short-life properties in local authority ownership.

Local Government Finance Studies

Mr. Burt asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how he is proposing to conduct the proposed local government finance studies.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: The studies will be undertaken under the direction of my right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State with responsibility for local government finance, in association with Ministers from the Scottish and Welsh offices. Professor Christopher Foster, Leonard Hoffmann QC, Lord Rothschild and Professor Tom Wilson have agreed to act as independent advisors.

Local Authority Expenditure

Dr. Twinn asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether, once the Greater London council and the metropolitan county councils have ceased to exist, he plans to alter, for the London boroughs, the City of London and the metropolitan district councils in England, the existing limitation of the product of a two penny rate on expenditure, which may be incurred under section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The latest information available to the Department does not indicate that, in general, the proposed successor authorities are unduly restricted, either by the current arrangements for section 137 or by the use of other relevant powers, in meeting the genuine needs of their areas, including the giving of grants to voluntary bodies and assistance to industry. While we see no reason to alter the limit so as to enable those successor authorities to accommodate the full amount of expenditure which the Greater London council and the metropolitan county councils will be incurring under section 137 prior to their proposed abolition, I will, keep the position carefully under review, and will be prepared to take account of any fresh factors which authorities and the voluntary sector may put to me.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 23 November 1984

NORTHERN IRELAND

Strip Searches

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many strip searches were made of female prisoners in Her Majesty's prison, Armagh, in October; if he will give the number of persons involved and the number of times each person was searched; whether any prison contraband, smuggled item or illegal correspondence was discovered in any search, indicating which items; and in how many cases prisoners refused to be searched and had to be restrained while the search was being concluded.

Mr. Scott: During October, 30 strip searches were carried out on 18 female inmates in Her Majesty's prison, Armagh. Individual prisoners were searched the following number of times:

Number of prisoners	*Number of searches in each case*
1	4
1	3
7	2
9	1

No prohibited articles were found during these searches and no prisoner refused to be searched.

Tamnamore, Dungannon (Incident)

Mr. McCusker asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement about the incident at Tamnamore, Dungannon on 19 October involving terrorists and the security forces which resulted in the death of Mr. Fred Jackson.

Mr. Scott: On the morning of 19 October a military patrol encountered a group it believed to be armed terrorists in a stolen van near Tamnamore, Dungannon. A pursuit ensued during which fire was exchanged between the soldiers and terrorists. Mr. Jackson was caught in this exchange of fire as he left his place of work and died from his wounds a short time later. The terrorists, who were acknowledged by the Provisional Irish Republican Army to be members of their organisation, abandoned their vehicle about a mile from the scene of the shooting and hijacked a further two vehicles in making good their escape. It was subsequently determined that the fatal shot came from the weapon of a member of the Army patrol. As the incident is currently the subject of an investigation by the Royal Ulster Constabulary and as there has not yet been an inquest, it would be inappropriate for me to comment at this stage, other than to express my profound sympathy to Mr. Jackson's family on their tragic bereavement.

WALES

Bison Wall Frame Buildings

Mr. Litherland asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list for each of the faults *(a)* to *(e)* specified in his Department's letter of 5 October 1983, those authorities which have undertaken, are undertaking or are planing to undertake remedial works on Bison wall frame buildings with respect to each fault specified.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: According the information available to the Department, none at present.

Mr. Litherland asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list those authorities which have appraised or are appraising their Bison wall frame dwellings for possible faults *(a)* in the connections between wall and floor panels and in the restraint of load-bearing walls, *(b)* in parapet fixing, *(c)* in the ties between inner and outer leaves of external cladding panels and *(d)* with spalling concrete or loose aggregate finishes.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: I understand that Wrexham Maelor borough council, Montgomery district council and Lliw Valley borough council have appraised their dwellings with these possible faults in mind.

Mr. Litherland asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list those local authorities which have replied to his Department's letter of 5 October 1983 about Bison wall frame dwellings, together with the dates on which each reply was received.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: This information is as follows:

Local Authority	*Date of Reply*
Montgomery District Council	19 October 1983
Wrexham Maelor Borough Council	8 November 1983
Lliw Valley Borough Council	15 November 1983
Delyn Borough Council	23 December 1983

Mr. Litherland asked the Secretary of State for Wales what progress he has made in consultations with Delyn borough council on the release to the National Asociation of Bison Tenants and others of the report on Bison wall frame buildings prepared for the council by the Building Research Establishment.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Delyn has agreed to the information in the report being released.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

EC (Measures)

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Attorney-General whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a list of European Economic Community measures enacted with the aid of article 235 of the Treaty of Rome since 1 January 1973.

The Attorney-General: Article 235 is the legal basis, or one of the legal bases, for several hundred European Economic Community measues, including most environmental, industrial, regional development and consumer protection legislation. An itemised list of such measures is not readily available, but if it can be made available, without disproportionate cost, I will send a copy to the hon. Member.

PRIME MINISTER

Johnson Matthey Bank

Mr. Leighton asked the Prime Minister how much public money is at risk in the rescue of Johnson Matthey bank.

The Prime Minister: Any losses which the Bank of England may incur as a result of the Johnson Matthey bankers rescue will be met on the governor's authority from the resources of the banking department of the Bank of England. The extent to which contingent liabilities on the banking department may be called is a matter for the Bank of England to judge.

Student Grants

Sir Brandon Rhys Williams asked the Prime Minister if she will estimate the number and percentage of families required to contribute to student grant who are also entitled to housing benefit; and how the number will be affected by the proposed changes to student grant regulations.

The Prime Minister: An estimate of the number of housing benefit recipients who are required to contribute to a student grant is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The proposed changes to the student grant regulations should not affect the number involved, since the threshold of the parental contribution scale is to be indexed broadly in line with earnings.

Family Spending Power

Sir Brandon Rhys Williams asked the Prime Minister if she will publish a table showing for a married man with three children aged 20 years, 17 years and 15 years, all in full-time education, net spending power from paid employment as a percentage of net spending power on supplementary benefit, with net spending power defined as gross earnings plus child benefit, less income tax, national insurance contribution, mortgage interest, rates, water rates, work expenses and parental contribution to student grant, and using the following assumptions: earnings of *(a)* £15,000 and *(b)* £20,000, mortgage £30,000, rates and water rates £550, work expenses £1,000 and parental contribution according to the student grant regulations proposed for 1985-86.

The Prime Minister: The information is in the table. The figures are based on 1984-85 tax and benefit rates.

Net spending power from paid employment as a percentage of net spending power on supplementary benefit

Earnings £	
15,000	160
20,000	227

Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Council

Mr. McCusker asked the Prime Minister how many meetings have taken place under the auspices of the Anglo-Irish intergovernmental council since its inception; and what has been the outcome of these meetings.

The Prime Minister: Since its inception in November 1981, there have been some 50 formal ministerial and official meetings held under the auspices of the Anglo-Irish intergovernmental council. The meetings have contributed to the development of good relations between the two Governments. The pattern of co-operation was set out in detail in the communiqué released after the Anglo-Irish summit meeting in November 1983, published as Command Paper 9094. During the past year, as made clear in the communiqué released after the recent summit meeting, this co-operation has continued.

HMS Conqueror

Mr. Dalyell asked the Prime Minister when she hopes to give the reply promised to the hon. Member for Linlithgow in her answer of 20 November concerning records of signals from HMS Conqueror.

The Prime Minister: I have written to the hon. Member.

General Belgrano

Mr. Dalyell asked the Prime Minister if she will publish in the *Official Report* a copy of her letter to the hon. Member for Linlithgow of 19 November concerning the General Belgrano.

The Prime Minister: Yes. Following is the letter:

Dear Mr. Dalyell,

Thank you for your letter of 30 October.

The answers to your questions are covered by the detailed Annex to my letter of 19 September to Mr. George Foulkes. On 2 May 1982, there were clear and unequivocal indications available to the Government that the Argentine Navy, including General Belgrano, provided a real and direct threat to the Task Force. In the light of that threat, the precise position and course of Belgrano at that time were irrelevant. That was why the report that Belgrano had reversed course was not made known to Ministers at the time. No evidence has at any time become available to the Government which would make Ministers change the judgement they reached on 2 May that the Belgrano posed a threat to the Task Force.

Yours sincerely,
Margaret Thatcher

New Ireland Forum

Mr. McCusker asked the Prime Minister whether the statement of the then Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the right hon. Member for Waveney (Mr. Prior), in the House of Commons on 2 July, *Official Report*, column 123-30, continues to represent Her Majesty's Government's policy towards the report of the New Ireland Forum.

The Prime Minister: Yes.

SCOTLAND

School Leavers

Mr. Ron Brown asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many young people left school in the Edinburgh and Leith areas last year; how many went into further education; how many secured full-time jobs; how many went on to youth training schemes; and how many are unemployed.

Mr. Allan Stewart: I regret that the information requested is not available.

Denaturation Centres

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the location of denaturation centres for surplus EC food in Scotland.

Mr. John MacKay: The Government do not run, nor do they pay private sector operators to run, centres for the denaturing of foodstuffs. Denaturing is carried out by commercial firms engaged in the animal feedstuffs industry. Feedstuff manufacturing plants at Cupar and Turriff are registered with the Intervention Board for Agricultural Produce for the disposal of skimmed milk powder which cannot otherwise be sold.

Milk

Mr. Kennedy asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will provide estimates or figures for the level of uptake amongst Scottish farmers for the milk supplementary levy (outgoers) scheme.

Mr. John MacKay: The scheme is intended to purchase 2·25 per cent.—29·8 million litres—of total Scottish milk quota. Some 370 applicants have offered a total of over 120 million litres. An initial invitation to proceed under the scheme has been extended to 169 applicants with quotas up to 268,000 litres and for whom dairying contributes at least a quarter of income. Of these applicants, 68 have accepted the offer to proceed, 36 have not done so and 65 await the outcome of their applications for additional quota before taking a decision.

In the light of the response so far, the invitation has been extended to a further 15 applicants with quotas of up to 300,000 litres. Further invitations will subsequently be made to producers with higher quotas until the target of 29·8 million litres is reached, and it is too early to say what proportion of the total applicants will finally be able to proceed under the scheme.

Mr. Kennedy asked the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he will express an estimated total for the cost to his Department of the milk supplementary levy (outgoers) scheme.

Mr. John MacKay: It is estimated that payments under the scheme in Scotland will total £3,874,000, spread over the five years 1984-85 to 1988-89.

Dairy Cattle

Mr. Kennedy asked the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he has any evidence of reductions in the value of dairy cattle due to the introduction of quotas and the application of the milk supplementary levy (outgoers) scheme.

Mr. John MacKay: No figures are available relating to the value of dairy cattle. Between 1 April and 31 October 1984, the price of all cast cows sold liveweight in Scotland was on average 9 per cent. lower than in the corresponding period of 1983. While the introduction of milk quotas will undoubtedly have had an effect on these prices, there are other factors which affect them, such as the export demand for cow beef, which has fallen off in this period.

No producer has yet ceased dairying under the milk supplementary levy (outgoers) scheme which, in any event, does not require a beneficiary actually to dispose of his herd.

ENERGY

Pollution

Mr. Jackson asked the Secretary of State for Energy if the question of emissions from large combustion plants was discussed at the meeting of the Energy Minister's Council on 13 November; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: I represented the United Kingdom at the Energy Ministers' Council on 13 November.

The council discussed energy aspects of draft directives on emissions from large combustion plant. I emphasised the need to ensure that measures adopted take full account of advances in scientific and technical knowledge and are cost-effective.

The Council adopted a resolution on energy savings, defining guidelines to good practice in a number of areas. Following discussion about the need for Community support for investment in solid fuels, the presidency concluded that all member states were willing to achieve the aim of a balanced Community strategy in this area. The Council reaffirmed its commitment to principles designed to promote realistic pricing and avoidance of discriminatory practices. Approval was given to the latest round of Community support for projects to promote development of new technology in oil and gas exploration and development.

Nuclear Power

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Energy (1) what are the projections for the growth in the supply of nuclear electricity between now and the year 2010;

(2) how many nuclear reactors it will be necessary to build to accommodate the projected growth in amount of electricity produced by nuclear power stations between 1984 and 2010.

Mr. Goodlad: It is impossible to project with any accuracy the amount of electricity that will be produced by nuclear power in 2010.

Coal Industry Dispute

Mr. Adley asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the coal strike.

Mr. David Hunt: Since 5 November over 13,000 former strikers have returned to work; 43 per cent. of those employed in the industry are now not on strike.

Combined Heat and Power

Mr. Rost asked the Secretary of State for Energy when he expects to announce a decision on support for lead city combined heat and power schemes.

Mr. David Hunt: Ten proposals have been received, including two for London, covering all the nine towns recommended for further study by the Atkins report. These are being evaluated by my Department and a statement will be made in due course.

THE ARTS

British Museum (Repainting)

Mr. Faulds asked the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State answering in respect of the Arts, if he has had any discussions with the director or board of trustees of the British Museum about the repainting of the entrance hall and the desirability of the recreation of the original polychromatic decorative scheme.

Mr. Waldegrave: No.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Customs Officers

Mr. Terlezki asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessments he has made of the potential increased efficiency in preventing illegal importation of drugs for given levels of increase in the numbers of Customs officers.

Mr. Hayhoe: Attempting to assess the relationship between a given increase in the number of Customs officers and increased efficiency in preventing illegal importation of drugs does not seem the best way forward. Customs need to identify those areas where its controls can most advantageously be strengthened. This is a continuous process with the constant adjustment of these controls to meet the changes in routes and methods used by smugglers which inevitably follow from successful action by Customs against existing methods.

Pound Note

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what effect his statement on 12 November about the abolition of the £1 note will have on Ulster bank, Northern bank, Bank of Ireland and Allied Irish bank £1 notes issued in Belfast.

Mr. Lawson: The decision to cease issuing the Bank of England £1 note does not alter the position of notes issued by banks in Northern Ireland, on which decisions are a matter for the banks concerned.

Mr. Watson asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many £1 notes were issued in 1983.

Mr. Ian Stewart: Approximately 660 million.

Mr. Skeet asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer why he is not prepared to consider a plastic £1 note, similar to that used in the Isle of Man.

Mr. Ian Stewart: Plastic notes are too easily forged and therefore unsuitable for a country with a large currency circulation.

Pound Coin

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if, following the introduction of the English, Scottish and Welsh versions of the £1 coin, it is proposed to introduce a Northern Ireland version.

Mr. Lawson: It is proposed to issue a Northern Ireland version of the £1 coin in either 1986 or 1987.

Building Societies

Mr. Weetch asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate for the current financial year, the yield to the Exchequer from the taxation of building society profits on gilt edged securities.

Mr. Moore: I regret that insufficient data are available from which to produce an estimate for the current financial year. Had profits on gilt edged securities in 1983-84 been subject to corporation tax, the yield would have been about £200 million, but this figure cannot be regarded as any indicator of the current yield.

Cider

Mr. Ashdown asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the cost of allowing farm house cider, produced only from apples without the addition of artificial sweetner, containing no artificial colouring and which is not artificially carbonated, in amounts of less than 100,000 gallons per annum, a tax option of a percentage based levy on sale price, worked out as the average tax paid by the industrial cider companies.

Mr. Hayhoe: Farm house cider is not specifically defined for revenue purposes and there is no official information on which to base a reliable cost estimate. The data available, mainly from trade sources, suggests that the loss of excise duty could be of the order of £300,000 per annum.

Mr. Ashdown asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will provide details of the number of registered and unregistered cider makers for *(a)* 1978 and *(b)* the last year for which figures are available, broken down to show the distribution in each year for each of the shire counties in England:

Mr. Hayhoe: Customs records indicate that on 31 March 1978 there were 55 registered and an estimated 35 exempt* cider makers, but information about their distribution by county is not available.

On 19 November 1984 the number of registered and exempt* cider makers was as follows:

County	*Registered*	**Exempt*
Avon	12	8
Bedfordshire	1	—
Cheshire	1	—
Cornwall	2	1
Devon	15	16
Dorset	3	5
Durham	1	—
East Sussex	1	3
Essex	2	1
Gloucestershire	5	22
Hampshire	1	1
Hereford & Worcester	8	6
Hertfordshire	1	—
Isle of Wight	1	3
Kent	4	6
Lancashire	1	—
Norfolk	2	—
Northamptonshire	—	1
North Yorkshire	1	—
Somerset	22	39
Suffolk	2	—
West Midlands	1	—
West Sussex	—	3
West Yorkshire	1	1

County	Registered	*Exempt
Wiltshire	1	—
Totals	89	116

*Exempt by virtue of The Cider and Perry (Exemption from Registration) Order 1976 (SI 1976 No 1206) as amended by The Cider and Perry (Exemption from Registration) Order 1976 (Amendment) Order 1979 (SI 1979 No. 1218).

Isle of Man

Mr. Skeet asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether, in view of the breach of the 1966 agreement between the United Kingdom and the Isle of Man concerning petroleum revenue tax, Her Majesty's Government will compensate the Isle of Man for a reduction in its share of the revenue accruing to the United Kingdom from its share of the continental shelf.

Mr. Moore: The agreement to which my hon. Friend refers related to licence revenues and not to petroleum revenue tax. The Isle of Man has throughout received its full entitlement under the agreement.

Petroleum Royalties

Mr. Skeet asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the policy of Her Majesty's Government concerning the collection of petroleum royalties relating to the area between the outer limit of the territorial waters of the Isle of Man and the median line between the island and the United Kingdom.

Mr. Moore: The collection of royalties for the area in question is the same as for other licensed areas of the United Kingdom continental shelf.

Taxation and Economic Performance

Mr. Deakins asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what statistical evidence is available to him about the correlation between the level and distribution of direct taxation on earned incomes and economic performance at the national and individual level.

Mr. Moore: The OECD and the European Commission both publish international comparisons of the level and distribution of taxation, including international comparisons of direct taxation on employment incomes. The Inland Revenue has recently published a note "International Comparisons of Direct Tax on Employment Incomes", based on this data. International comparisons of GDP growth rates are published by a number of international organisations from time to time.

Evidence on individual work incentives is reported in a number of research studies. Some of the main findings were summarised in evidence given to the Treasury and Civil Service Sub-Committee (Session 1982-83) on the structure of personal income taxation and income support.

Customs and Excise (Imported Literature)

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the complaints procedure relating to actions of Her Majesty's Customs and Excise in respect of the importation of materials by bookshops.

Mr. Hayhoe: If an importer does not agree that something seized is liable to forfeiture, he may so claim in writing within one month. The commissioners are then obliged to submit the matter to a court for civil condemnation proceedings.

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer which court decisions Her Majesty's Customs and Excise has used as comparisons when deciding on any prosecutions of bookshops for the importation of particular materials.

Mr. Hayhoe: In deciding whether material is indecent or obscene, Her Majesty's Customs and Excise is guided by the decisions of the courts in civil condemnation proceedings or, where known, in proceedings under the Obscene Publications Act. Moreover, its judgment may always be challenged by appeal against seizure, which must be decided by the courts.

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether any legal advice has been sought by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise officers from outside the Customs and Excise Department on the principles to be followed when deciding upon any prosecutions of bookshops for the importation of particular materials; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hayhoe: The Commissioners of Customs and Excise generally rely on the services of their solicitor's office for advice on legal matters. However, the opinion of counsel is sought in appropriate cases.

Charities (VAT)

Mr. Ron Brown asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if there are any plans to reduce the level of value added tax paid by registered charities, especially by homes for the elderly; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hayhoe: I have no such plans. I refer the hon. Member to my reply of 18 May, at columns 269-70, to the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape).

Milk

Mr. Kennedy asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will introduce legislation to provide that payment for quota under the milk supplementary levy (outgoers) scheme may be rolled over for capital gains tax purposes;

(2) whether he will take steps to exempt from capital gains taxation those dairy farmers who successfully apply for the milk supplementary levy (outgoers) scheme.

Mr. Moore: Payments made under the milk supplementary levy (outgoers) scheme will be liable to either income tax or capital gains tax. I have noted the hon. Member's suggestions, but I do not think that any departure from the normal rules would be justified.

Mr. Kennedy asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much he expects to accrue to the Consolidated Fund as a result of the introduction of, and operation of, the milk supplementary levy (outgoers) scheme from capital gains tax payments.

Mr. Moore: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Income Tax

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the amounts at 1984-85 prices that

could be raised by 1p on the standard rate of income tax in England for the financial years 1978-79, 1979-80, 1980-81, 1981-82, 1982-83, 1983-84 and 1984-85.

Mr. Moore: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

EMPLOYMENT

Training Opportunities Scheme

Mr. Tim Smith asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will estimate how many more people could be resettled in jobs if the resources available to the Manpower Services Commission for the training opportunities scheme were concentrated on those courses which have the best results in getting people into jobs.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Just over half the 64,000 unemployed people who completed occupational training and work preparation courses under the training opportunities scheme in 1983-84 found jobs within three months. Changes are now under way to make the Government's adult training programmes more effective, and to increase the number of unemployed people helped. Once these changes are fully implemented, 125,000 unemployed people a year should benefit from training closely related to known employment needs; and the employment prospects of 125,000 employed people will also be improved through training programmes aimed at updating or extending their skills.

Labour Statistics

Mrs. Beckett asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will provide information on the 50 geographical regions in Great Britain with the highest unemployment rates *(a)* on a constituency basis and *(b)* on the regional and sub-regional basis used in the "New Earnings Survey" in April, broken down between *(i)* men aged 18 years or over, *(ii)* women aged 18 years or over and *(iii)* workers aged under 18 years and show the relevant unemployment rates.

Mr. Alan Clark: The information is not available on the geographical basis requested. Unemployment rates are calculated for travel-to-work areas, counties and regions; unemployment rates by age are available only at the national level.

Mr. Forman asked the Secretary of State for Employment (1) how many people at the latest available date were registered as unemployed in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* Northern Ireland; what percentage of the total population available for work in those parts of the country the figures represented; and what were the comparable figures for 1979, 1981 and 1983;

(2) how many people at the latest available date were registered as unemployed in *(a)* Liverpool, *(b)* Manchester, *(c)* Newcastle, *(d)* Leeds, *(e)* Sheffield and *(f)* Plymouth; what percentage of the total population available for work in those cities the figures represented; and what were the comparable figures for 1979, 1981 and 1983.

Mr. Alan Clark: The information is available in the House of Commons Library. However, the figures for all the years requested are not directly comparable particularly because of the change from the registrant-based to claimant-based unemployment count in October 1982.

Mr. Forman asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many full-time male jobs in manufacturing have been lost in the United Kingdom since 1981; and how many part-time female jobs in all sectors have been created over the same period.

Mr. Alan Clark: Information about job gains and job losses is not available from the Department's statistics, but an indication of the net changes can be seen by comparing levels of employees in employment at different dates.

Other than at census of employment dates, a breakdown between full-time and part-time employees is not available for males and is available for females only for Great Britain. Between June 1981 and June 1984 the estimated number of males employed in manufacturing industries in Great Britain decreased by 421,000. Over the same period the estimated number of part-time female employees in employment in all industries in Great Britain increased by 360,000.

Mr. Forman asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many people at the latest available date have been registered as unemployed *(a)* for more than three years, *(b)* for more than two years and *(c)* for more than one year.

Mr. Alan Clark: The information on unemployed claimants is available in the House of Commons Library.

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many and what percentage, for each year since 1979, of *(a)* able-bodied people and *(b)* registered disabled people have been unemployed nationally and in the Manchester, Sheffield, London, Newcastle, Birmingham, Stoke on Trent, Leeds and Wakefield travel-to-work areas for (i) over three months, (ii) over six months, (iii) over one year, (iv) over 18 months and (v) over two years; and what these figures are for disabled people registered as (i) section 1 and (ii) section 2 disabled.

Mr. Alan Clark [*pursuant to his reply*, 21 November 1984, c. *195*]: Separate unemployment figures for able-bodied and disabled people are not available.

Comprehensive figures for registered disabled people have not been available since the introduction of voluntary registration of unemployed people at jobcentres and careers offices in October 1982. Analysis of total unemployment by duration for the old travel-to-work areas are available in the House of Commons Library, although direct comparisons back to 1979 are not possible mainly because of the change in the basis of the unemployment count in October 1982.

Following is the available information on numbers of registered disabled people registered as unemployed between 1979 and 1982 for Great Britain, and for October 1982 only for the old travel-to-work areas.

Registered disabled people registered as unemployed

Duration of unemployment	*Total*	*Percentage of all duration groups*	*Section 1*	*Percentage of all duration groups*	*Section 2*	*Percentage of all duration groups*
Great Britain—July 1979						
Over 3 months	49,976	82·8	42,210	81·2	7,766	92·1
Over 6 months	43,995	72·9	36,713	70·6	7,282	86·4
Over 1 year	35,529	58·9	29,003	55·8	6,526	77·4
Over 18 months	29,237	48·5	23,379	45·0	5,858	69·5
Over 2 years	24,856	41·2	19,541	37·6	5,315	63·1
Great Britain—October 1980						
Over 3 months	51,567	79·4	44,560	77·7	7,007	91·4
Over 6 months	43,086	66·3	36,642	63·9	6,444	84·1
Over 1 year	32,548	50·1	26,944	47·0	5,604	73·1
Over 18 months	26,239	40·4	21,285	37·1	4,954	64·6
Over 2 years	22,318	34·4	17,833	31·1	4,485	58·5
Great Britain—October 1981						
Over 3 months	65,718	85·3	58,406	84·2	7,312	94·2
Over 6 months	56,459	73·3	49,573	71·5	6,886	88·7
Over 1 year	41,628	54·1	35,554	51·3	6,074	78·2
Over 18 months	30,775	40·0	25,555	36·9	5,220	67·2
Over 2 years	24,629	32·0	20,078	29·0	4,551	58·6
Great Britain—October 1982						
Over 3 months	66,077	86·7	59,057	85·9	7,020	93·6
Over 6 months	58,468	76·7	51,862	75·4	6,606	88·1
Over 1 year	46,372	60·8	40,462	58·8	5,910	78·8
Over 18 months	36,635	48·0	31,349	45·5	5,286	70·5
Over 2 years	28,373	37·2	23,681	34·4	4,692	62·6
Sheffield travel-to-work area—October 1982						
Over 3 months	390	87·1	356	86·7	34	89·4
Over 6 months	344	76·8	314	76·5	30	78·9
Over 1 year	269	60·1	245	59·7	24	63·1
Over 18 months	205	45·8	185	45·1	20	52·6
Over 2 years	162	36·2	146	35·6	16	42·1
Manchester travel-to-work area—October 1982						
Over 3 months	1,925	77·6	1,710	76·9	215	84·6
Over 6 months	1,718	69·3	1,515	68·1	203	79·9
Over 1 year	1,306	52·7	1,130	50·8	176	69·3
Over 18 months	1,086	43·8	923	41·5	163	64·2
Over 2 years	909	36·7	767	34·5	142	55·9
London travel-to-work area—October 1982						
Over 3 months	6,325	87·0	5,641	86·3	684	94·8
Over 6 months	5,548	76·3	4,897	74·9	651	90·2
Over 1 year	4,260	58·6	3,681	56·3	579	80·2
Over 18 months	3,270	45·0	2,760	42·2	510	70·6
Over 2 years	2,500	34·4	2,055	31·4	445	61·6
Newcastle upon Tyne travel-to-work area—October 1982						
Over 3 months	735	91·6	647	91·5	88	93·5
Over 6 months	661	82·4	577	81·6	84	89·3
Over 1 year	567	70·7	493	69·7	74	78·7
Over 18 months	460	57·4	397	56·1	63	67·0
Over 2 years	366	45·7	310	43·8	56	59·6
Birmingham travel-to-work area—October 1982						
Over 3 months	2,027	89·4	1,855	88·8	172	95·5
Over 6 months	1,867	82·4	1,698	81·3	169	93·8
Over 1 year	1,552	68·5	1,412	67·6	140	77·7
Over 18 months	1,169	51·6	1,063	50·9	106	58·8
Over 2 years	938	41·4	840	40·2	98	54·4
Stoke-on-Trent travel-to-work area—October 1982						
Over 3 months	680	85·8	561	84·4	119	92·9
Over 6 months	578	72·9	472	71·0	106	82·8
Over 1 year	455	57·4	355	53·4	100	78·1
Over 18 months	326	41·1	244	36·7	82	64·0
Over 2 years	235	29·6	168	25·3	67	52·3
Leeds travel-to-work area—October 1982						
Over 3 months	647	80·6	574	79·2	73	93·5
Over 6 months	509	63·4	450	62·1	59	75·6
Over 1 year	337	42·0	293	40·4	44	56·4

Duration of unemployment	Total	Percentage of all duration groups	Section 1	Percentage of all duration groups	Section 2	Percentage of all duration groups
Over 18 months	272	33·9	234	32·3	38	48·7
Over 2 years	212	26·4	178	24·6	34	43·6
Wakefield travel-to-work area—October 1982						
Over 3 months	228	87·0	180	86·1	48	90·5
Over 6 months	194	74·0	148	70·8	46	86·7
Over 1 year	159	60·6	114	54·5	45	84·8
Over 18 months	139	53·0	98	46·8	41	77·3
Over 2 years	108	41·2	72	34·4	36	67·9

• MSC local and regional offices do not keep statistics of disabled people for longer than three years.

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Employment what, for each year since 1979, is *(a)* the unemployment rate, *(b)* the number of registered disabled people and *(c)* the unemployment rate for registered disabled people, nationally and for the Manchester, Sheffield, London, Stoke-on-Trent, Newcastle, Birmingham, Leeds and Wakefield travel-to-work areas; and what are these figures for disabled people registered (i) section 1, and (ii) section 2 disabled.

Mr. Alan Clark [*pursuant to his reply*, 21 November 1984, column *195*]: Overall unemployment rates for travel-to-work areas are available in the House of Commons Library. Figures for the new travel-to-work areas only go back to June 1983 and direct comparisons for the old travel-to-work areas back to 1979 are not possible, mainly because of the change in the basis of the unemployment count in October 1982. Unemployment rates for registered disabled people are not available.

Following is the available information on numbers of registered disabled people in the old travel-to-work areas.

Numbers of registered disabled people: April

	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984
Great Britain	482,006	470,588	460,178	447,259	433,177	420,475
Manchester	•	•	•	13,369	12,820	12,000
Sheffield	•	•	•	4,693	4,707	4,869
London	•	•	•	52,615	50,373	46,506
Stoke-on-Trent	•	•	•	5,816	4,811	4,219
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	•	•	•	4,557	4,586	4,246
Birmingham	•	•	•	11,513	10,980	10,404
Leeds	•	•	•	5,723	5,555	5,339
Wakefield	•	•	•	1,757	1,700	1,644

• Figures by travel-to-work areas are not available prior to October 1982.

Training Schemes (Accident Statistics)

Mr. Tom Clarke asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many young persons on youth training and youth opportunities programme schemes have been involved in accidents, including fatal accidents, since the inception of each scheme.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The information requested is available for the periods shown in the table:

Scheme and period*	Accidents Injuries†			
	Fatalities	Major injuries	Minor injuries	Total
Youth Opportunities Programme				
1 April 1980 to 31 March 1981	4	176	1,539	1,719
1 April 1981 to 31 March 1982	‡6	271	2,974	3,251
1 April 1982 to 31 March 1983	‖7	¶188	¶3,688	3,883
1 April 1983 to 31 March 1984	•2	83	819	904
Youth Training Scheme				
1 April 1983 to 31 March 1984	■4	100	843	947
1 April 1984 to 30 September 1984	•3	88	765	856

• Statistical information on the number of YOP trainees involved in accidents prior to 1 April 1980 is not available.

† Since 1 April 1983 MSC accident figures for YOP and YTS have been compiled on a similar basis to those prepared by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) on employed persons. However, the figures quoted in the table will include a number of accidents, in particular road traffic accidents during scheme time and accidents to trainees in educational establishments, which may not have been reportable to HSE had the individuals been employed.

‡ This figure includes two road traffic fatalities.

‖ This figure includes two road traffic fatalities and two lunch-time swimming accidents.

¶ Major injuries on YOP during the period 1 April 1982-31 March 1983 have been reviewed by MSC using the criteria laid down in the Notification of Accidents and Dagerous Occurances Regulations (NADOR). There were originally 311 recorded major injuries, but following the review 123 of these have been reclassified as minor injuries thus giving the totals quoted in the table.

• This figure includes one lunch-time swimming accident.

■ This figure includes one road traffic accident.

• This figure includes two road traffic accidents.

Health and Safety

Mr. Michie asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will take steps to ensure that the consultation procedures set out in the central study plan method of work are extended to include the following interested parties to enable the benefits of health and safety legislation to be adequately assessed *(a)* unions with members employed in small firms, *(b)* safety representatives in small businesses appointed under the safety representatives and safety committee regulations in 1977 and *(c)* employees in small businesses.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: No changes are proposed.

Asbestos

Mr. Skinner asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many firms have been *(a)* granted and *(b)* refused licences to strip asbestos since 1 August.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Fifty licences without conditions and 1,366 licences with conditions attached have been issued to individual licence holders. One licence application was refused, but the company has since re-applied and now holds a six-month conditional licence.

Mr. Skinner asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many extra health and safety inspectors have been recruited specifically to deal with asbestos licensing since 1 August.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Central (Mr. Caborn) on 29 October, at columns *779-80*.

Short-time Working

Mr. Skinner asked the Secretary of State for Employment what is the approximate number of hours lost through short-time working between April and August.

Mr. Alan Clark: Details of hours lost through short-time working are available for operatives in manufacturing industries in Great Britain. Figures for the months specified were published in table 1.11 of the labour market data section of the October 1984 issue of *Employment Gazette*, a copy of which is in the Library.

Hard-to-work Areas

Mr. Golding asked the Secretary of State for Employment what are the hard-to-work areas referred to on page 530 of the October *Employment Gazette*: and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: I hope it was not too hard to work out that the reference was meant to be to the revised travel-to-work areas.

Youth Training Scheme

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Employment (1) whether, in the light of the results of the recent Manpower Services Commission sample survey, he will give the most up-to-date breakdown of the destinations of youth training scheme leavers;

(2) whether, in the light of the reports of the recent Manpower Services Commission sample survey, he will give his most up-to-date estimate of the number of youth training scheme leavers who have gone straight into employment.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The latest estimates of the destinations of young people leaving the youth training scheme are based on the recent sample survey of 3,500 young people in nine Manpower Services Commission areas who left individual programmes within the scheme between 1 April and 31 July 1984. This showed that, of those leavers responding:

56 per cent. were in full-time employment.
2 per cent. were in part-time employment.
4 per cent. were on another YTS scheme.
2 per cent. were on a full-time course at a college or training centre.
34 per cent. were unemployed (of whom about one-fifth —i.e. 7 per cent. of all respondents—intended to take up full-time education or training).
2 per cent. were doing something else.

A copy of the paper containing the results of the sample survey has been placed in the Library.

Industrial Training Board Centres (Closures)

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will state for each industry the number of industrial training board training centres which have closed since 1979.

Mr. Peter Morrison: None.

Appeal Tribunals

Mr. Colin Shepherd asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many appeal tribunal hearings related to decisions made by his adjudication officers have been convened during the last 12 months for which information is available; and what is his estimate of the total cost of these.

Mr. Whitney: I have been asked to reply.

As a result of industrial action within the Department, the most recent information available is for the 12-month period ended 31 December 1983 when 15,096 unemployment benefit appeals were heard.

Information about the total cost of these appeals is not available.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Probation and After-care Service

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many persons were receiving after-care by the probation and after-care service in each metropolitan county area at 31 December in each year since 1974 by sex and type of contact and type of after care;

(2) what was the average number of persons on remand awaiting completion of social inquiry reports by the probation and after-care service in each metropolitan county area in each year since 1974 by age, sex and type of offence;

(3) how many persons were supervised by the probation and after-care service in each metropolitan county area at 31 December in each year since 1974 by sex and type of supervision.

Mr. Mellor: I shall reply as soon as possible.

Alcohol Sales

Mr. Soley asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the number of convictions in each of the years 1973 to 1983 for knowingly selling alcohol to a person under the age of 18 years.

Mr. Mellor: The information available to me, which may be incomplete, is given in the following table. It covers offences of selling liquor to a person under 18 years either on or off licensed premises.

Persons found guilty of offences against section 169 of the Licensing Act 1964 in magistrates' courts in England and Wales

	Number of persons
1973	273
1974	256
1975	*
1976	280
1977†	203
1978†	196
1979	257
1980	243
1981	242
1982	197
1983	191

* Not available.

† Figures adjusted to take account of the Criminal Law Act 1977 and a new counting procedure.

Mr. Soley asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the number of convictions in each of the years 1973 to 1983 for selling alcohol to an intoxicated person.

Mr. Mellor: The information available to me, which may be incomplete, is given in the following table. It covers proceedings brought under section 172 of the Licensing Act 1964 and includes offences where a licensee permits drunken or violent behaviour as well as offences of selling liquor to a drunken person.

Persons found guilty of offences against section 172 of the Licensing Act 1964 in magistrates' courts in England and Wales

	Number of persons
1973	14
1974	14
1975	*
1976	4
1977†	3
1978†	6
1979	3
1980	7
1981	20
1982	22
1983	14

* Not available.
† Figures adjusted to take account of the Criminal Law Act 1977 and a new counting procedure.

Criminal Law Revision Committee (Report)

Mr. Tom Cox asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to introduce legislation following the recent report of the Criminal Law Revision Committee.

Mr. Mellor: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to a question on 22 November, at column 246, from the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mr. Parry).

Libyans (Visa Applications)

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many visa applications submitted by Libyans for entry into the United Kingdom are currently awaiting authorisation by Her Majesty's Government; how many of these are new applications; and how many have been submitted by Libyans seeking entry into the United Kingdom for a second or subsequent time.

Mr. Waddington: The information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will describe the new visa regime imposed for Libyans seeking entry into the United Kingdom since the severance of diplomatic relations between Libya and the United Kingdom in May.

Mr. Waddington: My right hon. and learned Friend announced on 1 May a number of immigration restrictions on the entry and stay in this country of Libyan nationals. Visitors are granted visas for stays of shorter duration, adapted to the circumstances of each case. Applications from those who seek to come here as students, in particular, are subject to stringent checks, and Libyan students are not normally given permission to stay for more than one term at a time. Applications for visas must be made to a British consular post outside Libya, and all such applications are referred to the Home Office for a decision. All applicants for visas are asked to sign a declaration undertaking to refrain from the expression of any political opinion through violence. Similar restrictions apply to applications for extensions of stay from Libyan nationals in this country. These arrangements are kept under review.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the total number of Libyans admitted to the United Kingdom since the severance of diplomatic relations between the United Kingdom and Libya in May, and if he will indicate *(a)* those who have been given entry for the first time and *(b)* those who had previously been granted visas authorising entry into the United Kingdom prior to May.

Mr. Waddington: A total of 700 Libyan nationals was admitted to the United Kingdom in the period May to August 1984, following the severance of diplomatic relations with Libya on 22 April 1984. The information requested on admissions for the first time and on persons who had been granted visas prior to May 1984 is not available.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many new visas were issued to Libyans for entry into the United Kingdom for each month in 1983 and 1984.

Mr. Waddington: This is a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs. However, I understand that the information requested is not available. Returns of visa statistics kept by posts abroad indicate the total number of visas issued, which are not broken down by nationality.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the current average length of time for a visa to be granted to a Libyan seeking entry for the first time into the United Kingdom for *(a)* business purposes, *(b)* educational purposes, *(c)* medical purposes and *(d)* visiting and tourist purposes.

Mr. Waddington: The information requested could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Urgent compassionate and medical cases are given priority.

Longmoor Camp

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether any charges of criminal damage have been brought against persons attempting to deface with paint cruise missiles and of defacing with paint soldiers' uniforms at the high security vehicle compound as a result of activities in the early hours of Tuesday 20 November at Longmoor Camp.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The chief constable of Hampshire tells me that no charges have so far been preferred as a result of incidents at Longmoor camp on 20 November. My right hon. and learned Friend was informed by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence that there is no record of incidents as described by the hon. Member having taken place.

Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) on which date or dates and in which areas the various sections of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 will be brought into effect; and by what date the Act is expected to be fully operational;

(2) what additional training custody officers will undergo in order that they may fulfil their responsibilities under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act; and what will be the nature and duration of such training;

(3) what additional training Metropolitan police officers will undergo in order that they be fully acquainted with the new powers and duties contained in the Police and Criminal Evidence Act; and what is the nature and duration of such training.

Mr. Brittan: Our present intention is to bring the provisions of the Act into force in three stages, commencing on 1 January 1985. The provisions to be brought into force on that date will include section 106, which requires arrangements to be made in each police area for obtaining the views of the community on policing, and a number of miscellaneous provisions which can appropriately and sensibly come into effect in advance of the major parts of the Act.

The second stage of implementation will be on 1 March 1985 and will principally include part IX of the Act: the establishment of the Police Complaints Authority and other changes to the police complaints and discipline procedures.

The third stage will include the outstanding provisions of parts I to VIII — with the exception of subsections (11) to (14) of section 37, which are dependent upon provisions of the Children and Young Persons Act 1969 not yet in force, and section 60, which provides for the tape-recording of police interviews with suspects and which will be subject to a separate programme of implementation in the light of the progress of the field trials now taking place in various police areas. In deciding on the timing of this third stage I have had regard to the need for a service-wide training programme. The Home Office's instructor training unit at Harrogate is preparing a training package for use by all provincial police forces.

The training is likely to amount to 14 hours teaching time followed by on-the-job training. This includes up to seven hours teaching of particular relevance to custody officers. A corresponding package is being prepared by the Metropolitan police for all officers serving on that force.

The date for the third stage of implementation to which I have asked forces to work is 1 January 1986, which is also the date on which I propose to ask Parliament to agree that the four codes of practice which section 66 requires me to issue shall come into force.

Criminal Law Act 1977

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the essential elements of the proposed arrangements for the implementation of section 48 of the Criminal Law Act 1977.

Mr. Mellor: As previously announced, my right hon. and learned Friend's intention is to implement section 48 so that advance disclosure of the prosecution case will be available to defendants charged with offences triable either way before they are required to indicate whether they wish to be tried in the magistrates' court or the Crown court. It is intended to begin by providing for disclosure to be made either by a summary of the case or by copies of witness statements. Discussions on the proposals are taking place with interested parties as a preliminary to the making of the necessary rules. It continues to be our aim that the rules should be made and in force by next May. They will be reconsidered in the light of experience and no later than at the time of the introduction of the Crown prosecution service, with a view to prescribing a single method of advance disclosure for use in all cases.

Juveniles (Metropolitan Police District)

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the proposed use of instant cautions and multi-agency panels for dealing with juveniles in the Metropolitan police district.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The Metropolitan police introduced an early cautioning scheme for juveniles on 1 November. Where the offence is not serious, most first time juvenile offenders are eligible for an instant caution, which will be administered at the police station and without reference to the juvenile bureau. Other cases are still referred to the Metropolitan police's juvenile bureau for further consideration.

The Metropolitan police are also considering the introduction of multi-agency juvenile panels on an experimental basis in four districts. Cases of juvenile offenders would be referred to a juvenile panel if the juvenile bureau considered that prosecution was appropriate. The panel would either support prosecution or recommend a caution combined with some form of supervised activity. The viability of such schemes will clearly depend on all the agencies involved as well as the police.

Metropolitan Police (Identification Parades)

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will set out in full the Metropolitan Police identification parade code, the origins of the code and why terms such as mulatto, quadroon and octoroon are still used; if the code is being reviewed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The section of the Metropolitan police commissioner's general orders dealing with identification parades reflects directly the rules and administrative guidance laid down in Home Office circular 109/1978, a copy of which is in the Library of the House. This circular was issued in the light of recommendations of the departmental committee on evidence of identification in criminal cases — the Devlin committee — published on 26 April 1976.

The code of practice on identification to be made under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 will replace existing provisions on identification parades. The code has been published in draft and a copy is in the Library of the House. It has no reference to the terms to which the hon. Member refers.

Police Custody (Records)

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place in the Library a copy of the uniform custody record on which is recorded all details relating to a person's detention in police custody.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The Association of Chief Police Officers is preparing a custody record suitable for adoption by all police forces in England and Wales when the provisions of parts IV and V of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 are brought into force. When this work has been completed, I shall place a copy of the record in the Library of the House.

Special Branch

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of the total Metropolitan police budget for 1984-85 is spent on the activities of the Special Branch; and what proportion of the total cost is met by London ratepayers.

Mr. Brittan: The estimated cost of the Metropolitan police Special Branch in 1984-85 is £15·5 million which represents about 1·8 per cent. of the estimated gross revenue expenditure of the force. The London ratepayers' contribution to Metropolitan police costs is normally some 25 per cent. But, in view of the branch's national responsibilities, it is one of the services recognised by the Government through the imperial and national services grant, which reduces the cost to London ratepayers.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the current establishment of the Metropolitan police Special Branch; and if he will list the numbers employed in each rank.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The Metropolitan police Special Branch at present numbers 408 police officers and 119 civilians. For operational reasons, it is not the practice to disclose details of the rank structure of the branch.

Plastic Handcuffs

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how long the new disposable plastic handcuff has been available to police; if it has been tested and approved as safe by his Department; by whom it is manufactured; which police forces are in possession of it; and whether the guidelines for its use are the same as for conventional handcuffs.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Plastic handcuffs have been in use by police in England and Wales since at least 1978. The decision whether or not to seek to acquire such handcuffs is a matter for chief officers of police, and information about their origin and distribution is not recorded centrally. The Department has not issued any advice about the acquisition of plastic handcuffs, but guidance on the use of all handcuffs is contained in paragraph 4.65 of the "Consolidated Circular on Crime and Kindred Matters", a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Local Government Reform

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what arrangements will be made, in the event of the abolition of the Greater London council, for the administration of the fireman's pension scheme currently administered by the Greater London council and for those non-uniformed members of the London Fire Service who currently contribute to the Greater London council superannuation fund.

Mr. Brittan: Under the Local Government Bill the London fire and civil defence authority will, as from the abolition date, be the fire authority for Greater London with the responsibilities of a fire authority under the firemen's pension scheme. Clause 54 of the Bill provides for the establishment of the London residuary body in whom will be vested the Greater London council superannuation fund and whose responsibilities will include the functions of the Greater London council as administering authority under the local government superannuation regulations.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department who will set standards, ensure compliance and police premises owned by London borough councils under the terms of the Licensing Act in the event of the abolition of the Greater London council.

Mr. Mellor: As previously explained to the hon. Member, responsibility for the grant, renewal, transfer orremoval of Justices' licences under the Licensing Act 1964 will continue to rest with the licensing justices or the local magistrates' court for premises in the Greater London area. The right of police officers to enter licensed premises for the purpose of preventing or detecting an offence against that Act will also remain unchanged.

ENVIRONMENT

Bison Wall Frame Buildings

Mr. Litherland asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will explain the discrepancy between *(a)* his reply of 25 July to the hon. Member for Manchester, Central, *Official Report*, columns 727-29, which stated that 44 local authorities had replied to his Department's letter of 5 October 1983 concerning Bison wall frame buildings and *(b)* his reply of 26 July to the hon. Member for Manchester, Central, *Official Report*, colmumn 803, which listed only 34 local authorities as having replied to his Department's letter of 5 October 1983 concerning Bison wall frame buildings.

Mr. Gow: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to him of 26 October, at column *750*.

Mr. Litherland asked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will list the 15 authorties which have appraised or are appraising their Bison wall frame buildings for possible faults in parapet fixing;

(2) if he will list the 27 authorities which have appraised or are appraising their Bison wall frame buildings for possible faults in the connection between wall and floor panels and in the restraint of load-bearing walls;

(3) if he will list, for each of the faults *(a)* to *(e)* specified in his Department's letter of 5 October 1983, those authorities which have undertaken, are undertaking, or are planning to undertake, remedial works on their Bison wall frame buildings with respect to each specified fault;

(4) if he will list the 30 authorities which have appraised or are appraising their Bison wall frame buildings for possible faults with spalling concrete or loose aggregate finishes;

(5) if he will list the 11 authorities which have appraised or are appraising their Bison wall frame buildings for possible faults in the ties between inner and outer leaves of external cladding panels.

Mr. Gow: On the basis of the replies to the Department's letter of 5 October 1983—the majority of which were received in 1983 or early in 1984—the authorities which had appraised, or were appraising, their Bison wall frame buildings for possible faults in the connection between wall and floor panels and in the restraint of load bearing walls (paragraph 2*(a)* of the letter of 5 October 1983) were:

Barking and Dagenham
Barnet
Birmingham
Bradford
Brent
Brighton
Eastbourne
Elmbridge
Hillingdon
Hounslow
Knowsley
Leicester
Manchester
Nottingham
Portsmouth
Preston
Rotherham
Rugby
Salford
Sandwell
Scunthorpe
Solihull
Waltham Forest
Wandsworth
Wiggan
Wirral
Wyre Forest

Those which had appraised or were appraising these buildings for possible faults in parapet fixings (paragraph 2*(b)* of the letter of 5 October 1983) were:

Birmingham
Elmbridge
GLC
Hillingdon
Hounslow
Portsmouth
Preston
Rotherham
Rugby
Salford
Scunthorpe
Solihull
Wandsworth
Wirral
Wyre Forest

Those which had appraised or were appraising these buildings for possible faults in the ties between inner and outer leaves of external cladding panels (paragraph 2*(c)* of the letter of 5 October 1983) were:

Barnet
Birmingham
Hillingdon
Leicester
Oldham
Portsmouth
Rugby
Solihull
Wandsworth
Wirral
Wyre Forest

Those which had appraised or were appraising these buildings for spalling concrete or inadequately secured exposed aggregate (paragraph 2*(d)* and *(e)* of the letter of 5 October 1983) were:

Barnet
Birmingham
Bradford
Brent
Brighton
Eastbourne
Elmbridge
GLC
Hartlepool
Hounslow
Islington
Knowsley
Leicester
Liverpool
Manchester
Oldham
Portsmouth
Preston
Rotherham
Rugby
Salford
Scunthorpe
Slough
Waltham Forest
Wandsworth
Warrington
Windsor and Maidenhead
Wirral
Wyre Forest

Further appraisals were planned, and for up-to-date information the hon. Member should consult the authorities which own buildings of this type.

The details of appraisals and of steps taken, or to be taken, by authorities to eliminate safety risks were not sought by the Department in its letter of 5 October 1983 on the basis that they were for publication. It is open to the hon. Member to get in touch with the authorities concerned.

Mr. Litherland asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the local authorities which at the time of his statement on Bison wall frame buildings of 25 July had not yet replied to his Department's letter of 5 October 1983, stating for each authority whether it has yet replied to this letter and, in the case of authorities which have replied since 25 July, the date on which the reply was received.

Mr. Gow: The local authorities which had not replied by 25 July 1984 to the Department's letter of 5 October 1983 were as follows:

Brentwood
Greenwich
Rochdale
Sedgefield
Tower Hamlets

The four authorities which have now replied and the date on which those replies were sent are:

Brentwood 12/10/84
Rochdale 19/11/84
Sedgefield 26/7/84
Tower Hamlets 6/8/84

A reply has yet to be received from Greenwich.

Mr. Litherland asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will arrange for the publication of any of those reports by the National Building Agency into Bison wall frame dwellings which are held by his Department.

Mr. Gow: No. In my reply to the hon. Member on 31 October, at column *1055*, I said that it is for the authority or body which commissioned a report from the National Building Agency to decide whether it should be published.

Mr. Litherland asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the bodies which commissioned reports from the National Building Agency on Bison wall frame dwellings, together with the dates on which his Department received copies of these reports.

Mr. Gow: It is for the bodies which commissioned such reports to decide whether this information should be made available.

Community Centre, Waltham Forest

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for the Environment, in the urban programme for 1985-86, what priority he intends to give to the provision of a community centre for the Afro-Caribbean community in Waltham Forest.

Sir George Young: An application has been received and is being considered for grant-aid under urban programme circular 25 together with the bids from other local authorities. It is hoped that the results will be notified to boroughs early next year.

British Board of Agrément

Mr. Freeman asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the range of initial charges to companies whose products are tested by the British Board of Agrément.

Sir George Young: The charges for assessments by the British Board of Agrément are mainly in the range £4,000 to £6,500.

Mr. Freeman asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many staff are employed by the British Board of Agrément.

Sir George Young: On 31 October 1984 69 staff were employed by the British Board of Agrément.

Mr. Freeman asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the range of time taken to test products by the British Board of Agrément.

Sir George Young: The range of time taken by the British Board of Agrément to test products varies from a few days to about two years, if simulated weathering is involved. The average time for complete assessment of a product is 15 months.

Mr. Freeman asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has considered charging fees for testing products by the British Board of Agrément on the basis of royalties on sales rather than charges at the outset.

Sir George Young: The British Board of Agrément aims to achieve financial self-sufficiency as soon as possible and fees and different methods of charging, including charging on a royalty basis, are regularly reviewed in the light of this.

Basildon (Ministerial Visit)

Mr. Amess asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on his visit to Basildon on 13 October.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: I made a political visit to Basildon on 13 October, where I spoke at a Basildon Conservative Association function. I had hoped also to meet, at their request, the rural dean of Basildon and other community leaders before the function but, because of an unfortunate misunderstanding between the organisers of the function and the rural dean about the venue, that meeting did not take place. I did meet the rural dean later in the evening and was glad to have a useful exchange of views.

Local Government Reform

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment which voluntary organisations are, to his knowledge, opposing abolition of the Greater London council because they have become too dependent on the Greater London council for financial support as indicated in his speech to the annual general meeting of the National Council for Voluntary Organisations on 12 November.

Sir George Young: I shall answer this question shortly.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the Government's intentions for the future of County hall in the event of the abolition of the Greater London council.

Sir George Young: Initially, ownership of County hall will pass to the London residuary body; consideration is being given to a variety of possible uses thereafter.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how, in the event of the abolition of the Greater London council, members of the London residuary body appointed by him will be accountable for their administration of the Greater London council superannuation fund to the participating bodies which are required to make up any actuarial deficiencies on the fund and to account for them.

Sir George Young: In the administration of the superannuation fund the London residuary body will be subject to the local government superannuation regulations in the same way as other administering authorities.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what arrangements will be made in the event of the abolition of the Greater London council for the continued protection of the superannuation entitlements of those staff who were transferred to the London borough councils in 1965, and whose protected rights as former London county council and Middlesex county council contributors have been administered by the Greater London council.

Sir George Young: As stated in the White Paper "Streamlining the Cities" all existing pension rights will be fully safeguarded.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what arrangements will be made in the event of the abolition of the Greater London council for the review of existing payments and the assessment of the new awards in respect of pre-abolition accidents under part Q of the local government superannuation regulations 1974 to 1984 and under the provisions of the London Government Act 1963.

Sir George Young: The London residuary body will be given power to continue payment where awards have

been made by the GLC. It will also be able to make an award in any case which has not been finalised by the abolition date.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether, in the event of the abolition of the Greater London council, the superannuation affairs of all employing bodies currently admitted as members of the Greater London council superannuation fund will continue to be administered as part of a single superannuation fund managed by the residuary body.

Sir George Young: Yes.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether, in the event of the Greater London council being abolished, the strategic planning guidance he proposes to issue to the London boroughs will include any quantified allocation of land and development at borough level.

Mr. Macfarlane: The content of such guidance will be determined following advice from the proposed London planning commission.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether, in assessing the costs and savings arising from abolition of the Greater London council, the Government have taken into account the additional costs arising from the extra lines of communication between each London borough.

Sir George Young: The Government's estimates of savings in the explanatory and financial memorandum to the Local Government Bill are broad assessments and are naturally subject to decisions by successor authorities about the operation of the services they inherit.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment which body, in the event of the abolition of the Greater London council, will be the administering authority, for the purposes of the local government superannuation regulations, in relation to the existing beneficiaries of the council's superannuation fund.

Sir George Young: All functions of the Greater London council as an administering authority under the local government superannuation regulations will become functions of the London residuary body.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment who, in the event of the abolition of the Greater London council, will meet the costs currently levied on the council in respect of discretionary superannuation compensation powers which have already been exercised on behalf of retired staff; and how such charges will be apportioned.

Sir George Young: The existing liabilities of the Greater London council for compensation payments in respect of their retired staff will be transferred to the London residuary body. That body will recover the costs through a levy on the rating authorities in London, the amount being apportioned by reference to their population levels.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what arrangements will be made, in the event of the abolition of the Greater London council, for the uprating and payment of deferred superannuation benefits awarded by the council to former contributors to its superannuation fund.

Sir George Young: Clause 57 of the Bill provides that the London residuary body will assume all existing liabilities of the GLC superannuation fund.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if, in the event of the abolition of the Greater London council, arrangements will be made to recompense the council's superannuation fund for any adverse effect on its investment performance that may result from having to sell investments or maintain a level of liquidity above that required for investment management in order to facilitate and fund apportionments in respect of Greater London council staff transferred to other bodies.

Sir George Young: No. These payments will be spread over a considerable period after the abolition date, and there is no reason why they should affect the investment performance of the fund.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will ensure that the statutory housing improvement areas declared by the Greater London council continue in the event of the Greater London council being abolished.

Sir George Young: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 25 October, at column 696.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is Her Majesty's Government's policy in the event of the abolition of the Greater London council, on grant-related expenditure assessments for those boroughs which inherit a rate burden greater than current expenditure levels approved by the Government.

Mr. Waldegrave: The grant-related expenditure the GLC would have received for those services transferred to the lower tier will, following abolition, be redistributed among the London boroughs.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what arrangements are proposed, in the event of the abolition of the Greater London council, for the analysis and monitoring on a consistent basis of planning decisions across London.

Mr. Macfarlane: My Department will continue to monitor planning performance. It will be for the London boroughs to decide collectively whether they wish to monitor the content of decisions.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what arrangements are proposed for the London-wide appraisal of development applications involving high buildings in the event of the abolition of the Greater London council.

Mr. Macfarlane: None. They will continue as now to be dealt with on their merits by the London boroughs.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will provide a breakdown of the Government's estimate of £120 million savings in the event of the abolition of the Greater London council and metropolitan counties.

Sir George Young: My right hon. Friend has explained the Government's estimate of savings in the explanatory and financial memorandum to the Local Government Bill.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if any Greater London council housing functions are to be transferred to quangos in the event of the Greater London council being abolished.

Sir George Young: The London residuary body will assume the GLC's interest in personal mortagages for home purchase and improvement, with a view to refinancing by the private sector; certain of the GLC's rights or liabilities to payment under the housing transfer orders and in respect of certain nomination rights; and the GLC's liabilities under town development schemes and certain warranties.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what administrative and financial benefits will accrue from his proposals for housing mobility in the even of the Greater London council being abolished.

Sir George Young: Our overall estimate of the savings to be generated by abolition is set out in the explanatory and financial memorandum to the Local Government Bill.

Overcrowding

Mr. Loyden asked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will publish the figures of overcrowded households region by region in England;

(2) if he will publish in the *Official Report*, the number of households overcrowded in the cities of Liverpool and London, respectively.

Sir George Young: The latest information is from the 1981 census which enumerated the following numbers of households living at densities of more than one person per room:

Region	*Number*
Northern	42,039
Yorkshire & Humberside	60,570
East Midlands	38,981
East Anglia	13,881
South East (of which Greater London 132,330)	218,727
South West	35,149
West Midlands	72,193
North West	85,071
England	566,611

There were 10,061 in the city of Liverpool and 59 in the city of London.

Block Grant

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether grant payable to an authority under paragraph 29 of schedule 32 to the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980—enterprise zones—will be included within total expenditure for block grant purposes in 1985-86.

Sir George Young: The grants are paid to local authorities as full compensation for their loss of revenue from the exemption from rates of industrial and commercial properties in enterprise zones. Neither the revenue forgone, nor the grants received by a local authority score as total expenditure for block grant purposes. No change in those arrangements is proposed.

Local Authorities (Audit of Accounts)

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the local authorities whose audit of accounts under the Local Government Act 1972 have not yet been concluded for the years 1981-82 and 1982-83, respectively.

Mr. Waldegrave: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's responsibilities in respect of uncompleted audits of local authorities under the Local Government Act 1972 for the years 1981-82 and 1982-83 were transferred to the Audit Commission under the Accounts and Audit (Transitional Provisions) Regulations 1983. If the hon. Member cares to contact the commission, I am sure it will be pleased to provide the information requested. The commission's address is:

1 Vincent Square, London SW1P 2PN.

Local Government Expenditure

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if cash increases in expenditure, net of specific grant, between 1983-84 and 1985-86 on civil defence will be disregarded for the purpose of determining the extent to which an authority has complied with its expenditure guidance in 1985-86.

Mr. Waldegrave: My right hon. Friend will consider the representations for disregards he has received before implementing grant abatement for 1985-86.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the increase in the overall level of pay and prices for local authority current expenditure between the years 1980-81 to 1984-85.

Mr. Waldegrave: Based on information by local authorities, including forecasts made in their 1984-85 budgets, pay and prices affecting local authority current expenditure are provisionally estimated to have increased by 32 per cent. between 1980-81 and 1984-85.

Mr. Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will provide by service block a comparison of local authority capital expenditure bids and allocations in Greater London, the metropolitan counties, metropolitan districts, shire counties and shire districts for each of the years 1981-82 to 1984-85.

Mr. Waldegrave: My right hon. Friend does not hold information on bids for service blocks for which he is not directly responsible, and for the other services block there is no bidding system. Information on the housing bids and allocations for every housing authority in England for each of the years in question is available in the Library of the House.

Greater London Development Plan

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects the current Greater London development plan to be superseded by the 33 adopted unitary borough development plans which he is now proposing in the event of the abolition of the Greater London council.

Mr. Macfarlane: Plans will be prepared as required and it is therefore not appropriate at this stage to think in terms of an overall timetable.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he intends that the approved Greater London development plan should continue to be used as the statutory planning framework in London for the reassessment of land allocations for housing called for in his circular 15/84, "Land for Housing" issued on 4 July.

Mr. Macfarlane: The Greater London development plan remains the structure plan for London until its replacement by unitary development plans following abolition of the Greater London council.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether the existing approved Greater London development plan continues to reflect central Government policy and current development priorities in London as required in his circular 22/84, "Memorandum on Structure and Local Plans".

Mr. Macfarlane: The Greater London development plan remains the current structure plan for London, but where more recent policy advise has been issued by the Government, this should be taken into account by the relevant local planning authorities.

Rate Equalisation Scheme (London)

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the percentage increase in the contributions of the cities of London and Westminster to the London rate equalisation scheme between the years 1980-81 to 1984-85.

Mr. Waldegrave: The 1980-81 scheme was the last under the old rate support grant system and is therefore not comparable with the 1984-85 scheme.

London Planning Commission

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many London borough councils have expressed support for his proposal to establish a London planning commission.

Mr. Macfarlane: Of the London borough councils which commented on the proposed London planning commission, two expressed support.

Planning Inquiries

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will take steps to make public all advice, including briefing notes from his Department, given to inspectors at planning inquiries.

Mr. Macfarlane: Inspectors are rarely given departmental briefing on individual planning cases. When this does occur, briefing notes are made available on request to anyone reasonably entitled to know what they contain from the opening of the inquiry or any pre-inquiry meeting, to the end of the period during which the decision is open to challenge in the courts. Other advice available to inspectors in the "Inspector's Handbook" is of a general procedural and organisational nature unrelated to specific cases and would be unsuitable for general dissemination. A copy is on deposit in the Library.

Council House Sales

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what studies of the effect of council house sales in London have been made by his Department; and if he is aware of any such studies undertaken by other bodies.

Sir George Young: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 30 October, at column *943*.

Housing (London)

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what assessments of London's housing requirements have been made by his Department since 1979 or are currently in preparation;

(2) what will be the short-term net additional cost to the taxpayer of transferring responsibility for the Greater London council's statutory housing improvement areas to the London boroughs if the Greater London council is abolished;

(3) which body will be responsible for funding repair work on housing association schemes originally funded by the Greater London council in the event of the Greater London council being abolished;

(4) if he will ensure that the distribution to the London boroughs of capital receipts from the Greater London council mortgage account will reflect the location of housing association schemes originally funded by the Greater London council and needing additional funding for repair works in the event of the Greater London council being abolished.

Sir George Young: I refer the hon. Member to my answers of 25 October, to his identical priority written questions at columns *694, 696 and 711*, respectively.

Structure Plans

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the structure plans submitted for approval to his Department over the last five years, indicating whether they were new plans, replacement plans or alternatives to existing plans, replacement plans or alterations to existing plans; and what is the length of time each has taken between submission and final approval.

Mr. Macfarlane: The list is as follows:

Alteration to approved plans	*Submitted*	*Approved*
Norfolk No. 1	19 September 1980	*23 October 1981
Hertfordshire	5 November 1980	12 October 1984
Norfolk No. 2	12 November 1980	*16 December 1982
Warwickshire No. 3	28 November 1980	22 June 1982
East Sussex No. 2	22 May 1981	*30 September 1982
Kent	27 May 1981	21 December 1983
Norfolk No. 3	8 July 1981	*16 December 1982
Derbyshire No. 1	8 September 1981	*18 December 1981

Alteration to approved plans	*Submitted*	*Approved*
Norfolk No. 4	27 November 1981	*16 December 1982
Buckinghamshire No. 1	21 December 1981	—
Buckinghamshire No. 2	12 March 1982	—
Northamptonshire	23 July 1982	*24 March 1983
East Sussex No. 3	22 October 1982	—
Teesside No. 2	25 October 1982	*26 April 1983
South Wiltshire	6 April 1983	—
Central Berkshire	25 May 1983	Rejected
		*17 November 1983
West Midlands	15 June 1983	—
Cheshire	1 August 1983	—
Oxfordshire No. 2	30 December 1983	—
North East Hampshire	20 January 1984	—
South Hampshire	17 February 1984	—
Greater Manchester	2 March 1984	—
Derbyshire No. 2	9 March 1984	Rejected
		*15 May 1984
Bedfordshire No. 1	24 July 1984	—
Bedfordshire No. 2	28 September 1984	—
Greater London	15 October 1984	—
West Yorkshire	2 November 1984	—

* No examination in public held.

Replacement plans	*Submitted*	*Approved*
West Midlands	21 November 1980	25 March 1982
Staffordshire	3 March 1982	13 April 1984
Hereford and Worcester	1 February 1983	—
Warwickshire	8 October 1984	—

Initial structure plans	*Submitted*	*Approved*
Lincolnshire	22 January 1980	26 November 1981
Merseyside	28 January 1980	27 November 1980
Cumbria and Lake District	22 February 1980	13 December 1983
Gloucestershire	17 March 1980	30 September 1981
North East Wiltshire	9 April 1980	19 November 1981
Cornwall	17 April 1980	24 July 1981
Somerset	12 August 1980	1 February 1982
South West Hampshire	23 October 1980	14 September 1982
Central and North Lancashire	26 March 1981	9 February 1983
Isles of Scilly	3 September 1981	26 April 1984
Dorset (excluding South East)	2 October 1981	7 July 1983
Avon	29 October 1982	—

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Nuclear War (Effects)

Mr. Deakins asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information is available to him about the consequences for United Kingdom agriculture of a nuclear war.

Mrs. Fenner: Information on various aspects of this matter has been published by a number of sources, but, as any conclusions must necessarily depend upon the assumptions made about a wide variety of factors, no definitive assessment is possible.

Mr. Deakins asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food why his Department is not taking part in the study of the scientific committee on problems of the environment following a nuclear war.

Mrs. Fenner: The organisation conducting this study is an independent international non-governmental body and the committee concerned is comprised of academics representative of the various relevant scientific fields. The outcome of the study is expected in 1985 and the Government await this with interest.

Milk

Mr. Hargreaves asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many dairy farmers who have had their claim for special case treatment accepted by his Department are those who have increased their production in the current year.

Mr. MacGregor: Under the Dairy Produce Quotas Regulations my Department is responsible for verifying that special case claims are in the form and contain such information as is required and that the applicant may be entitled to secondary quota under the regulations. Thereafter it is for the tribunal and its local panels to determine the extent to which each claimant is entitled to secondary quota.

More than 23,000 special case claims have been received, and of those analysed so far over 80 per cent. included a claim on grounds of investment in increased production.

Intervention Stocks

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list for each London

parliamentary constituency and borough the amount of intervention stock stored in that area, broken down according to quantity of each type of produce stored.

Mr. Jopling: Intervention stocks at 31 October were as follows:

London Parliamentary Constituency	*London Borough*	*Tonnes*	
		Butter	*Beef*
Ealing—Southall	Ealing	1,122	—
Ealing—Acton	Ealing	696	—
Tottenham	Haringey	4,202	—
Hackney South and Shoreditch	Hackney	1,712	1,170
Hornsey and Wood Green	Hornsey	—	6

SOCIAL SERVICES

Severe Disablement Allowance

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the estimated saving to the new severe disablement allowance scheme of excluding until November 1985 people aged 35 to 49 years who are not already receiving non-contributory invalidity pension and housewives' non-contributory invalidity pension; and what is the estimate of the number of people likely to be affected.

Mr. Newton: As with the phasing-in of mobility allowance over about three years from 1976, severe disablement allowance is being introduced in two stages in order to minimise administrative problems and in particular because of the constraints inevitably imposed by the need for medical examinations. Those in the 35 to 49 age group who are in receipt of existing non-contributory invalidity benefits on 28 November 1984 will of course be automatically transferred to immediate receipt of severe disablement allowance, but we estimate that about 12,000 new claimants who would otherwise have qualified then or during the following 12 months will have to wait for the relevant period, and that expenditure would have been about £10 million higher in the first full year had we been able to introduce the new benefit without phasing.

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many additional staff are being employed by his Department to deal with the extra work involved in introducing the severe disablement allowance; what the full cost of this staffing is likely to be; how many officers have been transferred from other sections; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 20 November 1984, c. *125-26*]: The work of introducing severe disablement allowance is estimated to be 146 man years at a cost of £1·024 million.

The gross additional continuing cost is 114 staff, but this is offset by a saving of 71 staff at North Fylde central office. None of this work will involve a transfer of staff between sections.

Health Statistics

Mr. Colvin asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if he will publish in the *Official Report* the annual figures since 1970 showing the number of cases in the following categories *(a)* leukaemias, *(b)* myeloid leukaemia, *(c)* Hodgkin's disease, *(d)* lymphosarcoma, *(e)* all diagnoses of cancer and *(f)* abnormalities at birth for the areas covered by (i) the Wessex regional health authority and (ii) the Southampton and South-West Hampshire health authority;

(2) if he will publish in the *Official Report* the annual figures since 1970 showing the number of cases in the following categories *(a)* leukaemias, *(b)* myloid leukaemia, *(c)* Hodgkin's disease, *(d)* lymphosarcoma, *(e)* all diagnoses of cancer and *(f)* abnormalities at birth, for England;

(3) if he will publish in the *Official Report* the annual figures since 1970 collected by the Southampton and South-West Hampshire health authority showing the number of cases in the following categories *(a)* leukaemias, *(b)* myeloid leukaemia, *(c)* Hodgkin's disease, *(d)* lymphosarcoma, *(e)* all diagnoses of cancer and *(f)* abnormalities at birth (i) for the area around the Re-Chem plant at Hythe, Hampshire and (ii) for the area on the east side of the Solent opposite the Re-Chem plant.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The available information is shown in the tables. Numbers of newly diagnosed cases of cancer are not routinely available for areas below regional health authority level. Such figures are not considered reliable without detailed scrutiny and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. For the requested causes, mortality data are more reliable than the notified numbers of new cases and these are given in the tables for each area.

Figures are given for county districts as these are the smallest areas for which figures are available for the entire period.

Number of deaths from cancer for England, Wessex Regional Health Authority, Southampton and South West Hampshire Health District and county districts in the vicinity of the Hythe Re-Chem plant, 1970 to 1983

Area			*Year*													
			1970	*1971*	*1972*	*1973*	*1974*	*1975*	*1976*	*1977*	*1978*	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*
England	*ICD*															
All cancers	140-208/9	M	50,548	50,479	50,613	51,000	51,901	51,806	53,367	53,254	53,958	54,349	54,754	55,049	54,950	56,606
		F	50,488	50,820	51,402	52,007	52,801	53,358	54,792	54,531	55,190	56,112	56,812	57,271	57,742	58,253
All leukaemia	204-207/8	M	1,347	1,352	1,335	1,402	1,366	1,442	1,590	1,605	1,688	1,654	1,713	1,691	1,746	1,729
		F	1,294	1,295	1,410	1,286	1,356	1,352	1,395	1,377	1,438	1,432	1,487	1,456	1,512	1,490
Myeloid leukaemia	205	M	669	715	724	801	801	853	917	885	856	876	876	886	876	909
		F	644	683	784	708	762	760	844	783	849	886	821	801	833	875
Hodgkin's disease	201	M	483	485	456	406	415	420	377	378	376	323	317	297	290	273
		F	327	282	276	307	269	267	226	235	249	223	218	215	183	179
Lymphosarcoma	200-1	M	429	406	421	419	450	412	387	359	383	296	267	196	161	140
		F	340	337	362	371	341	352	335	332	291	264	195	167	144	122
Wessex RHA																
All cancers	140-208/9	M	—	2,731	2,779	2,859	3,430	3,550	3,645	3,566	3,583	3,716	3,727	3,707	3,813	4,045
		F	—	2,391	2,396	2,475	2,909	2,974	3,095	3,102	3,202	3,217	3,313	3,408	3,407	3,589
All leukaemia	204-207/8	M	—	67	66	81	97	99	102	94	106	98	106	97	95	112

Area			Year 1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983
		F	—	58	67	47	67	67	68	72	96	85	105	86	79	95
Myeloid leukaemia	205	M	—	37	35	36	51	56	60	57	68	58	54	48	46	59
		F	—	27	42	25	41	36	40	40	47	35	69	47	44	58
Hodgkin's disease	201	M	—	27	16	23	20	22	23	16	19	7	14	20	17	16
		F	—	16	7	9	16	16	9	18	9	15	12	8	6	12
Lymphosarcoma and reticulosarcoma	200	M	—	36	28	32	46	35	35	23	29	30	26	11	9	12
		F	—	21	26	37	54	42	36	33	25	23	22	11	14	12
Southampton and S. W. Hants. HD																
All cancers	140-208/9	M	—	—	—	—	398	383	613	576	550	593	638	587	609	627
		F	—	—	—	—	330	453	463	445	480	458	519	533	491	542
All leukaemia	204-207/8	M	—	—	—	—	11	22	14	12	16	16	13	20	15	16
		F	—	—	—	—	7	9	10	13	16	14	12	8	8	13
Myeloid leukaemia	205	M	—	—	—	—	6	11	11	7	10	10	8	7	12	7
		F	—	—	—	—	6	5	5	7	4	10	10	3	4	9
Hodgkin's disease	201	M	—	—	—	—	5	3	8	3	4	—	1	3	—	3
		F	—	—	—	—	1	1	2	—	—	2	2	1	—	2
Lymphosarcoma	200-1	M	—	—	—	—	8	7	4	—	3	2	2	3	—	2
		F	—	—	—	—	3	4	5	2	—	1	2	1	—	—
Southampton CD	*ICD*															
All cancers	140-208/9	M	302	289	310	318	299	342	319	328	294	343	353	308	299	332
		F	231	220	221	228	216	257	242	242	256	230	270	259	261	289
All leukaemia	204-207/8	M	13	4	2	5	7	15	5	6	8	10	9	11	10	6
		F	5	—	5	7	4	4	4	7	10	6	6	3	3	9
Myeloid leukaemia	205	M	4	1	2	3	2	6	5	3	4	7	6	5	7	1
		F	—	—	2	4	3	2	1	4	3	4	4	1	1	6
Hodgkin's disease	201	M	—	3	2	3	3	3	5	2	4	—	1	3	—	1
		F	1	1	—	2	—	—	—	—	—	1	1	1	—	1
Lymphosarcoma	200-1	M	3	4	4	3	4	3	3	—	1	—	2	2	—	2
		F	3	2	2	—	2	3	2	2	—	1	1	—	—	—
Eastleigh CD																
All cancers	140-208/9	M	123	127	119	133	95	121	110	108	110	91	105	108	129	102
		F	115	109	100	110	77	88	75	61	85	89	78	97	82	96
All leukaemia	204-207/8	M	5	7	6	4	3	3	3	—	3	4	6	8	3	4
		F	2	—	1	—	1	—	4	1	5	1	3	1	2	2
Myeloid leukaemia	205	M	3	3	2	1	—	2	2	—	2	1	3	5	2	2
		F	2	—	1	—	1	—	3	—	3	1	1	—	1	2
Hodgkin's disease	201	M	1	1	—	2	1	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—
		F	—	1	—	—	1	1	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—
Lymphosarcoma	200-1	M	2	—	—	2	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
		F	—	—	—	2	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	1	—
Fareham CD																
All cancers	140-208/9	M	84	91	84	91	81	103	90	110	88	97	86	111	98	105
		F	50	72	89	79	80	86	95	92	84	91	68	86	88	93
All leukaemia	204-207/8	M	3	4	2	3	2	2	6	3	4	2	—	6	1	3
		F	2	3	1	—	1	3	—	3	2	7	3	7	2	5
Myeloid leukaemia	205	M	1	2	2	1	—	1	2	2	2	2	—	3	1	2
		F	—	—	1	—	1	2	—	1	2	6	1	4	2	3
Hodgkin's disease	201	M	—	4	1	1	—	1	2	1	—	—	1	1	—	1
		F	1	2	1	2	—	—	2	—	—	1	—	—	1	—
Lymphosarcoma	200-1	M	1	3	1	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—
		F	1	1	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—
Gosport	*ICD*															
All cancers	140-208/9	M	82	102	75	75	90	82	81	93	93	94	90	97	94	102
		F	68	74	58	75	68	75	80	73	82	72	80	83	81	81
All leukaemia	204-207/8	M	2	2	2	2	2	3	2	—	2	4	2	1	3	2
		F	2	2	1	—	4	—	1	2	6	3	—	1	3	4
Myeloid leukaemia	205	M	—	1	1	—	—	2	1	—	1	3	—	1	2	1
		F	1	—	1	—	2	—	1	—	2	2	—	1	3	3
Hodgkin's disease	201	M	—	—	—	—	—	1	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
		F	—	1	—	1	—	1	1	3	—	—	—	—	—	—
Lymphosarcoma	200-1	M	2	—	1	—	1	2	1	—	—	1	—	—	—	—
		F	—	2	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	1	—
New Forest CD																
All cancers	140-208/9	M	180	210	209	201	194	205	238	201	216	207	245	243	243	248
		F	150	164	149	201	174	171	191	199	205	183	211	239	201	215
All leukaemia	204-207/8	M	5	7	4	10	4	5	11	6	6	4	4	4	5	7
		F	3	3	7	6	5	6	4	8	6	6	5	3	4	3
Myeloid leukaemia	205	M	4	2	3	5	3	4	7	4	4	3	1	1	4	4
		F	2	1	3	3	3	4	2	3	1	3	3	2	3	2
Hodgkin's disease	201	M	1	1	—	1	2	—	3	1	—	—	—	—	—	2
		F	—	2	—	—	1	—	2	1	—	1	1	—	—	1
Lymphosarcoma	200-1	M	3	2	1	1	4	3	1	—	1	1	—	1	—	—
		F	4	1	1	2	—	2	4	—	—	—	1	1	—	—

Note: Information for Wessex Regional Health Authority is supplied for ICD 200, lymphosarcoma and reticulosarcoma. Figures for ICD 200-1, lymphosarcoma are not readily available. Data for 1970-73 are for Wessex Hospital Region which differs from the Regional Health Authority for 1970 to 1973 figures the Eastleigh County District include the whole of the former Winchester Rural District and figures for New Forest County District include the whole of Ringwood and Fordingbridge Rural District.

Numbers of registrations of cancer for England, Wessex Regional Health Authority, Southampton and South West Hampshire Health District and county districts in the vicinity of the Hythe Ex-Cham plant, 1970 to 1983.

Area			Year 1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983
England	*ICD*															
All cancers	140-208/9	M	75,564	77,281	77,711	80,950	85,881	85,625	87,806	89,841	89,403	91,095	91,163	92,833	—	—
		F	71,973	72,364	74,258	76,874	83,405	82,669	84,281	85,570	86,531	86,736	87,259	89,791	—	—
All leukaemia	204-207/8	M	1,550	1,753	1,817	1,877	2,032	1,962	1,958	1,945	1,981	2,032	1,917	1,984	—	—
		F	1,342	1,348	1,481	1,525	1,577	1,628	1,663	1,670	1,605	1,590	1,537	1,634	—	—
Myeloid leukaemia	205	M	597	694	787	795	858	894	795	864	948	901	791	867	—	—
		F	526	636	727	744	750	794	824	812	752	801	699	779	—	—
Hodgkin's disease	201	M	741	737	855	832	832	777	782	786	780	682	688	712	—	—

Area			Year 1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983
		F	481	495	513	510	552	483	514	495	471	480	516	458	—	—
Lymphosarcoma and reticulosarcoma	200·1	M	968	836	912	959	931	986	870	811	731	610	571	541	—	—
		F	808	709	780	809	817	889	770	723	644	532	495	483	—	—
Wessex RHA																
All cancers	140-208·9	M	3,210	2,795	2,207	3,861	4,992	4,860	5,067	5,039	5,091	5,059	5,239	5,746	—	—
		F	2,950	2,458	2,158	3,853	5,084	4,718	4,854	4,940	5,232	4,899	5,247	5,699	—	—
All leukaemia	204-207·9	M	74	63	57	109	123	130	129	125	138	140	149	137	—	—
		F	44	39	41	77	94	106	95	101	119	100	128	112	—	—
Myeloid leukaemia	205	M	30	32	27	41	38	93	59	50	58	50	60	58	—	—
		F	15	23	12	29	44	42	39	47	49	51	56	49	—	—
Hodgkin's disease	201	M	23	30	33	61	51	60	64	33	37	34	35	38	—	—
		F	24	9	16	37	50	23	34	37	41	26	42	20	—	—
Lymphosarcoma and reticulosarcoma	200	M	55	25	29	42	53	63	52	41	47	38	28	26	—	—
		F	39	18	26	40	56	65	50	54	42	27	26	17	—	—

Note: information is supplied for ICD 200; lymphosarcoma and reticulosarcoma. Figures for ICD 200·1, lymphosarcoma are not readily available.

Numbers of babies born with congenital malformations in England, Wessex Regional Health Authority, Southampton and South West Hampshire Health District and County Districts in the vicinity of the Hythe Re-chem plant, 1970 to 1983

Area	Year 1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983
England	13,339	13,711	13,680	12,720	12,144	11,740	11,803	11,853	12,197	12,858	13,457	12,834	12,560	13,255
Wessex RHA	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	614	609	569	621	628	790	686	568	672	569
Southampton and South West Hampshire Health District	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	71
Southampton County District	78	97	94	105	115	96	82	85	100	83	78	59	40	51
Eastleigh County District	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	27	26	22	31	29	43	40	31	36	20
Fareham County District	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	17	10	12	21	20	23	23	10	22	5
Gosport County District	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	13	13	16	9	16	25	17	10	28	27
New Forest County District	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	33	20	23	36	19	25	34	23	24	12

n/a Not available.

Figures are derived from a voluntary system of notifying congenital malformations observed at birth or up to seven days after birth; they are therefore an incomplete measure of the total number of affected infants since many are not diagnosed until after the first week of life.

Supplementary Benefit (Appeals)

Mr. Colin Shepherd asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many appeal tribunal hearings relating to decisions made by the supplementary benefit office have been convened during the last 12 months for which information is available; and what is the total estimated cost of these.

Mr. Whitney: As a result of industrial action within the Department, the most recent information available is for the 12-month period ended 31 December 1983 when 60,567 supplementary benefit appeals were heard.

It is estimated that £10·855 million was spent on supplementary benefit appeals work in 1983, but this sum includes the cost of work on the 82,212 appeals which were lodged but were resolved without a tribunal hearing.

Children (Poverty)

Mr. Skinner asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many children are classified as living in poverty at the latest available date.

Mr. Whitney: There is no generally accepted definition of poverty on which to base such a calculation.

Hospital Kitchens

Mr. Gregory asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how much expenditure took place on modernising hospital kitchens in England in each year since 1978; and what is the planned expenditure for 1984 and 1985.

Mr. John Patten: This information is not available centrally.

Raw Blood Plasma

Mr. Kennedy asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will make available the extra £1 million needed to produce raw blood plasma if the United Kingdom is to become self-sufficient in blood products by 1986.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: There are a number of methods by which plasma can be collected to achieve the targets set for self-sufficiency. Each regional health authority must decide which methods to adopt and provide the necessary funding.

Regional health authorities are being asked to apply to plasma collection all income derived from the handling charges that we introduced recently for blood and blood products supplies to non-NHS hospitals.

AIDS

Mr. Kennedy asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will make the necessary money available to enable all blood donors to be screened for the acquired immune deficiency syndrome virus.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The possible test is still in the development stage so that the cost of introducing routine screening for HTLV III virus cannot yet be predicted.

Doctors and Nurses

Mr. Michael McNair-Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what was the ratio of nurses to patients in National Health Service hospitals in 1970, 1975 and 1980; and at the latest available date;

(2) what was the ratio of doctors to patients in National Health Service hospitals in the years 1970, 1975, and 1980; and at the latest available date.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

Prescription Charges

Mr. Canavan asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what has been the percentage increase in prescription charges since May 1979.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: 700 per cent., although this is measured from what I believe to be an artificially low base as previous Governments had, for reasons not known to me, decided to freeze the charge.

Salmonella Poisoning

Mr. Eastham asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what guidance he issues to local authorities about measures taken to inspect premises in the prevention of salmonella poisoning.

Mr. John Patten [*pursuant to his reply*, 22 November 1984, c. *239*]: The most frequent cause of salmonella food poisoning is poor standards in the handling of food. This is something to which careful attention is paid by environmental health officers when inspecting food and catering premises in the course of enforcing food hygiene regulations. The Department has not issued particular guidance on the subject.

Specialist Claims Control

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish the results of his investigation into the methods for calculating savings from the work of specialist claims control.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 12 November 1984, c. *149*]: The study into specialist claims control (SCC) was extended to incorporate an exercise to provide comparative figures for the cost-effectiveness of other departmental measures directed at the prevention of fraud, in order to help us achieve the most appropriate balance between SCC and other measures. We will announce our conclusions in the light of the results when these have been considered.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Germany (Reunification)

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if Her Majesty's Government will seek to make the reunification of Germany an objective of the Western European Union.

Mr. Renton: Successive British Governments have taken it as axiomatic that real and permanent stability in Europe will be difficult to achieve so long as the German nation is divided against its will. Heads of Government of the Western European Union—as members of NATO—joined in making the following declaration by NATO Heads of Government in Bonn on 8 June 1982:

"We recall that the rights and responsibilities of the Four Powers relating to Berlin and Germany as a whole remain unaffected and confirm our support for the political objective of the Federal Republic of Germany to work towards a state of peace in Europe in which the German people regains its unity through free self determination."

Western European Union

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will report to Parliament on matters discussed in the Western European Union.

Mr. Renton: Yes. We shall keep the House informed from time to time of important issues which arise. As I said to the hon. Member on 31 October, we have been working actively with our partners in the Western European Union to find ways of making better use of the organisation. We fully support the declaration and the document outlining institutional improvements which were agreed by Foreign and Defence Ministers at their meeting in Rome on 27 October and welcome their decision to meet regularly together within the WEU framework. Copies of the documents approved on 27 October have been placed in the Library of the House.

None of the measures which are to be taken to revitalise the WEU is intended to duplicate or undermine the Atlantic Alliance, which remains the foundation of our security. The activities of WEU can, however, help to bring about a stronger and more cohesive contribution to NATO from its members and increase public understanding of the European defence role within the Alliance.

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are the foreign policy implications for the United Kingdom of the new emphasis on Western European Union.

Mr. Renton: Our support for a reactivated Western European Union is designed to reinforce our existing foreign policy objectives of maintaining peace and securing the defence of Europe through our commitment to NATO. A revitalised WEU will help us to strengthen the European pillar of the Alliance, and to give political impetus to a more cohesive European defence contribution within it.

Mauritius

Mr. Greenway asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many higher education scholarships have been gained in the United Kingdom by students from Mauritius in each of the past three years; what number is expected to be gained in the next two years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: Our supported award schemes provided scholarships for higher education studies in the United Kingdom to 44 Mauritian students in 1982-83, 56 in 1983-84 and 80 in 1984-85. It is not possible to state the number expected in the next two years, but the special circumstances of Mauritius are well recognised and every effort is being made to provide assistance to enable Mauritian students to come to the United Kingdom for higher education studies.

Mr. Greenway asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has any proposal to visit Mauritius; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Rifkind: I have at present no plans to do so.

Tristan Investments Ltd.

Dr. Marek asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs where is the registered office of Tristan Investments Ltd.

Mr. Renton: Cape Town, Republic of South Africa.

Libya

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are the numbers

of British nationals currently working in Libya; and what are the arrangements for giving them diplomatic or consular protection as appropriate.

Mr. Renton: There are approximately 5,000 British citizens currently working in Libya.

Protection is afforded to them by the Italian embassy which represents British interests in Libya. There are two British diplomatic service officials on the staff of the Italian embassy in the British interests section.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if, in view of the prolonged disruption in relations with Libya and the absence of dialogue between the two countries, he will advise British citizens and businesses to leave Libya.

Mr. Renton: No. British residents who choose to remain in Libya, and British citizens who visit Libya, do so on their own responsibility and that of the Libyan authorities.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Rape Seed

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will publish in the *Official Report* details of the tariff and levies payable on rape seed and rape seed oil together with the imports and exports of these products in the current year to date compared with 1983 and 1970, distinguishing EEC trade from that with the rest of the world.

Mr. Channon: The rates of customs duty chargeable in 1984 on imports of rape seed and rape seed oil are:

Tariff heading	*Tariff/Trade Code Number*	*Rate of duty*
		Per cent.
ex 12.01A	1201-1400	Free
ex 12.01B	1201-5400	Free
ex 15.07DIa)3	1507-2710	5
ex 15.07DIb)2	1507-5830	8
ex 15.07DIb)2aa)	1507-7610	10
ex 15.07DIb)2bb)	1507-8910	15

Source: HM Customs and Excise Tariffs 1984.

Details of United Kingdom trade in rape seed and rape seed oil in 1970, 1983 and the first nine months of 1984 are:

Value £000's

	1970		*1983*		*January-September 1984*	
	EC	*Rest of world*	*EC*	*Rest of world*	*EC*	*Rest of world*
Imports (cif):						
Rape and colza seeds:						
(1201-1400/1201-5400)	1,298	1,698	37,997	409	9,443	1,789
Rape oil (including colza oil):	302	1,465	—	—	—	—
non-edible: crude						
(1507-2710)	—	—	391	281	1,272	—
other (1507-5830)	—	—	23	—	73	—
other (edible)						
crude (1507-7610)	—	—	3,318	—	3,020	—
other (1507-8910)	—	—	21,153	214	24,214	—
Exports (fob):						
Rape and colza seeds:	60	38	33,684	296	30,261	237
Rape oil (including colza oil):	3	23	—	—	—	—
non-edible: crude						
(1507-2710)	—	—	138	6,418	120	1,333
other (1507-5830)	—	—	72	40	40	52
other (edible):						
crude (1507-7610)	—	—	799	262	5,036	1,026
other (1507-8910)	—	—	337	20	673	23

Source: Data corresponding to SITC/R2 Sub-groups 222.6, 424.9 (part) and Item 423.91 (part) in the UK Overseas Trade Statistics, and equivalent headings under SITC/R1.

Notes:

(i) the European Community is defined throughout in terms of current membership.

(ii) — signifies nil trade.

(iii) rape seed and rape oil are not separately identifiable from colza seed and colza oil.

COCOM Agreement

Mr. Batiste asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the title of the specialist group responsible for the detection of breaches of the COCOM agreement within Britain; how it is constituted; and what are its powers.

Mr. Channon: Her Majesty's Customs and Excise is responsible for the detection and prosecution of breaches of export controls operated in pursuance of the United Kingdom's COCOM undertakings. Officials from Customs and other Departments with an interest meet as necessary to discuss enforcement matters under the chairmanship of my Department.

Newsprint Quota

Mr. Grylls asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will ask the European Economic Community Commission to set the newsprint quota for the future at a level of 750,000 tonnes or above.

Mr. Channon: It will be for the EC Council of Ministers to agree to the future level of the annual duty-free quota for imports of newsprint. The quota level will depend on the outcome of negotiations with Canada following the adoption by the GATT council of the report of a disputes settlement panel. Within the Community, the United Kingdom will continue to press for a future quota which adequately reflects the import needs of United Kingdom newsprint users.

Food Mixers, Domestic Irons and Typewriters

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information is available to him about the cessation of United Kingdom production of food mixers, domestic irons and typewriters and the consequent increase in the number of such products imported.

Mr. Butcher: Electric food mixers have ceased to be made in the United Kingdom by one firm and domestic electric irons by two firms in the last five years. These products are currently being made by other United Kingdom companies, but information about their production is not disclosed for commercial reasons. Typewriter production in the United Kingdom ceased several years ago. Import figures for irons and for food mixers and other food grinders and juice extractors are published in the "Business Monitor PQ3460 Domestic Electrical Appliances" and those for typewriters are available in "Business Monitor PQ 3301."

Coal Imports

Mr. Gould asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether the import price of coal given in the "Overseas Trade Statistics" includes the cost of unloading the coal.

Mr. Channon: The values of imported goods given in the statistics are cif, including freight, insurance, commission and all other costs, charges and expenses incidental to the sale and delivery of the goods to the port or place of importation into the United Kingdom—with the exception of any duty or tax chargeable in this country. They do not include subsequent internal charges incurred after importation, such as unloading or inland transportation.

Disabled Workers (Post Office)

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, as a percentage of the total work force, how many registered disabled workers are employed by the Post Office.

Mr. Pattie: I understand that about 1 per cent. of Post Office staff are registered dissbled people. In addition, there are a number of disabled people who for one reason or another have not registered. The Post Office is currently exploring methods of engaging a higher percentage of registered disabled people as part of the work force.

Patent Office

Mr. Gould asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received concerning the future of the Patent Office; and when he expects to announce a decision.

Mr. Trippier: Among the numerous responses we have received to the Green Paper, "Intellectual Property Rights and Innovation" (Cmnd. 9117), which recommended that the Patent Office should become a separate statutory body, are some 50 which have expressed a view on this recommendation. This matter is still under consideration and Ministers will make a statement as soon as possible.

United States (Export Controls)

Mr. Ward asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions have taken place with the United States Government about the application of United States export controls to persons in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Channon: The United Kingdom and United States Governments have discussed over recent months a number of issues relating to the application of United States export controls to United Kingdom persons. The purpose of the discussion has been to find ways of minimising problems which arise in this area.

Arrangements have now been made for the two Governments to consult if it appears that problems may arise in relation to the application of export controls administered by the United States Department of Commerce to companies or individuals in the United Kingdom, or if the United Kingdom Government envisage using the Protection of Trading interests Act in relation to the application of these controls.

British Telecom

Mr. Nicholas Baker asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry why shares in British Telecom are not to be issued on the Paris and Frankfurt stock exchange.

Mr. Butcher [*pursuant to the reply*, 22 November 1984, c. *223*]: The offer for sale of shares in British Telecom is principally a United Kingdom offering. It was not considered necessary for the success of the offering for shares to be offered for sale in Paris or Frankfurt.

Privatisation

Mr. Gould asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list those enterprises for whose privatisation his Department has been responsible since 1979; and if he will specify in each case the form which privatisation took.

Mr. Butcher [*pursuant to the reply*, 22 November 1984, c. *223*]: Since 1979 the Department has been responsible for the privatisation of British Aerospace, Cable and Wireless and now British Telecom. In addition, other sales have been made by the nationalised industries, publicly-owned companies and the British Technology Group (BTG) for which the Department is responsible. These include the privatisation of Jaguar—owned by BL — the disposal of holdings by BTG, joint ventures between the British Steel Corporation and the private sector and the disposal of certain subsidiaries by British Shipbuilders.

The form taken by each of these sales is as follows:

British Aerospace—Fixed price offer of 51·6 per cent. of the company's shares.

Cable and Wireless—1st sale (October 1981) fixed price offer of 49·4 per cent. of the company's shares.

British Telecom—Fixed price offer of 50·2 per cent. of the company's shares.

Jaguar—Fixed price offer of 100 per cent. of the company's shares.

British Technology Group—A variety of methods has been used including sales to management, sales to industrial companies and placements with institutional investors.

British Steel and private sector joint ventures—Six joint venture companies established

British Shipbuilders—Sales of Scott Lithgow to Trafalgar House and certain shiprepair and engineering subsidiaries to industrial purchasers or to management.

The second sale of shares in Cable and Wireless in December 1983 was the responsibility of HM Treasury.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Bulmer asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many members of his Department of the rank of assistant secretary or above have held a job in industry or commerce for at least a year; of these, how many have held a profit-accountable job in industry; and what proportions these represent in each case.

Mr. Butcher [*pursuant to the reply*, 22 November 1984, c. *222-23*]: Forty-six, or about one in four, of the officers of assistant secretary rank or above have held a job in industry or commerce for at least a year.

My Department has no means of identifying "profit-accountable" jobs.

DEFENCE

Greenham Common

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson asked the Secretary of State for Defence if discussions took place between his Department and the Thames water authority concerning the replacement of the standpipe on Greenham common used by the Greenham peace women.

Mr. Stanley: I am not aware of any such discussions.

Alconbury and Molesworth Air Bases

Mr. Caborn asked the Secretary of State for Defence how much the United States Government will contribute in 1985 for the construction of *(a)* Alconbury air base and *(b)* Molesworth air base.

Mr. Stanley: This is a matter for the United States Government, but I understand that the information requested is not yet publicly available.

British Military Attaché, Mexico

Mr. Dubs asked the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions during the last 12 months the British military attaché in Mexico has visited Nicaragua; for what purposes; and whom he met there.

Mr. Stanley: The military attaché Mexico City has visited Nicaragua five times in the last 12 months. The visits were made as part of his military attaché liaison duties and included meetings with members of the Nicaraguan Government and officials, foreign attachés and diplomats, and various other visitors, including business men.

Mr. Dubs asked the Secretary of State for Defence what are the responsibilities of the British military attaché in Mexico; and which countries he covers.

Mr. Stanley: The British military attaché Mexico City undertakes representational duties, promotes the sale of British defence equipment and advises the ambassador in each country to which he is accredited on military matters. He is resident in Mexico, but is accredited also to El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua.

36 (Eastern) Signals Regiment (Volunteers)

Mr. Neil Thorne asked the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects the new headquarters building for 36 (Eastern) Signals Regiment (Volunteers) to be ready for occupation.

Mr. Stanley: No decision has yet been made on the rebuild of this headquarters building. My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces will be writing to my hon. Friend to set out the present position.

NATO (Defence Expenditure)

Mr. Terlezki asked the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the implications for collective North Atlantic Treaty Organisation security policy of the average increase in defence spending of 3 per cent. annually by the European members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation.

Mr. Stanley: The additional resources which have been made available by the European members of NATO since the aim of 3 per cent. annual real increases in defence expenditure was endorsed in 1977, have strengthened the deterrent and defensive capability of the Alliance.

Ballistic Missiles (Defence)

Mr. Terlezki asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether the technology required to detect the launch of a ballistic missile at the instant of ignition is already available.

Mr. Stanley: The use of infra-red sensors mounted on satellites for the detection of heat sources such as ballistic missile exhaust plumes is an established technology.

Mr. Terlezki asked the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the desirability of North Atlantic Treaty Organisation countries developing a ballistic missile defence system in view of the fact that the Soviet Union has expanded its ground-based ballistic missile defence system in contravention of the 1972 anti-ballistic missile treaty.

Mr. Stanley: We are discussing the implications of potential developments in ballistic missile defences with our allies, including the United States.

Territorial Army

Mr. Terlezki asked the Secretary of State for Defence what are the prospects for achieving the membership target of the Territorial Army of 86,000 men by 1990.

Mr. Stanley: We consider this target achievable, but a significant increase in recruitment will be required.

Middle East Sales

Mr. David Atkinson asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the sales of non-lethal software such as hospital services to middle eastern countries through International Military Services.

Mr. Butler: International Military Services Limited provides a wide range of defence-related services. These

include educational and training services as well as hospitals and medical equipment. A large proportion of this business is in the middle east. The company has an offer for the provision of hospitals under consideration by one country, and is considering inquiries from several others for the provision of both field hospitals and rehabilitation centres. For reasons of commercial confidentiality, I cannot name the countries concerned.

Naval Log Books

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if *(a)* the control room log for April-May 1982 and *(b)* the signals log for April-May 1982 of HMS Splendid are available to him;

(2) if *(a)* the control room log, *(b)* the signals log and *(c)* the captain's account of HMS Splendid have been seen by (i) Ministers and (ii) any officials of his Department since the end of the Falklands conflict;

(3) when the routine destruction of signal logs of nuclear submarines was introduced in the Royal Navy; and by whose authority;

(4) what is the normal interval between the removal of a signals log from a vessel returning from patrol and its destruction; and where that log is kept in that interval;

(5) what Royal Navy logs, other than signal logs, are routinely destroyed.

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) when the signals log of HMS Conqueror during the Falklands campaign was destroyed; on whose authority; and at what level the decision was taken;

(2) when the signals log book of HMS Splendid was destroyed; and on whose authority.

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) in what circumstances Royal Navy signal log books are destroyed;

(2) in what circumstances signals log books from Royal Navy vessels could not be destroyed;

(3) how many signals log books of Royal Navy vessels which served in the Falklands during the hostilities in 1982 have been destroyed.

Mr. Stanley: I shall answer shortly.

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Defence for each naval vessel which took part in the Falklands campaign *(a)* whether its captain's account is available, *(b)* whether its control room log is available and *(c)* whether its signals log is available.

Mr. Stanley: I will write to the hon. Member.

NATO Exercises

Dr. Marek asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list those NATO exercises that he is not prevented from publishing because of security considerations.

Mr. Stanley: I understand that NATO has issued press releases about the following exercises in 1984: Teamwork, Avalanche Express, Ardent Ground, Deterrent Force, Distant Hammer, Central Enterprise, Sea Supply, Cold Fire, Display Determination and Safe Pass.

Longmoor Camp

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many persons have been arrested by the military police at demonstrations outside and inside Longmoor camp and on which days; and how many have been charged;

(2) what has been the daily number of people held in a pit at Longmoor camp, Hampshire, whilst awaiting being charged for taking part in demonstrations outside or near the camp;

(3) what were the circumstances and reasons why persons arrested by troops at Longmoor camp, Hampshire, were herded into a pit 6 ft deep and guarded by armed soldiers whilst awaiting processing.

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Defence why soldiers detained Mrs. Tessa Babcock and her 13-year-old daughter Zoe in a muddy pit surrounded by barbed wire for almost two hours at Longmoor camp, Hampshire, on Friday 16 November.

Mr. Stanley: The numbers taken into custody for trespass in a military training area whilst an exercise was in progress were as follows:

15 November	4
16 November	24
17 November	28
18 November	25
19 November	2
20 November	4

They were detained at an inactive rifle range as this was one of the few places in the training area where cover was available until collected by the Hampshire police. Twelve have been reported for summons.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the average length of time, the shortest and longest time a person has spent in a pit at Longmoor camp.

Mr. Stanley: These details are not available.

Naval Rating (Arrest)

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Defence what action has been taken by his Department in respect of the naval rating arrested while off duty in connection with the mining dispute.

Mr. Stanley: No administrative action will be considered by the Ministry of Defence until such time as any criminal proceedings have been completed.

Asbestos (Faslane)

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he has taken to ensure compliance with the regulations which are required to be observed in dealing with the asbstos dump at the submarine base at Faslane, Dumbarton; and what are his plans in respect of this asbestos.

Mr. Stanley: A decision has yet to be taken on the most suitable way of dealing with the asbestos contamination in an area separate from the main operating part of the Faslane submarine base. When this has been decided, the work programme will be discussed with, and approved by, the Health and Safety Executive, and the working procedures will be in accordance with the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, the asbestos regulations 1969 and the Health and Safety Commission's approved code of practice on work with asbestos. The Department is also fully aware of its responsibilities under the Control of Pollution Act 1974, and has already taken precautions

to prevent access to the area both by the erection of security fences in 1981 and, recently, by the placing of warning notices.

Nuclear Weapons (Transportation)

Mr. Janner asked the Secretary of State for Defence what instructions are given to the regional emergency planning officer in a region through which a convoy of nuclear weapons-carrying vehicles is to pass.

Mr. Stanley: I cannot add to the letter sent to the hon. and learned Member on 20 September 1984 by my noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces and to the reply I gave to the hon. and learned Member on 22 October, at column *497*.

Exercise Broken Arrow

Mr. Janner asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether civilian police and fire authorities were invited to participate in the recent Broken Arrow exercise on Salisbury plain.

Mr. Stanley: I refer to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Thomas) on 20 November, at column *88*.

TRANSPORT

Buses (Deregulation)

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for Transport what comparative changes in bus usage in terms of passenger journeys and passenger miles have taken place between 1981 and 1984 within the deregulated trial areas and the areas covered by the metropolitan county councils.

Mr. David Mitchell: The figures are not available for the trial areas. Passenger journeys in the metropolitan counties — excluding Tyne and Wear because the introduction of the Metro alters the basis for assessing change in bus usage between 1981-82 and 1982-83— will have increased by 0·9 per cent. between 1981-82 and 1984-85 on current projections. This compares with an increase in subsidy on current projections of 9·2 per cent. over the same period.

Figures for passenger miles are available only from 1982-83, and in the six metropolitan counties are projected to have risen by 1·2 per cent. between 1982-83 and 1984-85.

Taxis

Mr. Skeet asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many local authorities in the United Kingdom refuse to increase the number of taxi plates.

Mr. David Mitchell: In the latest survey, carried out in 1980, it was established that in 249 of the 304 districts in England and Wales where taxi licensing was applied, the number of hackney carriage vehicle licences—taxi plates—on issue was limited. In 201 of these areas the total specified number had been taken up, and there were waiting lists for further licences. In some cases the number of applicants on the waiting list was more than twice the number of existing licences.

Cyclists

Mr. Cartwright asked the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has for ensuring the co-ordination and funding of provision for cyclists following the proposed abolition of the Greater London council.

Mrs. Chalker: I attach importance to safe provision for cyclists in London as elsewhere and arrangements in London will take account of this.

Mr. Cartwright asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether he plans to issue any further consultation documents on the reallocation of transport responsibilities in London that will include discussion of cycling.

Mrs. Chalker: I have no plans at present to do so. Our discussions with boroughs about practical details during the transition period are already in hand.

North Devon Link

Mr. Speller asked the Secretary of State for Transport what difference the receipt of the north Devon link stage 2A report will make on his decision to hold a public inquiry into the north Devon link 2B orders, as recently announced.

Mrs. Chalker: None. As I explained to my hon. Friend on Tuesday 20 November, at column *94*, the joint decision of the Secretaries of State will be announced as soon as possible. My decision to hold a public inquiry into the north Devon link stage 2B orders will not influence that decision. The 2B orders, besides fulfilling in part the Government's desire for a road to link north Devon with the M5, also fulfils the objective of providing a much needed bypass for South Molton, Swimbridge and Landkey.

Road Maintenance

Mr. Snape asked the Secretary of State for Transport what has been the level of expenditure on the maintenance of roads by both Government and local authorities in each of the years 1964 to 1983 expressed in constant prices.

Mrs. Chalker: The information requested is not available before the financial year 1973-74.

Maintenance expenditure on roads in England from 1973-74 to 1983-84 at 1982-83 prices was as follows:

	Motorways and Trunk Roads	*Local Authority Roads*	*Total £ million*
1973-74	202	923	1,125
1974-75	114	905	1,019
1975-76	132	931	1,063
1976-77	135	863	998
1977-78	126	821	947
1978-79	143	851	994
1979-80	148	828	976
1980-81	137	802	939
1981-82	196	855	1,051
1982-83	210	838	1,048
1983-84	184	*895	*1,079

* Provisional

London Boroughs (Development Plans)

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Transport if his proposed strategic guidance to the London boroughs in formulating their unitary development plans will include specific borough highway proposals.

Mrs. Chalker: Boroughs will be responsible for formulating highway proposals for their roads. If appropriate, these may be referred to in any strategic planning guidance given.

London Boroughs (Strategic Planning Guidance)

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Transport if the strategic transport issues which will be reflected in the strategic planning guidance he will issue to the London boroughs will include matters relating to public transport policies and provision.

Mrs. Chalker: Yes, if appropriate.

Aircraft Noise

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Transport what alternative arrangements for dealing with complaints about aircraft noise he intends to make in the event of the Greater London council's noiseline service being discontinued following abolition of the council.

Mr. Michael Spicer: None. My Department's current procedures for handling complaints will not be affected.

Barking Relief Road

Mr. Leighton asked the Secretary of State for Transport what plans there are to compensate householders and allotment holders in the vicinity of the south Woodford to Barking relief road.

Mrs. Chalker [*pursuant to the reply*, 22 November 1984, c. *233*]: The normal full range of statutory compensation and sound insulation measures is available. I am sending copies of the relevant leaflets to the hon. Member and shall be happy for them to be supplied direct to any of his constituents who would find this helpful.

Mr. Leighton asked the Secretary of State for Transport what levels of noise and air pollution are expected to be generated from traffic using the south Woodford to Barking relief road as it passes through Newham, both before and after the opening of the east London river crossing.

Mrs. Chalker [*pursuant to the reply*, 22 November 1984, c. *233*]: Noise effects will vary according to proximity of the relief road and to the noise-reducing measures such as grass mounds which will be provided. If the hon. Member has particular properties in Newham in mind, perhaps he will write to me. Lead emissions from vehicle exhausts are expected to be within the air quality standard.

Mr. Leighton asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether the decision to proceed with the overhead route for the south western to Barking relief road takes into account the effect of additonal traffic when the east London river crossing is opened.

Mrs. Chalker [*pursuant to the reply*, 22 November 1984, c. *233*]: The south Woodford to Barking relief road decision was taken on its own merits. The environmental impact evidence provided by the Department about its design included estimates of the possible effects in the event of construction of an east London river crossing.

Mr. Leighton asked the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received from residents of Newham about the proposal to build a viaduct over the Liverpool street to Southend railway line for the south Woodford to Barking relief road.

Mrs. Chalker [*pursuant to the reply*, 22 November 1984, c. *233*]: The objections and representations about this were reviewed in the inspector's report following the public inquiry, and were carefully considered before the Secretaries of State for the Environment and for Transport decided to accept the inspector's recommendation that the viaduct should form part of the scheme.

Mr. Leighton asked the Secretary of State for Transport what consideration he gave to the aesthetic effect, and effect on local amenities, of building a viaduct for the south Woodford to Barking relief road; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker [*pursuant to the reply*, 22 November 1984, c. *233*]: Detailed attention has been given over a long period to the appearance of the proposed five viaducts and their design was considered by the Royal Fine Arts Commission. Decisions were taken only after the most careful consideration of all the available evidence including points made at the public inquiry.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Schools (Shropshire)

Mr. Cockeram asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the schools in Shropshire that have been inspected by Her Majesty's Inspectorate, and the dates of such inspections, since 1 January 1982.

Sir Keith Joseph: The following schools and colleges in Shropshire have been the subject of formal inspections by Her Majesty's Inspectors since 1 January 1982:

Blessed Robert Johnson Catholic College, Telford — November 1982.

William Reynolds County Junior School, Telford — November 1982.

Madeley Court Comprehensive School, Telford — November 1982.

Oswestry College—January 1983.

Oxon Church of England Primary School, Shrewsbury—February 1983.

Acton Reynald School, Shrewsbury (Independent)—March 1983.

Corbet Comprehensive School, Baschurch—October 1983.

Additionally, since 1 January 1982 there have been more than 180 less formal visits by HMI to schools in the county.

Student Grants

Sir Brandon Rhys Williams asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is his estimate of the number of families likely to be affected by the proposed *(a)* 20 per cent. and *(b)* 25 per cent. tapers for student grants.

Mr. Brooke: For the academic year 1985-86 an estimated 160,000 families will be assessed at £1 in every

£5 on residual incomes of £10,300 and above, and of these an estimated 85,000 families will be assessed at £1 in every £4 on residual incomes of £15,000 and above.

Parental Contributions

Mr. Marlow asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science, on the basis of a £1,000 per annum net mortgage payment, £700 annual pre-1984 life insurance premiums, 5 per cent. pension contribution normal rates of national insurance, wives' income election where advantageous and no other allowances or unearned income, what is the parental contribution assessed for joint incomes set out at every £1,000 between £8,000 and £30,000 of joint income, setting out also the husbands' and wives' individual gross incomes, and how this compares with their joint net income after tax and national insurance both in overall terms and as a percentage, assuming that in all cases both partners work and the huband's gross income is one and a half times that of his wife.

Mr. Brooke: For the 1985-86 academic year the information is as follows:

Family Gross Income (1984-85 Financial year)	*of which Husband's earnings*	*Wife's earnings*	*Net income after tax and national insurance*	*Parental contribution 1985-86*	*1985-86 parental contribution as per cent. of 1984-85 net income*
£	£	£	£	£	
8,000	4,800	3,200	7,058	0	0
9,000	5,400	3,600	7,683	0	0
10,000	6,000	4,000	8,308	27	0·3
11,000	6,600	4,400	8,933	163	1·8
12,000	7,200	4,800	9,558	299	3·1
13,000	7,800	5,200	10,183	474	4·7
14,000	8,400	5,600	10,808	664	6·1
15,000	9,000	6,000	11,433	854	7·5
16,000	9,600	6,400	12,058	1,044	8·7
17,000	10,200	6,800	12,683	1,234	9·7
18,000	10,800	7,200	13,308	1,462	11·0
19,000	11,400	7,600	13,933	1,699	12·2
20,000	12,000	8,000	14,558	1,937	13·3
21,000	12,600	8,400	15,183	2,174	14·3
22,000	13,200	8,800	15,826	*2,412	15·2
23,000	13,800	9,200	16,505	2,649	16·0
24,000	14,400	9,600	17,130	2,887	16·9
25,000	15,000	10,000	17,714	3,124	17·6
26,000	15,600	10,400	18,298	3,362	18·4
27,000	16,200	10,800	18,875	3,599	19·1
28,000	16,800	11,200	19,554	3,837	19·6
29,000	17,400	11,600	20,233	4,000	19·8
30,000	18,000	12,000	20,912	4,000	19·1

Notes:

The contribution payable in each case may be less than the amounts shown in the scale, particularly at its top end. This will depend on the amount of the award (maintenance and fees) towards which the contribution has to be made and whether any of the assessed contribution is offset by allowances for other dependent children.

* Families with one award-holder studying outside London and with no other dependent children will be assessed to contribute on average no more than this sum.

In 1985-86 there will be a maximum parental contribution of £4,000 per family.

ILEA (Compensation Awards)

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what arrangements will be made in the event of the abolition of the Greater London council for the future payment of compensation awards at present paid by the council on behalf of his Department to former Inner London education authority teachers.

Mr. Dunn: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Youth Clubs

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the number of statutory youth clubs run by each outer London borough and the total amount per head of the population allocated as grant aid to non-statutory youth organisations.

Mr. Brooke: Information about the number of local education authority provided youth clubs run by each outer London borough is not available centrally. Outer London boroughs return information to the Department of the Environment each year about the total grant paid to voluntary organisations as part of each authority's expenditure on the youth service. Expenditure per head of the 11 to 17-year-old population within each authority in 1982-83 the latest year for which information is available, was as follows:

LEA	*Expenditure per 11 to 17-year-old* £
Barking	0·2
Barnet	3·8
Bexley	0·9
Brent	1·4
Bromley	—
Croydon	2·2
Ealing	—
Enfield	0·2
Haringey	4·7
Harrow	0·3
Havering	0·3

LEA	Expenditure per 11 to 17-year-old £
Hillingdon	—
Hounslow	—
Kingston	0·7
Merton	—
Newham	13·2
Redbridge	2·9
Richmond	2·8
Sutton	0·9
Waltham Forest	0·3

Expenditure Statistics

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will give a comparison of per capita spending on teaching staff, support staff and books and equipment by Norfolk county council with the average per capita spending on those items by non-metropolitan counties.

Mr. Dunn: The average expenditure per pupil on teaching staff, support staff and books and equipment in 1982-83, the latest year for which firm figures are available, are set out in the table. The figures for primary and secondary schools combined are:

Per Pupil Expenditure by LEAs (£'s 1982-83 prices)

	Teaching Staff	Educational Support Staff	Books and Equipment
Norfolk	540	20	26
All Non-Metropolitan Counties	546	17	27

Nursery Schools

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what were the number of nursery class and nursery school places available per 1,000 children aged three years plus and four years plus in Dorset, East Sussex, Hereford and Worcester, Kent, Somerset and Wiltshire, and the total number available per 1,000 children aged three years plus and four years plus in non-metropolitan counties, metropolitan districts and Greater London.

Mr. Dunn: The information requested as at January 1984 is as follows:

	Number of pupils in nursery* classes	Number of places per 1,000 of the 3 and 4-year-old population
Dorset	647	52
East Sussex	950	71
Hereford and Worcester	964	56
Kent	1,827	47
Somerset	68	6
Wiltshire	137	10
Non-metropolitan authorities	109,339	149
Metropolitan authorities	97,986	333
Greater London	51,276	315
England	258,601	217

* The number of pupils in nursery classes in nursery and primary schools

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what were the number of nursery schools in England in each of the years 1980, 1981, 1982 and 1983.

Mr. Dunn: The numbers of maintained nursery schools in England as at January in each of the years 1980 to 1983 are as follows:

January	Number of maintained nursery schools
1980	596
1981	588
1982	582
1983	575

ILEA (Superannuation)

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what superannuation arrangements will be made in the event of the abolition of the Greater London council for the non-teaching staff of the Inner London education authority.

Mr. Dunn: The London residuary body will take over the GLC's superannuation fund and non-teaching staff of the ILEA will continue to participate in that fund.

Disabled Persons (Specialist Information Technology Training)

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what percentage of the budget spent on information technology education in 1983 in colleges and universities was spent on specialist information technology training for disabled people who cannot attend these establishments.

Sir Keith Joseph: This information is not available.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 26 November 1984

WALES

Development Board for Rural Wales

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the amounts of cash given to the Development Board for Rural Wales in each of the years 1979-80 to 1984-85; if he will compare the 1979-80 and 1984-85 amounts indicating the change in real terms; when he proposes to announce the board's budget for 1985-86; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: Funds, including housing subsidy, provided or expected to be provided to the Development Board for Rural Wales are, in cash terms:

	£ million
1979-80	10·0
1980-81	7·4
1981-82	8·2
1982-83	8·9
1983-84	9·2
1984-85	9·7

Comparison in the terms asked for is not directly possible, Government programmes are no longer planned on a constant price basis. However, by applying the gross domestic product deflator and at 1983-84 prices, the figures for 1979-80 and 1984-85 would be £14·5 million and £9·3 million respectively. The figure for 1979-80 includes the special supplementary resources made available in that year.

The board's budget for 1985-86 will be published in the 1985-86 supply estimates.

Rate Support Grant

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales what is the decline in real terms of the rate support grant paid in Wales in 1984-85 since 1981-82.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: When 1981-82 figures are revalued to 1984-85, prices the decline is £65.7 million. If a 1981-82 price base is used, the decline is £56·35 million.

EEC (Food Surpluses)

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Wales what were the total costs incurred by his Department in the storage of European Economic Community food surpluses in Wales for the last full year for which figures are available.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: I would refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given to him by my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food today.

EEC (Food Storage Centres)

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Wales why he has refused to give the addresses of European Economic Community food storage centres in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: The stores concerned are private businesses and it would be a breach of commercial confidence to identify them in this way.

Housing Authorities (Capital Receipts)

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish the SBI percentage of capital receipts accruing in the current year which can be utilised by housing authorities in *(a)* Wales and *(b)* England; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: The prescribed proportion of housing receipts in Wales for 1984-85 is 25 per cent. The proportion for England is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment.

Disabled Persons

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many people registered as disabled in Wales were employed in *(a)* full-time employment and *(b)* part-time employment at the latest date for which figures are available.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: This information is not available.

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish the number of people registered as disabled in Wales at the latest date for which figures are available.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: On 31 March 1984, the total number of persons registered as handicapped on local authority registers was 109,729.

NHS (Private Beds)

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many private beds are available in National Health Service hospitals in Wales; and what percentage of Health Service beds this represents.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: 52 beds are currently available for private use, representing 0·2 per cent. of the total NHS beds in Wales.

National Bus Company

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many people are employed by the National Bus Company in Wales.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: I am told by the three National Bus Company subsidiaries operating in Wales that the figures are as follows:

	Number
The South Wales Transport Company Limited	1,292
National Welsh Omnibus Services Limited	1,560
Crosville Motor Services Limited	1,004
TOTAL	3,856

PRIME MINISTER

Minister for Youth Affairs

Mr. Alton asked the Prime Minister if she will consider the appointment of a minister for youth affairs for a trial period of 12 months during International Youth Year 1985.

The Prime Minister: No. Such an appointment would tend to complicate existing lines of responsibility which I believe to be satisfactory.

Anglo-Irish Talks

Mr. Proctor asked the Prime Minister if the question of the Republic of Eire's membership of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation was discussed during the Anglo-Irish talks at Chequers on Sunday 18 November and Monday 19 November.

The Prime Minister: No.

Mr. Yasser Arafat

Mr. Latham asked the Prime Minister what information she has received regarding a possible visit to the United Kingdom in December by Yasser Arafat; and whether she will ensure that such a visit is not permitted in the interests of security and public order.

The Prime Minister: I am aware of reports that Mr. Arafat may wish to visit Britain privately in connection with the publication of a biography of him. If Mr. Arafat confirms that he does wish to come to this country, we should need to take into account the security implications before issuing a visa.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Intermittent Custody

Mr. Evennett asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what responses he has received to the Green Paper "Intermittent Custody"; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: My right hon. and learned Friend has received over 40 responses from interested bodies and individuals to the Green Paper "Intermittent Custody" and we are giving them careful consideration.

Remand

Mr. Stuart Holland asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will introduce legislation to impose a time limit on the period allowed before remand cases are brought before the courts.

Mr. Mellor: The Prosecution of Offences Bill, now in another place, contains provisions to enable time limits to be applied to periods before trial. We propose to exercise these powers only after conducting field trials to test the practical implications and effects of particular limits.

Member's Correspondence

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will now reply to the letter sent to him by the hon. Member for Gower on 17 September concerning his constituent, Mrs. Dhandayah Williams, of 20 Perryhead Road, Gorseinon, Swansea.

Mr. Waddington: I replied to the hon. Member on 19 November.

Crowd Control

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give details of the guidelines for the police use of dogs and horses in public order and crowd control situations.

Mr. Giles Shaw: This is primarily an operational matter for chief officers of police, but some general guidance relating to the use of dogs is contained in paragraph 1.95 of the consolidated circular to the police on crime and kindred matters, a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Police and Criminal Evidence Act

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made by the police in the training required by the implementation of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Good progress has been made in the preparation of training packages by the Home Office's central planning and instructor training unit and by the Metropolitan police. The programme of training each serving officer will begin in the course of next year.

Parole Policy (Statistics)

Mr. Wrigglesworth asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will publish statistics on the operation in the first year of the new parole policy;

(2) how many prisoners serving sentences of five years or more for offences of violence or drug trafficking have been released since the implementation of the new parole policy; and what have been the exceptional circumstances or compelling reasons in each case.

Mr. Mellor: We expect shortly to be able to publish an assessment of the working of the new policy in January to June this year compared with the same period last year.

Mr. Wrigglesworth asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many life-sentence prisoners in the new 20-year categories created by the change in parole policy have been released since its inception; and what were the exceptional circumstances or compelling reasons in these cases.

Mr. Mellor: Two. One had been in custody 26 years and four months; the other 23 years and one month.

Police and Fire Services

Mr. Lofthouse asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what additional powers he proposes to take to improve staffing structures in the police and fire services; and whether it is his intention to have separate staffing structures for these services.

Mr. Giles Shaw: We have no proposals to alter the staffing structure of the police and fire services. If the hon. Member is referring to support presently provided by the metropolitan counties (to the police and fire services) and the Greater London council (to the fire service) these will be matters for determination in the first instance by the new joint authorities proposed in the Local Government Bill.

Mr. Lofthouse asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information presently is available to determine staffing support for police and fire services currently provided by the control support departments of the metropolitan counties and the Greater London council.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The detailed information is held by the metropolitan county councils and the Greater London council. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment has issued a formal request under section 5 of the Local Government (Interim Provisions) Act 1984 for information on the authorities' current manpower.

Juveniles (Remand)

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the number, by age, sex and location, of juveniles on remand in custody in Welsh penal establishments at the latest date for which figures are available; and what were the offences with which they were charged and the length of time on remand.

Mr. Mellor: According to the records held centrally, there were no juveniles on remand in prison department establishmens in Wales on 31 August 1984, the latest date for which information is readily available.

Special Patrol Groups

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the special patrol group operations carried out in the Metropolitan police district between January 1983 and 30 September 1984 by district, and give details of the nature of operations conducted by district, the number of officers involved and the length and duration of each operation.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many special patrol group serials have been deployed during the current coal dispute; on which dates and for how long; and in which police authority areas.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I understand from the commissioner that no personnel from the special patrol group of the Metropolitan police have been deployed to other police areas during the dispute.

Elections (Impersonation)

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will provide details of *(a)* the number of offences reported and *(b)* the number of prosecutions for voting more than once in the general elections of 1983, 1979 and 1974 in (i) Northern Ireland and (ii) Great Britain.

Mr. Mellor: I shall reply as soon as possible.

Truncheons (Use)

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what instructions are issued to the Metropolitan police regarding the circumstances in which truncheons may be used, and on what parts of the body; and whether he will issue guidance to forces outside the Metropolitan police on the same matters.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The Metropolitan police instructions on the use of truncheons are given in chapter 10, paragraph 12, of the instruction book, a copy of which is in the Library of the House. We have no plans to issue guidance on the matter.

Leicester (Election Statistics)

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will provide detailed figures for the city of Leicester giving the turnout for each ward and polling district box for local elections in May 1983, the general election in June 1983 and for local elections in May 1984.

Mr. Mellor: The information requested is not available. No central record is kept on this basis of the turnout at local or parliamentary elections.

Coal Industry Dispute

Mr. Chope asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the chief constable of Hampshire as to how many members of the Hampshire constabulary have been injured whilst carrying out duties connected with the mining dispute.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The chief constable of Hampshire tells me that in the period from 14 March to 22 November inclusive, 40 of his officers were injured while carrying out duties connected with the mining dispute.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Industrial Research and Development

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what assistance his Department offers to applicants who have been refused aid for industrial research and development;

(2) how much money remained unspent on 12 November of the 1985-86 allocation for innovation grants;

(3) how many applications for support for industrial research and development remain to be processed by his Department; and what is the total amount of assistance asked for.

Mr. Pattie: Since the start of Support for Innovation in May 1982, about 40 per cent. of all applications for financial assistance have failed to meet the necessary criteria. Currently, about 850 applications remain to be processed representing potential assistance of around £140 million.

On 12 November, the amounts committed for expenditure in 1985-86 on offers made under the various SFI schemes totalled around £235 million. Details of the Department's 1985-86 allocations for its main sub-programmes will be given in the forthcoming Public Expenditure White Paper.

All the Department's many and wide-ranging technical advisory services and consultancy schemes remain available to assist firms, irrespective of whether they have had an SFI application rejected or not.

Bankruptcies and Company Liquidations

Mr. Skinner asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many bankruptcies and company liquidations have taken place throughout the United Kingdom since May 1979.

Mr. Fletcher: From May 1979 to October 1984 inclusive, the number of bankruptcies (including deeds of arrangement) was 32,735 and the number of company liquidations (compulsory plus creditors' voluntary) 58,010. Bankruptcies are stated before deduction of consolidations and rescissions in England and Wales; these figures are not available for parts of years but in the 5 years 1979-83 totalled 1,691.

Advanced Technology (Skill Shortages)

Mr. Baldry asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on initiatives that he is taking to tackle skill shortages in advanced technology.

Mr. Butcher: I chair the information technology skills shortages committee, which proposed in its first report, published in July, a "partnership for change" between industry and the academic world to provide the IT skills needed by Britain's industry, specifically at graduate level. I am delighted to report that this idea has been taken up by the CBI education foundation, which has proposed an IT skills agency, to define industry's requirements and to bring together industry and education to meet these. It is hoped that the agency will start work shortly. The committee intends to produce a report on IT skills shortages below graduate level shortly, and a final report will summarise progress made so far and put forward new points for action.

Insolvency Law

Mr. Evennett asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what responses he has received to "A Revised Framework for Insolvency Law"; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fletcher: The White Paper, which was published in February 1984, met with general approval. A number of modifications, including wider grounds for relief from automatic disqualification made in the light of comments received, were announced on 1 August 1984. The principal of these were described in a memorandum, copies of which were placed in the Library of this House. As announced in the Queen's Speech, the Government will introduce a Bill during the current session of Parliament to give effect to their proposals.

Independent Cinemas

Mr. Pendry asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make an early pronouncement on the recommendation of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission Report (Cmnd. 8858) in relation to a limited experiment in Glasgow and Manchester for the independent cinemas in those cities to be afforded the same rights of access to films as EMI and Rank.

Mr. Fletcher: The Director General of Fair Trading has reported to me on difficulties that have arisen in such an experiment. I am considering the position and will make a further announcement as soon as possible.

British Telecom

Mr. Frank Field asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much money has been spent on the advertising budget of his Department on advertising the prospectus of British Telecom.

Mr. Butcher: About £3 million is being spent on advertising the full British Telecom prospectus and the abridged mini prospectus during the offer period in the press, and on radio and television.

Mr. Beith asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry why the prospectus issued on his behalf by Kleinwort Benson and Co. in respect of the British Telecom plc share offer made reference to the policies of the Labour party and omitted any reference to those parties whose policies do not include the renationalisation of British Telecom.

Mr. Trippier: It is necessary to make reference to the Labour party's declared policy of renationalisation since if it were carried out it would have a material impact upon the interests of investors. Nothing comparable arises from the declared policies of the other parties.

Mr. Gould asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what total sums will be paid by way of commission to City institutions arising from the flotation of British Telecom shares.

Mr. Butcher: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Dangerous Goods

Mr. Crowther asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he intends to introduce legislation concerning the importation of dangerous goods during the present Session.

Mr. Fletcher: As stated in the White Paper on the Supply of Goods (Cmnd. 9303), a Bill will be introduced when legislative time is available.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Students (Board and Lodging)

Mr. Simon Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is his policy concerning the continuation of the higher charge for board and lodging in public sector college hostels and halls of residence imposed on extra-district further education students.

Mr. Brooke: It is for the providing authority to secure the home authority's agreement to the payment of the costs of provision. My right hon. Friend agrees with the recommendation of the inter-authority payments committee that for residential students this agreement should cover payment of the residual boarding charge. The decision whether to pay for extra-district further education is at the discretion of the home authority; a student taking up such a place without the permission of his authority will find himself liable to pay the full cost.

Books

Mr. Sean Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) what has been the total spending on books by local education authorities in England and Wales for each of the last 10 years for which figures are available in cost and real terms using 1979-80 as the base year;

(2) what has been the total spending on books per pupil by local education authorities in England and Wales for each of the last 10 years for which figures are available in cost and real terms using 1979-80 as the base year.

Mr. Dunn: Expenditure by local education authorities in England on books in primary and secondary schools and that expenditure expressed as cost per pupil, in cost and real terms, is set out in the following table for the ten financial years up to 1982-83, the latest year for which firm figures are available:

(£ 1979-80 prices)

	Primary Schools				Secondary Schools			
	Expenditure £ million		Cost per Pupil		Expenditure £ million		Cost per Pupil	
	Cost Terms	Real Terms	Cost Terms	Real Terms	Cost Terms	Real Terms	Cost Terms	Real Terms
1973-74	25·6	25·2	5·2	4·7	34·8	31·6	10·2	9·2
1974-75	24·2	21·0	5·0	4·3	32·3	27·9	9·0	7·8
1975-76	23·4	21·4	4·8	4·4	31·0	28·3	8·5	7·8
1976-77	22·7	21·3	4·8	4·5	31·6	29·6	8·4	7·8
1977-78	21·7	21·1	4·6	4·5	31·2	30·3	8·1	7·9
1978-79	22·3	21·6	4·8	4·7	32·4	31·5	8·4	8·2
1979-80	20·3	20·3	4·6	4·6	30·2	30·2	7·8	7·8
1980-81	18·7	19·9	4·5	4·8	28·2	28·0	6·8	7·3
1981-82	18·8	19·5	4·8	4·8	25·1	26·1	6·6	6·8
1982-83	19·2	20·2	5·0	5·3	26·7	28·1	7·1	7·5

(The figures in cost and real terms have been calculated using respectively the GDP deflator and the average price of school books index of the Publishers' Association.)

Mr. Sean Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will provide figures showing spending on books alone by each local education authority in England and Wales *(a)* in terms of their overall allocation and spending per pupil and *(b)* in cost and real terms using 1979-80 as the base year for each of the last five years for which figures are available.

Mr. Dunn: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Mr. Sean Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what proportion of total local authority budgets and current spending, respectively, on education was accounted for by books alone in the latest year for which figures are available; and how this compares with each of the previous five years.

Mr. Dunn: Local education authority expenditure on books in primary and secondary schools as a percentage of net recurrent expenditure on those schools was as follows in each of the six financial years up to 1982-83, the latest year for which firm figures are available:

per cent.

Year	Primary Schools	Secondary Schools
1977-78	1·1	1·2
1978-79	1·1	1·3
1979-80	1·1	1·2
1980-81	1·0	1·0
1981-82	1·0	0·9
1982-83	1·0	1·0

Blind and Hearing Impaired Children (Teachers)

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will meet the organisations concerned with the blind and deaf to discuss proposals from the Advisory Committee on Supply and Education of Teachers for removing the mandatory requirement from a specialist qualification for teachers of blind and hearing impaired children; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dunn: My right hon. Friend has agreed to meet representatives of these organisations. The meeting is expected to take place shortly.

Pupil-Teacher Ratio

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will give the pupil-teacher ratio for nursery schools and classes in England for each of the years 1980, 1981, 1982 and 1983.

Mr. Dunn: The information requested is as follows:

January of each year	*Pupil Qualified teacher ratio*	*Pupil/All Adult Staff ratio*
1980	22·0	9·8
1981	22·0	10·0
1982	22·5	10·2
1983	23·0	10·4

Special Schools

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what proportion of children in the care of a local authority or voluntary organisation are in special schools; and what proportion of all children are in special schools.

Mr. Dunn: Information is not collected centrally about the number of children in care who are being educated in special schools. In England, in 1984, 1·5 per cent. of the total school population of compulsory school age were in special schools.

Adult Education (Outer London)

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the total expenditure on adult education in each of the outer London boroughs; and what this represents in terms of expenditure per head of the population in those boroughs.

Mr. Brooke: Separate information about expenditure on adult education is only available for adult education centres. The net recurrent expenditure on adult education centres in 1982-83, the latest year for which firm figures are available, as returned by each outer London borough, and that expenditure expressed as expenditure per head of the 18+ population is set out below.

LEA	1982-83 Expenditure £'000 (cash)	Expenditure per head of population £
Barking	289·7	1·9
Barnet	—	—
Bexley	699·5	3·2
Brent	452·4	1·8
Bromley	531·7	1·8
Croydon	360·9	1·1
Ealing	279·1	1·0
Enfield	—	—
Haringey	1,064·6	5·2
Harrow	592·5	2·0
Havering	307·0	1·3
Hillingdon	415·2	1·8
Hounslow	815·0	4·0
Kingston	292·7	2·2
Merton	162·6	1·0
Newham	267·9	1·3
Redbridge	166·9	0·7
Richmond	639·2	4·0
Sutton	14·6	0·1
Waltham Forest	570·4	2·6

These figures exclude expenditure on adult education provided in polytechnics or other maintained further education establishments, since such expenditure is not separately identifiable in the expenditure returns submitted by authorities.

Essex

Dr. McDonald asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) how much was spent, per child, in real terms in each of the last five years in primary and secondary schools in Essex on *(a)* books, *(b)* equipment and *(c)* maintenance and repair, compared with the average for the non-metropolitan counties;

(2) what has been the real value of the capitation allowances in the primary and secondary schools in Essex for each of the last five years, compared with the average for the non-metropolitan counties;

(3) how much was spent in real terms in each of the last five years on each child attending primary and secondary schools in Essex, compared with the average for the non-metropolitan counties.

Mr. Dunn: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Dr. McDonald asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing the percentage of school leavers in Essex with O and A-level passes for each of the last five years, compared with the average for the non-metropolitan counties.

Mr. Dunn: The information requested is given in the following table.

Percentages of School Leavers in England

	1 or more A level passes		1 or more higher grades at O level	
	Essex	Non-metropolitan counties	Essex	Non-metropolitan counties
1978-79	12·5	13·1	42·8	41·0
1979-80	14·3	13·1	43·5	41·7
1980-81	13·1	14·1	44·1	42·3
1981-82	14·9	14·8	46·2	43·8
1982-83	14·6	15·1	45·9	45·1

Dr. McDonald asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will give the number of education welfare officers and educational psychologists in Essex in each of the last five years, compared with the average for the non-metropolitan counties.

Mr. Dunn: The number of educational psychologists employed by Essex over the years in question is shown in the following table. This compares the number each year with the average number employed by the 40 non-metropolitan counties.

Part-time educational psychologists are shown as full-time equivalents. Information about the employment of education welfare officers is not collected by the Department.

Educational psychologists employed as at January in each year

Year	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984
Essex	25·0	27·1	27·5	27·5	27·5
Average overall Non-metropolitan counties	12·8	12·8	13·2	13·5	14·8

ILEA (Compensation Awards)

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what arrangements will be made in the event of the abolition of the Greater London council for the future payment of compensation awards at present paid by the council on behalf of his Department to former Inner London education authority teachers.

Mr. Dunn [*pursuant to his reply*, 23 November 1984, c. *341*]: The Local Government Bill contains provisions to enable the liabilities of the GLC in its capacity as the local education authority for the inner London area to be transferred to the new ILEA on the abolition of the council. This applies to the payment of compensation. All existing rights to pension and compensation payments will be fully safeguarded.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Health Authorities (Food Hygiene)

Mr. Gregory asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will estimate expenditure incurred for training in food hygiene by health authorities in Northern Ireland in each year since 1978; and what is planned expenditure for 1984 and 1985.

Mr. Chris Patten: The information requested is not available in the form requested and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Hospital Kitchens

Mr. Gregory asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much expenditure took place on modernising hospital kitchens in Northern Ireland in each year since 1978; and what is the planned expenditure for 1984 and 1985.

Mr. Chris Patten: The information requested is not available in the form requested. However details of expenditure on structural alterations and major equipment replacement in hospital kitchens is as follows:

Financial Year	£
1978-79	263,720
1979-80	318,041
1980-81	506,129
1981-82	755,411
1982-83	1,119,457
1983-84	1,261,007
*1984-85	375,357
*1985-86	571,650

* Estimated.

Student Awards

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what figures are available to indicate the numbers of minimum awards to higher education students granted by each of the education and library boards over each of the past three years.

Mr. Scott: The available information is as follows:

Numbers of Students Claiming Minumum Awards

Education and Library Board	Academic Year		
	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83
Belfast	146	265	352
North Eastern	205	253	277
South Eastern	372	506	644
Southern	94	138	141
Western	54	74	99

The number of minumum awards in 1983-84 and 1984-85 is expected to be higher than in 1982-83.

Youth Training Programme

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what figures are available to indicate the numbers of young people taking part in the various areas of the youth training programme in Northern Ireland.

Dr. Boyson: On 26 October 1984 there were 6,525 16-year-olds in full-time training schemes; 3,540 17-year-old employees training with employers; and 1,758 17-year-olds engaged full-time in project work.

Training Centres

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on Government training centres in Northern Ireland detailing the facilities and courses in each centre, the number of trainees and staff, capital investment, plans for new courses and what courses have been dropped in given centres.

Dr. Boyson: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that the Department of Economic Development has been conducting a review of the Government training centres and the attachment training scheme, and that a discussion document was issued by the Department. Comments on the document were invited by 30 November, following which the Department will begin the process of re-shaping its direct training provisions to make them both more relevant to the changing needs of industry and more cost-effective. I will write as soon as possible with the detailed information requested.

Gaelic Athletic Association

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he next expects to meet the Gaelic Athletic Association to discuss the level of Government assistance to the association.

Mr. Scott: My right hon. Friend has no plans to meet the Gaelic Athletic Association.

TRANSPORT

Transport and Road Research Laboratory

Mr. Iain Mills asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish the costs of the Transport and Road Research Laboratory for each of the years 1979-80, 1980-81, 1981-82, 1982-83 and 1983-84; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: The global in-house costs for TRRL by financial year for the period 1979-1984 were as follows:

Year	£ million
1979-80	8·896
1980-81	*11·645
1981-82	10·498
1982-83	10·462
1983-84	11·105

* Includes a major computer capital purchase.

These figures do not include expenditure on research undertaken by other organisations under extra-mural contracts let by the laboratory. They also exclude expenditure relating to property repayment services (introduced with effect from 1.4.83) and central purchases — the 1983-84 level of expenditure for these two headings being £3·2 million.

European Coastal Trade (British Ships)

Sir David Price asked the Secretary of State for Transport what steps Her Majesty's Government are taking in the Council of Ministers to ensure free access for British ships to trade in the coastal waters of the European Community; and what reasons have been given by member Governments for denying British ships such rights of cabotage.

Mr. David Mitchell: The Government have made clear, in the Council of Ministers and in other international fora, their rooted objection to restrictive cabotage laws and other cargo reservation legislation. Within the European Community, we have stressed our view that all such laws are contrary to the spirit of the Treaty of Rome. We have pressed the Commission of the European Communities to take action on this matter and expect them to come forward with practical proposals for Community measures by the end of this year.

London Underground (Identification Parades)

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many identification parades were conducted in London Transport underground stations during the first nine months of 1984.

Mrs. Chalker: No formal identification parades are conducted in London underground stations. However, underground stations are sometimes used for less formal

identification procedures in accordance with Home Office circular 109/1978. The British Transport police used underground stations for this purpose on 12 occasions in the period in question. Similar procedures are also carried out by the Metropolitan police but no central record of these is maintained.

London Regional Transport

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether the rate to be levied for London Regional Transport in 1985-86 will be consistent with the national rate poundage calculated for block grant purposes.

Mrs. Chalker: The rate support grant report for 1985-86, which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment will lay before the House shortly, will include details of a deduction from the national poundage schedule which will be used in calculating the grant entitlements of London authorities. The deduction will ensure that ratepayers in London are not disadvantaged compared to those elsewhere as a result of the transfer of responsibility for London Regional Transport.

Public Transport Subsidy

Mr. Lofthouse asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list those local authorities whose level of public transport subsidy is within the levels considered to be reasonable by his Department.

Mr. David Mitchell: It is for local authorities to decide their own priorities for spending on individual services, having regard to their statutory duties and the guidance on overall levels of expenditure issued by my right hon. Friend. Only a small number of authorities are responsible for the major overspending in relation to the Government's plans.

Driving Licence Applications

Mr. Ewing asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many people holding a driving licence have been requested by his Department, in each of the past three years, to submit themselves for medical examination to establish their fitness to continue to hold a driving licence, based on information supplied by *(a)* people giving their names and addresses in confidence and *(b)* anonymous notifications.

Mr. Michael Spicer: I will write to the hon. Member with such details as are available.

Road Accident Statistics

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will indicate the numbers of rear seat car occupant casualties involved in accidents in 1983 by injury severity and age.

Mrs. Chalker: The data requested are to be published on 29 November in "Road Accidents Great Britain 1983" table 38. A copy will be available in the Library.

EMPLOYMENT

Truck Acts

Mr. Evennett asked the Secretary of State for Employment whether he intends to introduce legislation to repeal the Truck Acts; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Legislation is not planned for the current session, but I would refer my hon. Friend to my right hon. Friend's reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Bruinvels) on Wednesday 31 October at column *993*. I am sending my hon. Friend a copy of the proposals issued on 31 October.

Skillcentre Courses (West Yorkshire)

Mr. Richard Wainwright asked the Secretary of State for Employment (1) if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing the current waiting time for a place on each separate course run at each skillcentre in west Yorkshire;

(2) how many people are currently waiting for a place at a skillcentre course in west Yorkshire; and what is the average time involved in each case.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The following table lists the average waiting times and the number of people on the waiting list for each course in west Yorkshire's three skillcentres at Bradford, Leeds, and Wakefield.

Skillcentre Waiting Lists—West Yorkshire

Course	*Skillcentre*					
	Bradford		*Leeds*		*Wakefield*	
	Waiting Time (Months)	*Numbers*	*Waiting Time (Months)*	*Numbers*	*Waiting Time (Months)*	*Numbers*
Bricklaying	6 to 8	6	up to 12	19	over 12	27
Carpentry and Joinery	over 12	27	up to 12	18	over 12	37
Woodcutting and Machining			5 to 7	7		
Boring Setting Machining			Immediate	—		
Capstan Setting/Operating			Immediate	3		
Centre Lathe Turning			6 to 8	12		
Milling Setting/Operating			2 to 4	3		
Precision Grinding			Immediate	1		
Welding Electric Arc Plate	over 12	6	up to 12	11	4 to 6	9
Engineering Inspection			Immediate	3		
Computer Numerically Controlled Machines (Programming and Operation)			Immediate	—		
Draughtsmanship			Suspended	—		
General Fitting			4 to 6	5		
Fitting Pneumatic/Hydraulic			1 to 2	3		
Electrical Installation and Maintenance			over 12	7		

Course	Skillcentre: Bradford Waiting Time (Months)	Bradford Numbers	Skillcentre: Leeds Waiting Time (Months)	Leeds Numbers	Wakefield Waiting Time (Months)	Wakefield Numbers
Instrument Maintenance			5 to 7	14	Suspended	
Radio/Television/Electical Servicing	over 12	1	over 12	6		
Typewriter Repair and Maintenance			5 to 7	1		
Watch and Clock Repair			Suspended	—		
Hairdressing (Men's)			up to 12	14		
Electronic Test and Service Mechanic	over 12	—			up to 12	16
Vehicle Body Repair/Spray Painting	over 12	17			over 12	22
Motor Vehicle Repair and Maintenance	over 12	5				
Office Machinery Servicing	1 to 2	3				
Heavy Vehicle Fitting					3	9
Plumbing					Suspended	—
Contractors Plant Repair					Suspended	—
Heavy Vehicle Repair and Maintenance					Suspended	—
Light Plate Fabrication					2 to 3	9
Wider Opportunities	1 to 2	3	1 to 2	10	4 to 6	20
Basic Engineering/Machining	1 to 2	4	1 to 2	8		
TOTAL		72	—	145	—	149

Notes:
(a) Courses marked "up to 12 months"—recruitment suspended. Reserve lists in operation except for priority cases.
(b) Courses marked "over 12 months"—reserve list suspended also.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Forman asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many people at the latest available date have been registered as unemployed *(a)* who are 24 years old or younger, *(b)* who are 55 years old or older and *(c)* who have no educational or vocational qualifications; and what were the comparable figures for 1971, 1981 and 1983.

Mr. Alan Clark: Following is the available information by age from the unemployment count for Great Britain.

Unemployed: Great Britain

	Aged under 25	*Aged 55 years and over*
Registered unemployed		
July 1971	230,342	168,464
October 1981	1,144,325	428,026
Unemployed claimants		
October 1983	1,210,702	351,186
October 1984	1,236,063	350,263

The comparisons are affected by the change in the basis of the unemployment count in October 1982 and by the 1983 Budget provisions which enable some men, mainly aged 60 and over, to receive the long-term rate of supplementary benefit and national insurance credits without having to sign on at an unemployment benefit office. Between April and August 1983 an estimated 161,800 men were affected.

The monthly unemployment count does not separately identify persons with and without qualifications. However, the labour force survey provides information about the qualifications of persons aged 16-59 without a job who were looking for work in the week before the survey. Results now available from the 1983 survey, and corresponding figures from the 1981 survey are given in the following table. There was no labour force survey in 1971.

Great Britain: Thousands

Persons aged 16 to 59	*1981*	*1983*
Unemployed, seeking work	2,330	2,810
of whom: no qualifications	1,240	1,420

"Training for Jobs"

Mr. Baldry asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the progress being made with local authority organisations concerning non-advanced further education funding under the White Paper, "Training for Jobs."

Mr. Peter Morrison: In recent discussions between the new chairman of the Manpower Services Commission, Mr. Bryan Nicholson, and representatives of the Association of County Councils and the Association of Metropolitan Authorities, an agreement was reached about the basis upon which local education authorities will seek MSC support for their programmes of work-related non-advanced further education in 1985-86, and about a means of determining arrangements for later years in accordance with the White Paper "Training for Jobs" [Cmnd. 9135].

Average Weekly Income

Mr. Donald Stewart asked the Secretary of State for Employment what was the average weekly income of *(a)* men and *(b)* women in full-time employment in Great Britain as at April expressed in terms of modality.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The range (in units of £10) of gross weekly earnings for a full week containing the largest number of full-time employees on adult rates in Great Britain in April 1984 was, for males, £130 to £140 (covering 8 per cent. of such employees) and, for females, £80 to £90 (covering 12 per cent. of such employees).

Private Security Industry

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he has received any representations for wage councils to be introduced for workers employed in the private security industry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: My right hon. Friend and I have received no such representations during the past year.

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he has any plans to introduce wage councils for workers employed by security companies.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The future of wages councils is under consideration. We have no current plans to establish new councils.

Average Wage

Mr. Freud asked the Secretary of State for Employment whether he will list in the *Official Report* for the latest date for which figures are available and for each of the previous five years *(a)* the average wage for a woman in full-time employment and *(b)* the number of such workers who earned less than that amount; and what percentage this represents in each case (i) nationally and (ii) in Cambridgeshire.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The following table sets out the available information from the new earnings survey between 1979 and 1984 in respect of full-time adult female employees working a full week.

	Average gross weekly earnings			*Percentage of employees earning less than the relevant average*	
	(1) Great Britain £	*(2) Cambridgeshire £*	*(2) as a percentage of (1)*	*Great Britain*	*Cambridgeshire*
1979*	63·0	61·9	98	59	58
1980*	78·8	75·0	95	60	60
1981*	91·4	87·3	96	61	60
1982*	99·0	96·4	97	58	60
1983*	108·8	104·4	96	61	60
†	109·5	104·2	95	61	60
1984†	117·2	113·8	97	60	61

* Females aged 18 and over.
† Females on adult rates of pay.

Mr. Freud asked the Secretary of State for Employment whether he will list in the *Official Report* for the latest date for which figures are available and for each of the previous five years *(a)* the average wage for a man in full-time employment and *(b)* the number of such workers who earned less than that amount; and what percentage this represents, in each case (i) nationally and (ii) in Cambridgeshire.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The following table sets out the available information from the new earnings survey between 1979 and 1984 in respect of full-time adult male employees working a full week.

	Average gross weekly earnings			*Percentage of employees earning less than the relevant average*	
	(1) Great Britain £	*(2) Cambridgeshire £*	*(2) as a percentage of (1)*	*Great Britain*	*Cambridgeshire*
1979*	101·4	101·9	100	59	60
1980*	124·5	118·8	95	61	61
1981*	140·5	139·1	99	61	62
1982*	154·5	151·1	98	61	62
1983*	167·5	160·1	96	61	61
†	164·7	155·6	94	61	60
1984†	178·8	173·9	97	61	62

* Males aged 21 and over.
† Males on adult rates of pay.

Mortgage Interest

Mr. Wainwright asked the Secretary of State for Employment what representations he has recently received proposing that the status in the retail price index of interest paid on mortgage be altered; and if he will make a statement.

Dr. McDonald asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he intends to exclude mortgage interest rates from the retail price index; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: My right hon. Friend and I have received no such representations but are aware that the Building Societies Association has recently questioned the inclusion of mortgage interest in the retail prices index.

As indicated by my right hon. Friend in his reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, North (Mr. Burt) on 6 June at column *171*, we have asked the retail prices index advisory committee, inter alia, to re-examine the treatment of housing costs in the index. In its report of February 1975, [Cmnd. 5905], the committee said that its recommended approach to owner occupiers' housing costs should be

"reviewed in a few year's time in the light of experience".

The committee is expected to report later next year. Meanwhile we have no plans to make any changes in the coverage or method of construction of the index.

Wages Council Establishments (Yorkshire)

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many wage council establishments in Leeds and in west Yorkshire were found to be underpaying in 1983; how many workers were involved; and what were the numbers of prosecutions.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Statistics are not collected for geographical areas smaller than wages inspectorate divisions. In the Yorkshire and Humberside division of the wages inspectorate, 941 establishments were found to have underpaid 2,227 workers in 1983. No employers in Leeds and west Yorkshire were prosecuted last year for offences under the Wages Councils Act 1979.

Apprentices

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will specify the recruitment targets of apprentice trainees in the engineering industry.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The Engineering Industry Training Board's recruitment target for apprentice trainees in 1984-85 is 8,650.

Young Persons (Newham)

Mr. Leighton asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he has anything to add to his answer of 20 November, *Official Report*, column 139, that there was no reason why the 1,016 young people over the age of 18 years in Newham should not have had either a job or training experience.

Mr. Alan Clark: Yes. Unlike most other local authorities, Newham borough council has yet to start up a single project under the community programme. Young people in the borough who are under 25 and unemployed for more than six months are therefore being deprived of the opportunities for temporary work which the programme offers. I would urge the hon. Member to investigate the reasons for this delay and seek to ensure their speedy resolution.

British Gas Rough Storage Project (Dispute)

Mr. Randall asked the Secretary of State for Employment when he will have completed the evaluation of the test case regarding redundancy payments entitlement resulting from the dispute at the British Gas rough storage project, Fortuna Ugland accommodation barge; how many individuals are involved; and what representations he has received on this matter from the Electrical, Electronic, Telecommunications and Plumbing Union.

Mr. Alan Clark: There is to date no test case regarding redundancy payments entitlement resulting from the dispute at the British Gas rough storage project, Fortuna Ugland accommodation barge. No individuals are therefore involved and no representations have been received on this matter from the Electrical, Electronic, Telecommunications and Plumbing Union.

Labour Force Survey

Dr. McDonald asked the Secretary of State for Employment (1) if he will indicate, on the basis of the labour force survey carried out in spring 1984 *(a)* the number of unemployed female claimants, *(b)* the number of unemployed women registered at unemployment benefit offices and *(c)* an estimate of the number of female discouraged workers;

(2) if he will now publish the results of the labour force survey carried out in spring 1984; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Results from the 1984 labour force survey are not yet available. Preliminary information will become available in the second quarter of 1985 and will be published in the *Employment Gazette* and in an Office of Population Censuses and Surveys monitor. It is hoped that a fuller report will be published by the end of the year.

ENERGY

Magnox Reprocessing Line

12. **Mr. D. E. Thomas** asked the Secretary of State for Energy whether Euratom will be allowed to inspect the Magnox reprocessing line at Sellafield.

Mr. Goodlad: I would refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to his written question on 21 November 1984 at column *160*.

Machinery and Equipment (Protection)

13. **Mr. Merchant** asked the Secretary of State for Energy if any provision has been made for the protection of vital machinery and equipment in the public companies under his control in the event of war.

Mr. Peter Walker: The Government will be developing general advice and guidance on these matters for implementation by industry.

Energy Efficiency Campaign

11. **Mr. Burt** asked the Secretary of State for Energy whether he is planning to increase the number of locations to which the energy efficiency campaign is to take breakfast-special meetings.

Mr. David Hunt: So far my ministerial colleagues and I have addressed 28 early morning briefings on energy efficiency, attended by over 11,000 senior executives. I plan to increase the number of these meetings.

42. **Mr. Heathcoat-Amory** asked the Secretary of State for Energy what progress he is making with the energy efficiency campaign.

Mr. Peter Walker: In the first 12 months an energy saver exhibition offering advice and assistance to domestic consumers has been exhibited at over 200 different locations. Ministers have held 28 early morning briefings throughout the country attended by over 11,000 top executives. The most successful ever national energy management conference and exhibition was held just over two weeks ago. Our current series of "Lift a Finger" advertisements on television and in the press has resulted in over 70,000 requests from the public for further information and advice.

Redundant Mineworkers Payments Scheme

16. **Mr. Beith** asked the Secretary of State for Energy what representations he has received in favour of including redundant opencast-mining workers within the redundant mineworkers payments scheme.

Mr. David Hunt: Primarily from the Transport and General Workers Union.

Elderly Persons (Fuel Supplies)

18. **Mr. Freud** asked the Secretary of State for Energy what arrangements have been made by his Department to meet the needs of the elderly in the event of failures in the supply of energy to domestic consumers this winter.

Mr. David Hunt: I do not envisage any failures of energy supplies during this winter, unless in some regions NUM strikers prevent coal going to hospitals and old peoples homes.

Coal Stocks

20. **Mr. Madden** asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on coal stocks at the latest available date.

Mr. Peter Walker: The latest official published figures are for stocks of coal on 26 August. These show total stocks of 39·18 million tonnes, of which 15·5 million tonnes were at power stations. Stocks at power stations remain at a similar level today.

43. **Mr. Eggar** asked the Secretary of State for Energy what stocks of coal are currently held at power stations and on National Coal Board property.

Mr. Peter Walker: I refer to the reply given earlier today to the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden).

NCB (Borrowing Powers)

21. **Mr. Skeet** asked the Secretary of State for Energy when he proposes to increase the borrowing powers of the National Coal Board.

Mr. David Hunt: I have no present plans to do so but we are increasing the deficit grants.

Coal Industry Dispute

22. **Mr. Willie W. Hamilton** asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a further statement on the dispute in the coal industry.

25. **Mr. Knox** asked the Secretary of State for Energy whether he will make a statement on the coal strike.

26. **Mr. Proctor** asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on progress made towards ending the coal industry dispute.

30. **Mr. Barron** asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the current situation in the mining industry.

33. **Mr. Eadie** asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the current situation in the mining industry.

35. **Mr. John Hunt** asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a further statement on the mining dispute.

41. **Mr. Douglas** asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the current dispute in the coal industry.

Mr. Peter Walker: I refer to the reply given earlier today to the hon. Member for Bedfordshire, South-West (Mr. Madel).

27. **Mr. Welsh** asked the Secretary of State for Energy how many meetings have taken place between him and the chairman of the Coal Board to discuss the mining dispute.

Mr. Peter Walker: I meet the chairman of the National Coal Board regularly to discuss all aspects of the coal industry.

32. **Mr. Maples** asked the Secretary of State for Energy what are the most recent figures for the numbers of miners employed by the National Coal Board who are *(a)* working and *(b)* on strike.

Mr. David Hunt: I refer to the reply given earlier today by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to my hon. Friend the Member for Bedfordshire, South-West (Mr. Madel) and to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton (Mr. Morris).

36. **Mr. Nellist** asked the Secretary of State for Energy what is his estimate of the total cost of the mining dispute to date.

Mr. Greenway asked the Secretary of State for Energy what has been the cost to date of the miners' dispute; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Walker: The final cost cannot be determined until the strike ends.

40. **Mr. Kenneth Carlisle** asked the Secretary of State for Energy how many coal faces have been lost, and how many are now endangered, as a result of the strike in the mining industry.

Mr. David Hunt: I understand from the National Coal Board that 21 working faces have been lost, and that a further 87 are causing concern at collieries throughout the British coalfield.

Electricity Generation

23. **Mr. Pike** asked the Secretary of State for Energy on a fuel-used basis what percentage of electricity generated by the Central Electricity Generating Board in September was from coal.

Mr. Goodlad: The latest published information available is for August. This shows that, on a fuel used basis, 35 per cent. of the electricity produced by the Central Electricity Generating Board in that month was derived from coal.

34. **Mr. Ron Davies** asked the Secretary of State for Energy what percentage of United Kingdom electricity supply is currently being supplied by coal-fired, oil-fired and nuclear power stations, respectively.

Mr. Goodlad: Based on fuel used, the proportion of electricity produced fom coal, oil and nuclear power by the electricity boards in the United Kingdom in August were as follows:

	Per cent.
Coal	33
Oil	49
Nuclear	17
Hydro-electricity and natural gas	1

Electricity Prices

24. **Mr. Roy Hughes** asked the Secretary of State for Energy when he last met the chairman of the Electricity Council to discuss electricity prices.

Mr. Peter Walker: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) earlier today.

46. **Mr. Baldry** asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement as to the anticipated impact on electricity prices of the present dispute in the coal industry.

47. **Mr. Freeman** asked the Secretary of State for Energy whether the Government propose to set financial targets for the electricity industry in 1985-86 which do not place upon it the full burden of financing the dispute in the coalmining industry.

Mr. Peter Walker: No decisions have been taken on how the costs arising for the electricity supply industry from the miners' strike will be met.

United Kingdom Offshore Operators Association

28. **Mr. Malone** asked the Secretary of State for Energy when he next intends to consult representatives of the United Kingdom Offshore Operators Association.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: My Department has frequent meetings with UKOOA on a wide variety of issues.

Industrial Knowledge (Storage)

29. **Dr. Twinn** asked the Secretary of State for Energy what guidance he gives to the publicly owned industries under his control about the secure storage of industrial knowledge in the event of war.

Mr. Peter Walker: This is primarily a matter for the industries concerned.

Alternative Energy Supplies

31. **Mr. Chapman** asked the Secretary of State for Energy how much his Department is currently spending annually on grants for research into alternative forms of energy; and how this compares with five years before.

Mr. David Hunt: My Department expects to spend about £14 million on renewable energy research and development in the current financial year compared with expenditure of about £8 million in 1979-80.

38. **Mr. Hannam** asked the Secretary of State for Energy what steps he is taking to research alternative energy schemes such as wind-power, wave-power, solar and tidal-barrage.

Mr. David Hunt: In 1983-84 expenditure under my Department's renewable energy research and development programme amounted to £11·3 million, of which £4·7 million was concerned with geothermal energy and £2·5 million with wind energy. Work is being concentrated on the most promising technologies and encouraging progress is being made. For example, in October I announced approval for the construction of a 3 megawatt wind turbine on Orkney.

Civil Defence

37. **Mr. Gerald Bowden** asked the Secretary of State for Energy how many representatives of each of the publicly owned industries under his control attended courses at the Civil Defence college, Easingwold, during the last 12 months.

Mr. Peter Walker: According to the college, during the last 12 months 20 attended courses from the British Gas Corporation and two from the electricity supply industry in England and Wales.

Coal Industry (Competition)

Mr. Rost asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he has any plans to promote competition in the coalmining industry by encouraging more private sector investment, production and marketing.

Mr. Peter Walker: The private sector is already involved in the construction of new mines and the operation of opencast sites, while marketing of domestic coal is also largely in the private sector.

Nuclear Electromagnetic Pulse

44. **Mr. Nell Thorne** asked the Secretary of State for Energy whether the communications of the public industries under his control are hardened against nuclear electromagnetic pulse.

Mr. Peter Walker: There are arrangements to provide for continued communications in an emergency and this phenomenon is being taken into account in further work in this area.

Sleipner Gas

45. **Mr. Orme** asked the Secretary of State for Energy when a decision is to be made on the Sleipner gas deal; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: A decision will be taken as soon as possible.

Energy Supplies (Nuclear Power)

48. **Ms. Clare Short** asked the Secretary of State for Energy what proportion of Britain's energy supplies the Government expect to be provided by nuclear power in 1994 and 2004.

Mr. Goodlad: Accurate projections are not possible for the years 1994 and 2004.

Domestic Smokeless Fuel

49. **Mr. Patrick McNair-Wilson** asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the availability of domestic smokeless fuel.

Mr. David Hunt: Every attempt has been made to meet the demand, particularly for those most in need.

Private Coal Pits (Royalties)

Mr. Leigh asked the Secretary of State for Energy if Her Majesty's Government have any plan to seek to remove royalties which private sector coal pits at present pay to the National Coal Board.

Mr. David Hunt: No.

Coal Imports

Mr. Wallace asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will state *(a)* the total volume and *(b)* the average price per tonne of domestic coal imported into the United Kingdom from Poland in (i) September 1983, (ii) February 1984 and (iii) September 1984.

Mr. David Hunt: This information is not available.

Coal and Smokeless Fuel (Imports)

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Energy if there has been any increase in the price of coal and smokeless fuel imports from the German Democratic Republic since 6 March.

Mr. David Hunt: Reliable information on prices is not available.

Sizewell B Inquiry

Mr. Orme asked the Secretary of State for Energy how much the Sizewell B inquiry has cost to date.

Mr. Goodlad: I refer the right hon. Member to the answer I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. Hughes).

Mr. Orme asked the Secretary of State for Energy when he expects the Sizewell B inquiry to report on its findings.

Mr. Goodlad: This is a matter for the inspector of the inquiry. The report and recommendations will be presented to me by the inspector when he has assessed all the evidence gathered throughout the inquiry.

Nuclear Explosions

Mr. Gould asked the Secretary of State for Energy what estimates he has made of the likelihood of any high-explosive bomb or non-nuclear missile penetrating the reactor core of a nuclear power station, in the event of a direct hit; and of what effect this would have in terms of blast, heat or radiation in the surrounding area.

Mr. Goodlad: As explained in my previous reply of 12 November to the hon. Member the general safety requirements for protection of nuclear power stations in the United Kingdom against external hazards are such as to give a considerable degree of protection against weapons. The precise consequences of a direct hit by a high explosive bomb or non-nuclear weapon would depend on the nature of the weapon concerned.

Public Companies (Shelter Accommodation)

Mr. Leigh asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will seek to provide effective shelter accommodation at their place of work for the employees of public companies under his control in the event of war.

Mr. Peter Walker: The Government will be developing general advice and guidance on these matters for implementation by industry.

CIVIL SERVICE

Trade Unions (Meeting)

55. **Mr. Parry** asked the Minister for the Civil Service when he last met representatives of Civil Service trade unions; and what subjects were discussed.

Mr. Hayhoe: On behalf of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, I met representatives of Customs and Excise trade union side last Wednesday to discuss manpower requirements within that Department.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Overseas Aid

Mr. Richard Page asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what was the amount budgeted for bilateral aid in 1983-84; and what was the amount spent on bilateral aid in 1983-84;

(2) what was the amount budgeted for multilateral aid in 1983-84; and what was the amount spent on multilateral aid in 1983-84.

Mr. Raison: The information requested for 1983-84 is as follows:

£ million

	Provision in spring supplementary estimate	*Outturn*
Multilateral	379,833	403,233
Bilateral	647,532	601,974
	*1,027,365	1,005,207

* This cash limit was reduced by £19·7 million to £1,007,674 million as announced in House of Commons on 27 July 1983.

In addition to the multilateral aid figure from voted expenditure shown above, the United Kingdom share of European Community overseas aid financed from within the EC budget and which is attributed to the aid programme in 1983-84 was £92·25 million against an original estimate of £100 million.

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will describe the administrative requirements which currently exist to reduce his Department's overseas aid budget by some specified national proportion which is related to decisions of the European Community to release stocks of food and monetary aid for disaster relief in Ethiopia; and whether he will discontinue any such practice of reduction forthwith.

Mr. Raison: Food and finance for disaster relief is provided from the European Community budget or, in the latter case, from the European development fund under article 137 of the Lomé convention. The United Kingdom share of budgetary expenditure is attributed to the public expenditure allocation for financing the United Kingdom aid programme.

In the case of Ethiopia, the amount so far allocated from the 1984 budget amounts to 34·2 MECU (£20·5 million). The United Kingdom share of this is about £4·55 million, although since the rate of expenditure is uncertain, this will not necessarily all be a charge on the aid programme in this financial year.

SCOTLAND

Scottish Development Agency

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list in the *Official Report* past, present and future Scottish Development Agency-funded environmental improvement projects in each of the Scottish constituencies.

Mr. Allan Stewart: I regret that full information cannot be provided except at disproportionate cost; but I will publish in the *Official Report* a table of investment expenditure in each Scottish constituency as soon as possible.

Mr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the approximate total number of jobs created in the past five years by Scottish Development Agency investments for each of the Scottish constituencies.

Mr. Allan Stewart: I regret that this information cannot be provided except at disproportionate cost.

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list in the *Official Report* past and present Scottish Development Agency investments in companies in each of the Scottish constituencies.

Mr. Allan Stewart: I regret that full information cannot be provided except at disproportionate cost; but I will publish in the *Official Report* a table of expenditure on environmental projects in each Scottish constituency as soon as possible.

Teachers (Early Retirement)

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many teachers have applied for, or expressed interest in, early retirement in each of the last four years;

(2) how many teachers obtained early retirement; and how many have expressed an interest in the current year even if the outcome is not yet known.

Mr. Allan Stewart: In the 1984-85 financial year, to the end of September, 745 teachers employed by local authorities obtained early retirement. The other information requested is not held centrally.

Pharmacy Contract

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for Scotland whether substantive negotiations on a new contract for pharmacy between the Government and the Pharmaceutical General Council (Scotland) will take place before a negotiated settlement between the pharmaceutical services negotiating committee and the Department of Health and Social Security is completed.

Mr. John MacKay: I can confirm that negotiations are taking place between my Department and the Pharmaceutical General Council (Scotland) in parallel with those taking place between the pharmaceutical services negotiating committee and the Department of Health and Social Security.

Personal Incomes

Mr. Donald Stewart asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the average weekly income of *(a)* men and *(b)* women full-time workers in Scotland as at April expressed in terms of modal range.

Mr. Younger: The modal range (in units of £10) of gross weekly earnings (not affected by absence) in April 1984 was £120-£130 for men (covering 7 per cent. of full-time adult male employees) and £89-£90 for women (covering 13 per cent. of adult female employees).

Mr. Donald Stewart asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the mean average wage of *(a)* men and *(b)* women full-time workers in Scotland as at April.

Mr. Younger: Figures on the average earnings of full-time adult male and female employees working a full week as at April 1984 are given in tables 12 and 13 respectively, of New Earnings Survey, 1984, part A, a copy of which is in the Library.

Bread and Flour Regulations

Mr. Home Robertson asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the bodies which were consulted by his Department prior to the drafting of the Bread and Flour (Scotland) Regulations.

Mr. John MacKay: The following bodies were consulted about the proposals to make new Bread and Flour (Scotland) Regulations:

Convention of Scottish Local Authorities
Scottish Branch of the Institute of Trading Standards Administration
Scottish Consumers Council
Association of Public Analysts
The Society of Scottish Directors of Consumer Protection
The Royal Environmental Health Institute of Scotland
The Faculty of Community Medicine
The British Medical Association, Scottish Branch
The Scottish Association of Master Bakers
The Federation of Bakers (Scottish Area)
CPC (UK) Ltd Brown and Polson Division
The Scottish Association of Milk Product Manufacturers
The North of Scotland Milk Marketing Board
The Aberdeen and District Milk Marketing Board
The Scottish Milk Marketing Board
The Scottish Dairy Trade Federation
Edinburgh School of Agriculture
The West of Scotland School of Agriculture
The North of Scotland College of Agriculture
The British Hotels and Caterers Association Scottish Division
The Association of Scottish Chambers of Commerce
The Wholesale Grocers' Association of Scotland
Scottish Grocers' Federation
The Scottish Retail Federation
The Scottish Co-operative Food Trade Association
The National Farmers Union of Scotland
The Scottish Trades Union Congress
The Institute of Food Science & Technology Scottish Branch

Consultation with these bodies first took place in May 1983 and again with revised proposals in March 1984.

Road Accidents

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will have discussions with Grampian regional council and the Grampian police authority on the incidence of accidents on the A92 Aberdeen-Fraserburgh road and the A952 Toll of Birness-Peterhead road which have occurred during the last two years with a view to ascertaining the need for road improvements.

Mr. Ancram: Officials of my Department maintain frequent contact with the regional council's roads department and with Grampian police to monitor accident trends on the trunk road section of the A92 and on the A952 and to assess the need for improvements to these roads.

Corstorphine Hill

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for Scotland when he intends to make a decision on the proposed and recommended designation of Corstorphine hill; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ancram: My right hon. Friend will make his decision on the proposal that Corstorphine hill should be statutorily designated as countryside when he has received the views of the Countryside Commission for Scotland, his advisers in such matters, and has considered these together with the case made by Edinburgh district council.

EC (Food Surpluses)

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what were the total costs incurred by his Department in the storage of European Economic Community food surpluses in Scotland for the last full year for which figures are available.

Mr. John MacKay: I would refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him today by my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

Milk

Mr. Nicholson asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the estimated cut-back in milk production to date in each of the board areas in Scotland since milk quotas were implemented.

Mr. John MacKay: The reductions in the period 1 April to 31 October 1984, compared to production in the same period of 1983, in the areas of the three Milk Marketing Boards in Scotland are:

	Per cent.
Scottish Milk Marketing Board	7·2
Aberdeen & District Milk Marketing Board	8·5
North of Scotland Milk Marketing Board	8·1

Grudie/Talladale Hydro-electric Scheme

Mr. Kennedy asked the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to be able to announce his decision on the proposed Grudie/Talladale hydro-electric scheme.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The proposals made by the North of Scotland Hydro-Electric Board are still under consideration by my right hon. Friend and his decision will be announced as soon as possible.

Glue Sniffing

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many cases have been brought to his notice involving glue sniffing in Lothian region and in Scotland for each of the last three years to date; how many deaths have occurred over each of the last five years to date; how many cases have been brought before the children's panel, to date; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John MacKay: Information is not available centrally on the number of cases reported by police to the procurator-fiscal involving solvent abuse, but the number is likely to be small in relation to the extent of the practice. Only those cases involving a criminal element such as house-breaking, theft, breach of the peace, or wilful and reckless conduct in relation to the sale of solvents to children would come to the notice of the procurator-fiscal.

The number of deaths from solvent abuse over the five years 1979-83 was:

	Lothian	*Total*
1979	1	2
1980	0	3
1981	0	9
1982	2	14
1983	2	10

I am advised that to date the total number of referrals to reporters to children's panels under the 1983 Act has been 612, of which 93 were in Lothian. Of these 270 were referred to a children's hearing, of which 12 were in Lothian.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Business Expansion Scheme

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he intends to review the conditions governing the business expansion scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moore: All aspects of the business expansion scheme are being closely monitored and, as my right hon. Friend recently told the House on 13 November at column 552, the picture which is emerging is most encouraging.

Profit Sharing

Mr. Alton asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many profit sharing schemes are in existence in the United Kingdom; how many employees are included in these schemes; what percentage of the United Kingdom work force is affected by such schemes; and what information he has as to the number and scale of such schemes in other countries;

(2) what information he has as to the average amount of money provided by profit sharing schemes as a percentage of an average employee's earnings.

Mr. Moore: At 31 October 792 employee share schemes of all kinds had been approved by the Inland Revenue. This total is made up of 439 profit sharing schemes, 349 savings-related share option schemes and four other share option schemes approved under the Finance Act 1984. In the year 1982-83, the most recent for which figures are available, the average initial value per employee of shares allocated under approved profit sharing schemes was £230; no information is available as to the average earnings of the 230,000 employees who are benefited under these schemes.

It is estimated that the total number of employees who, since 1979, have received shares or options over shares under all types of approved schemes is at least half a million — over 2 per cent. of the total working population. We have no statistics for schemes in other countries.

Mr. Alton asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if Her Majesty's Government are considering any proposals to encourage the use of profit sharing schemes in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Moore: We have already taken major steps to improve the tax incentives for employee share schemes. Since taking office in 1979 we have made significant improvements to the profit sharing reliefs and introduced new reliefs for two different types of share option scheme. Whenever we have moved a company from state control to the private sector we have given the employees an opportunity to acquire shares on preferential terms. The results of all these initiatives continue to be very encouraging. We shall keep them under close review.

Unemployment and Economic Growth

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the effect on *(a)* unemployment and *(b)* economic growth for the next four years of (i) a nil increase in earnings, (ii) a 3 per cent. per annum increase in earnings and *(c)* an increase in line with inflation, each sustained for one, two and three years, leaving other inputs on the Treasury model unchanged.

Mr. Peter Rees: Hon. Members have access to the Treasury model through the Library of the House. This facility may be used to obtain the required information.

Unit Labour Costs and Earnings

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the percentage change in unit labour costs and earnings between the latest available quarter in 1984 and the comparable quarter of *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* 1982 in the United Kingdom, West Germany, the United States of America, Japan and France.

Mr. Peter Rees: International data on unit labour costs and earnings can be found in Main Economic Indicators, published by the OECD.

Job Creation

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the number of new jobs which would be created each year if real wages remained unchanged; what proportion of the additional jobs would be *(a)* in manufacturing and *(b)* in low paid no-tech

services; and what effect this would have on interest rates, the exchange rate and the public sector borrowing requirement.

Mr. Peter Rees: My right hon. Friend has already given estimates of the scale of the increase in employment that would result, over a period of years, if real wages had been held constant between 1981 and 1984—on 30 October at column 1184—it is likely that the additional jobs would be spread throughout the economy. Within the monetary and fiscal framework set out in the MTFS lower real wage growth, brought about by slower growth in money wages, would also give lower interest rates, improved international competitiveness and scope for lower taxes.

North Sea Oil Revenues

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the estimate of North sea oil revenues for 1984-85 and 1985-86, assuming on average dollar to pound sterling ratio of *(a)* 1.40, *(b)* 1.30, *(c)* 1.20 and *(d)* 1.10.

Mr. Moore: Estimates of North sea oil revenues for 1984-85 and 1985-86 were given in the Autumn Statement on assumptions that dollar prices for North sea oil, and the dollar/sterling exchange rate, will not change much from the current levels. The magnitude of the changes in the exchange rate postulated by the hon. Member, if they represented a change in the value of the dollar against all currencies, could have implications for dollar oil prices and tax revenues which need to be considered together with the more direct effects of exchange rate changes on oil revenues resulting from oil's being priced in dollars. It is estimated that the marginal effect on total tax taken from the North sea of a sustained one per cent. change in the sterling oil price is of the order of £150 million in a full year.

Bank Notes

Mr. Skeet asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will seek to end the differences in practice in Scotland and England relating to the powers of some banks to issue bank notes.

Mr. Ian Stewart: No. There are no plans to alter the provisions relating to private note issue.

Manufactures

Mr. Deakins asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if it is an objective of United Kingdom economic policy to reverse the downward trend in the United Kingdom share of exports of manufactures by the main manufacturing countries.

Mr. Peter Rees: Government policy is designed to create conditions that will increase the competitiveness of all sections of United Kingdom industry including manufactures.

EC (Budgetary Discipline)

Mr. Deakins asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the EEC Council of Agriculture has approved the common position on budgetary discipline agreed by the Economic and Finance Ministers on 11 November.

Mr. Ian Stewart: Agriculture Ministers did not discuss the common position on budgetary discipline at their meeting on 12-13 November. The issue will go before Foreign Affairs Ministers at their meeting on 26 and 27 November.

Lever Report

Mr. Cohen asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list those parts of the Lever report on the debt problems of developing countries which he does not find acceptable; if he will give the reasons in each case; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Rees: I am not persuaded that global schemes such as those canvassed by the Lever report offer an effective solution to international debt problems.

Partnership Taxation

Mr. Tim Smith asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of the total tax paid by partnerships the £30 million of tax being avoided by partnerships and referred to in paragraph 13 of the Inland Revenue consultation document, "Partnership Taxation: Basis of Assessment", represents.

Mr. Moore: £30 million would be in the region of 2½ per cent. of the total tax charge on all partnerships.

Income Tax

Mr. Ewing asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list for each of the last 10 years the number of people who paid tax at *(a)* the standard rate and *(b)* each of the successive higher rate bands.

Mr. Moore: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Customs and Excise (Confiscated Books)

Mr. Dobson asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the grades of Customs and Excise officers involved in reading books confiscated from the Gay's the Word bookshop; how many are men; and how many women.

Mr. Hayhoe: In the first instance Customs officers in the grades of higher executive officer, executive officer and clerical officer were involved in reading books detained from the Gay's the Word bookshop. They were also subsequently examined by a senior executive officer and a principal. Of the officers concerned 30 were men and six were women.

Mr. Dobson asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many hours have been devoted by Customs and Excise officers to reading books confiscated from the Gay's the Word bookshop; and what is the total cost to date.

Mr. Hayhoe: As detailed records are not kept this information is not available.

Mr. Dobson asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what instructions have been given to Customs and Excise officers reading books confiscated from the Gay's the Word bookshop.

Mr. Hayhoe: Customs and Excise officers have been instructed to consider whether or not, in their opinion, the

books were indecent or obscene in accordance with contemporary standards as currently interpreted by the courts.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Young Persons (Rights)

Mr. Alton asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations the Government have made to the United Nations working group on the United Nations convention on the rights of the child with a view to the speeding up of the drafting process; and if any further representations are expected.

Mr. Renton: As a member of the working group, we are working to achieve a practical, balanced and useful instrument on the rights of the child. We will continue to do so.

Mr. Alton asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on United Nations General Assembly resolutions 36/29 and 37/47, concerning the rights of young people to education, vocational training and work; and whether the Government are satisfied that their present policies are compatible with these resolutions.

Mr. Renton: The United Kingdom delegation voted for resolution 36/29 and similar United Nations resolutions on this issue as our present policies were and are compatible with these resolutions.

We attach high priority to the provision of educational and vocational training services for young people.

Brussels (Representation)

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many of the 74 United Kingdom-based officers in the United Kingdom permanent representation in Brussels have current passports issued by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland; and how many also hold passports issued by other nations.

Mr. Renton: All United Kingdom-based officers in the United Kingdom permanent representation in Brussels have current passports issued by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. In the time available it has not been possible to determine whether any also hold passports issued by other nations. I will write to the hon. Member.

Israel (Export Licences)

Dr. Michael Clark asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will now lift the ban on issuing export licences to Israel for military equipment to enable Israel to purchase items from Britain as do some of her neighbours.

Mr. Luce: Restrictions on the issue of export licences for the sale of certain equipment to Israel are kept under close review. There are no immediate plans to lift them.

Iraq (Ministerial Visit)

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will make a statement on the Minister of State's visit to Iraq; and whether he took the opportunity to urge Iraqi leaders to agree to a ceasefire in the Gulf war and the implementation of outstanding resolutions of the Security Council.

Mr. Luce: My visit to Iraq was part of the normal pattern of Ministerial exchanges we have with the Iraqis. I discussed a number of bilateral and international issues during the visit, including the Iran-Iraq conflict. I made very clear our wish to see this distressing conflict brought to an early end. Iraqi leaders have frequently expressed their desire to see a ceasefire agreed as soon as possible.

Law of the Sea (Convention)

Mr. Douglas asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will detail the Government's current position in relation to the United Nations convention on the law of the sea, in particular whether it is proposed to sign the convention on or before 9 December; and what is the Government's policy towards the United States' overtures relating to a mini treaty of industrial nations.

Mr. Rifkind: Our policy towards the convention is being reviewed at present. British companies were encouraged to come to arrangements with other pioneers in deep seabed mining in order to avoid the possibility of overlaps of deep seabed sites. We have always recognised the need to ensure on a governmental level the results of the companies agreement and pursued discussions with other interested states. The result of these discussions is an agreement called a Provisional Understanding on Deep Seabed Matters which was signed on 3 August.

Mr. Craigen asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he is undertaking a ministerial review of Her Majesty's Government's policy towards the United Nations convention on the law of the sea; and if he will list the benefits and disadvantages to the United Kingdom of remaining a non-signatory to the convention.

Mr. Rifkind: Our policy towards the convention is being reviewed at present and the benefits and disadvantages of the convention are being considered.

Gibraltar

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Secretary of State for the Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the reason for the visit to his office of Gibraltar's Chief Minister and Deputy Chief Minister on 21 November; and if he will make a statement on what matters were discussed.

Mr. Renton: The meeting reviewed developments since my right hon. and learned Friend last saw Sir J. Hassan on 3 October. Discussion included a review of progress in the contacts with Spain which are aimed at achieving the full normalisation of relations between Gibraltar and Spain.

Hong Kong

Mr. Stanbrook asked the Secretary of State for the Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many persons not of Chinese descent were naturalised as citizens of the United Kingdm and Colonies in Hong Kong in each year since 1964, respectively, and as British Dependent

Territories citizens in 1983 and up to the latest available date in 1984; and what was their former nationality in each case.

Mr. Luce: The information requested is as follows:

Year	Total Number of Non-Chinese naturalised	Breakdown by former Nationality
As citizens of United Kingdom and Colonies		
1964	13	2 Burmese 2 Indonesians 4 Filipinos 5 Portuguese
1965	8	2 Burmese 1 Korean 4 Portuguese 1 Swiss
1966	10	2 Burmese 2 Indonesians 1 American 1 Israeli 4 Portuguese
1967	17	2 Burmese 2 Filipinos 10 Portuguese 1 Venezuelan 1 Hungarian 1 Pole
1968	11	2 Burmese 1 Indonesian 1 South African 2 Filipinos 3 Portuguese 2 South Vietnamese
1969	8	3 Burmese 1 Indonesian 1 Filipino 3 Portuguese
1970	17	3 Burmese 1 Indonesian 1 American 2 Israelis 1 Peruvian 1 Cuban 8 Portuguese
1971	12	1 Burmese 1 Indonesian 4 Americans 2 South Africans 1 Cambodian 2 Filipinos 1 Portuguese
1972	7	1 American 2 Israelis 2 Filipinos 2 Portuguese
1973	6	1 American 3 Filipinos 2 Portuguese
1974	6	1 South African 1 Israeli 1 Filipino 1 Korean 1 Portuguese 1 British Protected Person (North Borneo)
1975	15	1 Indonesian 5 Pakistanis 1 American 1 South African 1 Israeli 3 Cambodians 1 Filipino 1 Portuguese 1 Nepalese
1976	12	4 Pakistanis 1 American 2 South Africans 1 Israeli 1 Cambodian 2 Filipinos 1 Portuguese
1977	14	4 Burmese 4 Pakistanis 1 South African 3 Israelis 1 Filipino 1 South Vietnamese
1978	5	1 Burmese 1 South African 2 Portuguese 1 British Protected Person (Brunei)
1979	4	1 Indonesian 1 Pakistani 1 South African 1 Portuguese
1980	6	1 Burmese 1 Pakistani 1 South African 1 Israeli 1 Filipino 1 British Protected Person (Tanganyika)
1981	2	2 Burmese
1982	4	3 Burmese 1 Pakistani
As British Dependent Territories Citizens		
1983	1	1 Burmese
1984*	5	3 Burmese 1 American 1 Portuguese

* To 23 November.

Mr. Stanbrook asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he will make a statement on the policy of the Government with regard to the pension rights of members of the overseas Civil Service now serving, or who have served, in Hong Kong;

(2) if Her Majesty's Government will undertake to provide for the pension rights of members of the overseas Civil Service serving, or who have served, in Hong Kong, on terms not less favourable than those negotiated with successive Governments elsewhere in the Commonwealth;

(3) what arrangements have been made with the Government of the Chinese Republic to safeguard the pension rights of those members of Her Majesty's overseas Civil Service who have served, or are still serving, in Hong Kong.

Mr. Luce: Section IV of annex I to the joint declaration initialled by the British and Chinese sides on 26 September states that the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) Government shall pay to public servants in Hong Kong

"who retire or complete their contracts, as well as to those who have retired before 1 July 1997, or to their dependents, all pensions, gratuities, allowances and benefits due to them on terms no less favourable than before, and irrespective of their nationality or place of residence."

We are confident that the arrangments set out in the draft agreement provide full security for the payment of pensions of both serving and retired civil servants, including members of Her Majesty' Overseas Civil Service (HMOCS), and their dependants. It is not possible to define at this stage the exact arrangements which will be made for the payment of pensions by the SAR Government after 1997 to former HMOCS officers.

Mr. Stanbrook asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his estimate of the total number of those persons in Hong Kong entitled under the United Kingdom memorandum attached to the draft agreement between Her Majesty's Government and the Chinese Government to retain an appropriate status after 1 July 1997; and how many of these are Hong Kong Chinese compatriots as defined in the Chinese memorandum attached to the draft agreement.

Mr. Luce: Approximately three million persons who are now British Dependent Territories citizens by virtue of a connection with Hong Kong (Hong Kong BDTCs) will be eligible to retain with effect from 1 July 1997 the appropriate status referred to in the United Kingdom memorandum. This number is estimated to rise to around 4·1 million in 1997. Although this is a matter for the Chinese Government, I believe that some 6,000 of those who are currently Hong Kong BDTCs may not be considered to be Chinese compatriots in terms of the Chinese memorandum.

Mr. Stanbrook asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what arrangements have been made for the nationality of those British Dependent Territories' citizens in Hong Kong who, after 1 July 1997, will lose their citizenship and who are not eligible to be Chinese nationals.

Mr. Luce: All persons who on 30 June 1997 are British Dependent Territories citizens by virtue of a connection with Hong Kong are eligible to retain the appropriate status referred to in the United Kingdom memorandum, irrespective of whether or not they are eligible to be Chinese nationals.

Palestine Liberation Organisation

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will describe the circumstances in which he met Mr. Faisal Oweida, described as a representative of the Palestine Liberation Organisation, in Blackpool on 11 October; and whether this represents any change in Government policy towards ministerial contacts of this kind.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: Mr. Faisal Oweida was briefly introduced to me at a reception given by the Conservative Middle East Council in Brighton on 11 October. This does not represent any change in Government policy.

Mr. John Sprange

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) whether he will give details of the Berlin legal authorities' consultations with him before deciding to prosecute Mr. John Sprange and another person for flying a hot air balloon into East Berlin;

(2) whether the British Government have helped Mr. Sprange retrieve his hot air balloon from East Berlin;

(3) how long the Berlin authorities took to decide to prosecute Mr. Sprange.

Mr. Renton: A British representative asked the Soviet authorities in Berlin twice last year for the balloon to be returned. There was no response. Further approaches to the Soviet authorities were made on 24 and 31 October 1984, and on 7 November.

The Berlin prosecutor applied to the Allied Kommandatura on 11 November 1983 for permission for the German courts to exercise jurisdiction with respect to the alleged violation of the law. On 30 November 1983 the Legal Committee of the Allied Kommandatura granted permission. The Berlin legal authorities then proceeded with the prosecution.

Tristan da Cunha (Generators)

Dr. Marek asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which firm constructed the wind-powered electricity generator that was blown down on Tristan da Cunha; and who were the consulting engineers.

Mr. Renton: The wind turbine was manufactured by Wind-Matic a/s of Denmark and installed by the Tristan authorities. The consulting engineers were the Cranfield Institute of Technology.

Dr. Marek asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the payment to Tristan Investments Ltd. for its supply and use of electricity generators on Tristan da Cunha.

Mr. Renton: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to his question of 12 November at column *124*, in which I said that responsibility for the provision of electricity on Tristan da Cunha lies with the Island council. Information regarding payments is therefore not readily available. I will write to the hon. Member.

Wirebird

Dr. Marek asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what evidence he has for his statement that the wirebird, endemic to St. Helena, is not threatened with extinction.

Mr. Renton: The evidence of expert visitors and long-term residents over recent years is that the wirebird is not a threatened species and that the population is now stable. Wirebirds have been protected by law since 1894. They are believed to have eleven separate breeding localities and have no major predators. The upland pastures the bird inhabits have suffered some encroachment from human habitation but are likely to remain in sufficient quantity.

Libya (Gas Pipeline)

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance Her Majesty's

Government have given to British companies to secure contracts relating to the construction of a gas pipeline in Libya; and if he will list the companies involved.

Mr. Channon: I have been asked to reply.

I am unaware of any British involvement in the construction of any gas pipeline in Libya at the present time.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Visiting Forces Act

Mr. Ashdown asked the Attorney-General whether he will provide statistics for the number of United States personnel stationed in the United Kingdom who were granted immunity from prosecution under British law according to the Visiting Forces Act for each year since 1980; and whether he will provide an analysis of these figures according to the type of offence and the service to which the offender belongs.

Mr. Mellor: I have been asked to reply.

The Visiting Forces Act 1952 does not grant any general immunity from British legal process. In certain cases the authorities of a visiting force, including those of the United States, are permitted to exercise the primary jurisdiction but information about such cases is not held centrally and could not be obtained without disproportionate cost.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Social Security Review

Mr. Tony Lloyd asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) when he expects the results of the social security review to be published;

(2) if he will ensure the full publication of the results of the social security review;

(3) if he will ensure that adequate time is made available for public discussion on the conclusion of the social security reviews prior to the introduction of any necessary legislation;

(4) if he will ensure that no steps are taken to implement the recommendations of the social security review until they have been debated in the House.

Mr. Newton: We expect to publish our conclusions and proposals in the early part of next year. This will provide a basis for further public discussion; and the hon. Member will be aware that no proposals requiring legislation could be implemented without Parliament having the opportunity to debate them.

Mr. Kennedy asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether his publication of the finding of the social security review will come in the form of a White or a Green Paper; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: The form in which the Government's conclusions and proposals for change are to be published has not yet been decided.

Hypothermia

Mr. Alton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many cases of hypothermia are reported each year in the United Kingdom; what is the urban and rural breakdown of these cases; and what is the estimated cost of treating these cases each year in the United Kingdom.

Mr. John Patten: The estimated number of discharges and deaths from NHS hospitals of patients with the main diagnosis of hypothermia in the United Kingdom in 1982 was 2,570. It is not possible from the information held centrally to provide a breakdown of these cases between urban and rural areas. The cost of treating these patients is estimated to have been about £5 million at current prices.

Housing Benefit

Mrs. Rumbold asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what steps he has taken to rectify the discrepancies arising in the joint administration of unified housing benefit by his Department and local authorities.

Mr. Whitney: An independent review of the housing benefit scheme has been set up with the improvement of the scheme's administration as one of its main objectives. However it has always been recognised that close co-operation and mutual understanding between local authorities and DHSS local offices is essential to the smooth running of the scheme. To encourage this a circular was issued earlier this year stressing the need for close local liaison and clarifying and underlining points that were causing difficulty. A copy of the circular (HB (84)2: Local Authority and Local Office Liaison) is available in the Library.

Health Authorities (Food Hygiene)

Mr. Gregory asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will estimate expenditure incurred for training in food hygiene by health authorities in England in each year since 1978; and what is the planned expenditure for 1984 and 1985.

Mr. John Patten: We do not collect the information requested centrally.

Hospitals (Food Poisoning)

Mr. Gregory asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many cases, as opposed to outbreaks, of food poisoning in hospital premises in England were reported for each year since 1978.

Mr. John Patten: The number of staff and patients in hospital premises in England and Wales affected by food poisoning and salmonellosis reported to the communicable diseases centre was 1979—776, 1980—457, 1981—313, 1982—789, and 1983—799.

Benefit Claimants

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what considerations he bears in mind when deciding whether an individual diagnosed as suffering from an illness has to present himself or herself in person at a local office of his Department for the receipt of benefit.

Mr. Whitney: Payments of benefit are normally sent to claimants by post. If the Department considers that the postal delivery arrangements at a claimant's address are unsafe, he may be asked to collect his benefit from the

local office. If he is unable to do this because of the nature of his illness, he can authorise someone else to collect it for him.

Westminster Hospital (Cardiac Surgery Services)

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will estimate the effect on recruitment of anaesthetists, intensive care and operating theatre nurses and on the quality of training for medical students of the proposal by the Victoria health authority to close the cardiac surgery services in Westminster hospital.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: In view of the concern expressed by my hon. Friend and others about the possible effects of the proposal to close the cardiac surgery unit at the Westminster hospital I am writing to the chairman of Victoria health authority informing her that my right hon. Friend will take the final decision following the outcome of local consultation. We will take account of the effects on staff recruitment and medical education in coming to our decision.

Claims

Mr. Freud asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many administrative staff deal with social security claims; and what are the number of social security claimants and the ratio of staff to claimants for each of the last five years *(a)* nationally, *(b)* at the King's Lynn, *(c)* at the Peterborough and *(d)* at the Cambridge local offices of his Department, respectively.

Mr. Whitney: I assume the hon. Member to be concerned with the staffing of local social security offices which is described in a guide held in the Library.

The number of staff allocated *(a)* to all local offices, *(b)* at the King's Lynn, *(c)* at the Peterborough and *(d)* at the Cambridge local offices of the Department at 1 November for each of the last five years is as follows:

	1980	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*
All local offices	62,424	63,642	61,871	56,703	57,420
King's Lynn	204	208	207	193	192
Peterborough	249	271	257	234	242
Cambridge	215	221	205	181	199

It would be disproportionately expensive to provide statistics — which for some benefits are kept for the number of claimants and for others of the number of claims made — to match the table. In any case staffing levels are fixed by reference to workloads and the latter will vary in relation to policy changes (e.g., the introduction of housing benefit) and procedural changes (e.g., the introduction of a postal claim form for supplementary benefit for the unemployed.)

Widows (Funeral Costs)

Mr. Penhaligon asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is his estimate of the number of widows who lose entitlement towards funeral costs because the death of their husband transfers them from supplementary benefit to widows' benefit.

Mr. Whitney: This information is not available.

Wills (Investigations)

Mr. Ewing asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if he will instruct his Department's investigators to stop immediately the practice of checking the wills of elderly deceased people;

(2) what representations he has received from the relatives of elderly deceased people whose wills have been examined by investigators of his Department;

(3) what is the total amount recovered to date from the estates of elderly deceased persons whose wills have been examined by investigators from his Department:

(4) if he will list in the *Official Report* the local offices of his Department from where investigators have carried out examinations of the wills of elderly deceased people;

(5) on what date instructions were issued by his office to investigators of his Department to examine the wills of elderly deceased people.

Mr. Whitney: Information about an estate including the will itself is available to any member of the public (and often publicised in newspapers) and it would clearly be wrong for the Department to ignore such information where it indicates that supplementary benefit may have been overpaid. Since 1959 such information has been sought by all local offices on a routine basis from the probate authorities when the death of a supplementary benefit recipient comes to the Department's notice. The will itself may be obtained in appropriate cases, but this is not normally necessary. These procedures are referred to in paragraph 15721 of the 'S' manual, a copy of which is in the Library, and they have resulted in a total of £3,573,108 of overpaid Supplementary Benefit being paid back to the Department in 1983-84.

No central record is kept of individual correspondence with executors or relatives of deceased people. The Department's offices are expected to handle all these matters with sympathy and propriety.

We have no plans to change these procedures.

NHS (Ancillary Services)

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on the fall in the percentage of contracting out of ancillary services in the National Health Service between 1978-79 and 1983-84.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Unemployment Benefits (Computer)

Mr. Garrett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what financial aid is available from Her Majjesty's Government to British firms working to tender for the contracts to install the national unemployment benefits computer system; and when he will announce the name of the company whose tender has been accepted.

Mr. Whitney: There is no Government aid specifically for work connected with tendering for the contracts to install the national unemployment benefit computer system. General questions of financial aid for British firms are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. We expect to announce the name of the company whose tender for terminals has been accepted toward the end of January 1985. A contract for the main frame computer equipment was awarded to ICL on 20 November.

Mr. Garrett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what percentage, by value, the national unemployment benefits computer system will be installed in his Department's headquarters at Newcastle upon Tyne.

Mr. Whitney: None of the equipment being purchased for the national unemployment benefit system is to be installed at our Newcastle upon Tyne central office.

Spectacles (Retailers)

Mr. Corbett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will seek powers to prohibit advertising by unqualified retailers of spectacles until such time as qualified and registered opticians are legally entitled to advertise.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Supplementary Benefit

Mr. Tony Lloyd asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he has any plans to make postal applications the standard method of application for supplementary benefit or pensions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Whitney: I refer the hon. Member to my hon. Friend's reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Mr. Bowden) on 30 October at column *962*.

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is his most recent estimate of the number of supplementary benefit payments that are subject to deductions under section 6 of the Social Security (No. 2) Act 1980 *(a)* in Great Britain and *(b)* in Scotland.

Mr. Newton: All supplementary benefit payments to strikers are subject to deductions under section 6 of the Social Security (No. 2) Act 1980. Cumulative totals of such payments for 1984 up to 23 October are as follows:

	Number
(a) Great Britain	1,194,258
(b) Scotland	74,045

AIDS

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what funds he has allocated through the Medical Research Council for research into the causes of and cure for AIDS; whether he has any plans to increase this amount; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: I have been asked to reply.

It is for the Medical Research Council (MRC) to decide on its scientific priorities within the resources available to it from its grant-in-aid and its income from other sources. I understand the the MRC is at present providing grants for research into the causes of and cures for AIDS to a total value of £369,000, of which £58,500 has been provided by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services. The council is always willing to consider soundly based research proposals for support through its grant scheme in competition with other applications.

Board and Lodging Payment

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what were the average numbers of weekly payments for board and lodgings in Scotland since 1980 for tiers i, ii and iii;

(2) what were the average numbers of weekly payments for board and lodgings in Scotland for each individual tier for November to March 1983 to 1984 and April to September 1984.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 16 November 1984, c. *384*]: Information is not available in the form requested. The available information, derived from the annual statistical enquiries carried out each November/December, is as follows:

Supplementary benefit claimants in board and lodging accomodation in Scotland.

	Ordinary board and lodging accommodation and hostels	*Private and voluntary residential care and nursing homes*
1980	5,000	Not available
1981	7,000	Not available
1982	8,000	fewer than 500
1983	9,000	1,000

Notes

1. Separate information is not available in respect of claimants in residential care and nursing homes in Scotland for 1980 and 1981.
2. 1983 figures are provisional.

ENVIRONMENT

Palace of Westminster (Restoration)

58. **Mr. Janner** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects the restoration of the Palace of Westminster to be completed.

Sir George Young: Assuming present expenditure levels can be maintained, restoration of the exterior stonework should be complete by around the turn of the decade.

High Grade Oil from Waste (Manchester)

59. **Mr. Litherland** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has for the continuance after 1986 of the programme for deriving high-grade oil from waste materials run by the Greater Manchester county council in the event of the abolition of that council.

Mr. Waldegrave: I cannot yet predict the future after 1986 for this programme which is run by the Greater Manchester council. Further development will depend on financial support and on the voluntary cooperative arrangements proposed for waste disposal by the district councils in the light of their consideration of the Government's consultation document "Streamlining the Cities: Waste Disposal".

Knowsley

Mr. Sean Hughes asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what proportion of Knowsley district council's current expenditure 1984-85 will be met by funding from central Government; and how this compares with the last financial year.

Mr. Waldegrave: On the basis of Knowsley's 1984-85 budget return, relevant specific grants and block grant account for 54 per cent. of net revenue expenditure (to be met from rates, block grant, relevant specific grants and rate fund balances). The equivalent percentage for 1983-84, based on outturn returns, is 58 per cent.

Local Authorities (Advertising)

Mr. Adley asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to amend the law regarding the power of local authorities to advertise; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: Any changes to the discretionary powers under which local authorities issue publicity and advertising material require very careful consideration. I hope to put shortly to the House my proposals for a thorough and dispassionate inquiry into certain aspects of conduct of local authority business. The use of advertising powers is a factor which could well be examined in that context.

Unfit Houses

Mr. Thurnham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has plans to amend at an early date the legislation covering compensation for unfit houses acquired compulsorily; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gow: The rules for compensating owner-occupiers and landlords whose unfit properties are bought compulsorily are being considered as part of the Government's review of private sector home improvement policy. We hope to publish our proposals shortly in a consultation document.

Block Grant

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the total block grant paid to local authorities at budget and each supplementary grant stage in each year from 1981-82 to 1984-85, showing in each case *(a)* block grant, *(b)* holdback and *(c)* block grant net of holdback.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The information is as follows:

		Block grant £ million	*Holdback* £ million	*Block grant net of holdback* £ million
1981-82 Main Report		8,364	—	8,364
Supplementary reports	1st	8,490	—	8,490
	2nd	8,490	201	8,289
	3rd	8,470	124	8,346
	4th	8,469	123	8,346
1982-83 Main Report		8,682	—	8,682
Supplementary reports	1st	8,612	308	8,304
	2nd	8,581	232	8,349
1983-84 Main Report		8,730	—	8,730
Supplementary reports	1st	8,729	280	8,449
	2nd	8,685	280	8,405
1984-85 Main Report		8,631	—	8,631
Supplementary report		8,631	452	8,179

Note:
The figures in columns 1 and 3 include payments made to bodies specified under section 56(9) of the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980.

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the estimated block grant receipts of each *(a)* non-metropolitan county, *(b)* metropolitan district, *(c)* London borough, *(d)* metropolitan county and *(e)* London precepting authority at each supplementary report stage in each year from 1981-82 to 1984-85, showing the percentage change in block grant receipt in each authority between 1981-82, original budget, and 1984-85, original budget.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: The information requested is in the following tables. The figures for London boroughs include for 1981-82 grant received in respect of the Greater London council and the Metropolitan police; and for 1982-83 grant received in respect of the Metropolitan police.

£ million

	1981-82				*1982-83*		*1983-84*		*1984-85*	
	First supplementary report	*Second supplementary report*	*Third supplementary report*	*Fourth supplementary report*	*First supplementary report*	*Second supplementary report*	*First supplementary report*	*Second supplementary report*	*First supplementary report*	
Avon	133·2	123·9	124·9	124·9	121·9	120·9	115·8	115·0	102·8	−2·00
Bedfordshire	60·5	56·4	56·2	56·4	52·6	59·2	63·4	62·9	60·1	5·52
Berkshire	61·9	61·9	61·8	61·4	44·5	54·6	52·2	51·4	33·9	−15·02
Buckinghamshire	55·9	56·0	55·9	56·6	58·4	56·5	53·8	53·2	57·6	4·56
Cambridgeshire	72·0	72·0	72·4	72·7	75·2	73·9	76·3	75·7	74·7	9·38
Cheshire	138·2	127·2	141·2	141·5	120·7	131·0	129·5	128·7	100·6	−1·82
Cleveland	111·5	104·9	104·2	104·1	100·5	99·0	103·1	102·6	92·0	6·15
Cornwall	68·4	68·4	67·7	67·8	70·6	71·8	72·4	72·1	73·3	8·91
Cumbria	94·3	90·6	92·0	92·0	91·4	93·1	91·6	91·3	91·4	3·06
Derbyshire	147·8	147·8	148·9	148·8	147·4	144·4	146·3	145·6	132·8	7·75
Devon	139·0	139·0	139·3	139·1	142·8	140·5	141·8	141·1	144·5	3·39
Dorset	69·4	69·4	71·7	71·8	66·1	64·6	63·5	63·0	61·5	−8·41
Durham	123·2	118·3	119·7	119·6	119·4	118·8	122·8	122·5	120·5	0·97
East Sussex	69·4	67·6	69·7	69·7	66·5	64·6	63·6	63·0	61·8	−11·34
Essex	154·4	154·5	156·3	156·6	151·1	146·4	154·1	152·6	144·1	−5·21
Gloucestershire	70·6	70·6	70·4	70·5	71·2	69·8	70·9	70·5	70·4	−0·90
Hampshire	186·8	186·8	187·1	187·1	187·6	183·3	188·4	187·0	186·9	−0·89
Hereford and Worcester	85·2	85·2	86·5	86·8	86·9	85·2	88·9	88·3	88·6	3·57
Hertfordshire	90·5	90·5	90·5	90·3	83·6	80·1	78·1	77·0	70·5	−21·72
Humberside	168·6	161·3	159·6	159·6	163·8	165·8	165·2	164·6	165·8	8·28
Isle of Wight	18·4	18·4	18·4	18·4	19·9	19·6	20·5	20·4	20·1	13·52
Kent	208·0	208·0	211·3	212·1	212·6	209·8	220·7	219·5	219·2	6·53
Lancashire	264·9	264·9	263·6	264·0	271·8	269·0	275·4	274·5	279·0	9·77
Leicestershire	126·8	126·8	129·8	129·8	132·0	129·7	134·9	134·2	136·2	8·90
Lincolnshire	92·8	92·8	93·6	93·7	96·0	94·8	97·0	96·6	96·9	6·39
Norfolk	92·9	92·9	93·3	93·4	94·4	93·6	93·2	92·6	92·6	−0·09
Northamptonshire	75·2	75·2	76·6	76·8	83·3	81·9	86·7	86·3	84·9	24·11
Northumberland	54·9	54·3	54·6	54·6	53·2	54·1	54·4	54·2	50·2	0·85
North Yorkshire	111·5	111·5	112·6	112·7	111·6	110·1	111·4	111·0	108·2	−3·64
Nottinghamshire	174·7	165·5	171·8	171·7	161·3	161·3	169·0	168·3	167·7	4·12

	1981-82				1982-83		1983-84		1984-85	
	First supplementary report	Second supplementary report	Third supplementary report	Fourth supplementary report	First supplementary report	Second supplementary report	First supplementary report	Second supplementary report	First supplementary report	
Oxfordshire	58·6	57·0	58·0	58·1	55·2	53·6	53·8	53·3	49·8	−16·90
Shropshire	62·2	62·2	62·6	62·8	65·6	64·3	68·1	67·8	67·3	9·05
Somerset	64·6	64·6	64·6	64·6	65·8	64·8	65·3	64·9	65·5	3·31
Staffordshire	158·2	152·4	157·3	157·4	159·9	160·3	167·0	166·2	158·4	9·07
Suffolk	75·5	75·5	76·0	76·3	79·7	78·1	80·6	80·1	78·7	1·51
Surrey	72·8	72·8	73·1	73·2	66·6	63·3	56·1	55·1	49·0	−33·17
Warwickshire	60·3	60·3	61·9	62·0	62·3	61·0	62·6	62·2	61·9	1·41
West Sussex	60·3	60·3	60·4	60·3	58·7	56·7	58·7	58·0	59·0	−3·86
Wiltshire	82·9	82·9	83·2	83·3	86·8	85·5	87·3	86·9	87·4	5·89
Greater Manchester										
Bolton	49·8	49·8	50·2	50·2	52·0	51·9	54·1	54·0	54·8	10·14
Bury	30·3	28·8	29·3	29·3	29·2	28·9	31·4	31·3	30·7	0·29
Manchester	110·3	108·2	109·6	109·8	99·8	93·8	96·6	96·2	90·6	−18·10
Oldham	49·6	49·6	49·8	49·9	49·5	49·0	51·8	51·6	52·3	8·02
Rochdale	48·5	46·6	46·5	46·3	47·7	47·4	49·8	49·6	49·1	7·52
Salford	54·8	54·8	56·5	56·5	53·4	53·4	54·7	54·6	53·9	0·57
Stockport	40·4	40·4	40·0	40·0	39·8	38·8	39·6	39·4	38·8	−4·17
Tameside	45·6	45·2	44·4	44·3	44·5	44·8	46·3	46·2	45·8	5·51
Trafford	24·9	24·9	25·0	24·9	24·0	23·2	22·5	22·3	21·0	−18·62
Wigan	61·0	59·6	59·7	59·7	59·5	61·3	62·4	62·2	60·5	3·93
Merseyside										
Knowsley	39·5	38·0	39·5	39·4	37·5	38·0	38·6	38·5	37·7	2·82
Liverpool	120·8	115·4	114·7	114·6	112·1	111·3	118·4	118·0	115·1	−1·03
St. Helens	34·3	33·8	33·1	33·1	33·6	33·1	35·1	34·9	34·6	8·07
Sefton	47·0	47·0	46·9	46·8	46·0	45·7	45·6	45·3	44·2	−5·88
Wirral	55·1	55·1	55·2	55·2	55·6	54·5	57·6	57·4	56·6	3·88
South Yorkshire										
Barnsley	48·7	47·8	47·7	47·7	46·5	46·7	48·4	48·3	47·8	3·60
Doncaster	58·3	58·3	57·6	57·6	55·5	56·0	57·5	57·3	57·5	7·49
Rotherham	53·7	53·7	53·2	53·2	52·0	51·6	53·4	53·3	53·7	2·32
Sheffield	96·8	90·2	89·8	89·9	86·0	86·1	83·2	82·8	84·3	5·01
Tyne and Wear										
Gateshead	42·8	42·4	42·1	42·1	40·8	40·5	42·7	42·6	42·1	2·55
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	46·3	45·2	46·1	46·1	36·8	35·6	37·6	37·4	35·0	−8·22
North Tyneside	38·6	38·6	38·2	38·2	36·3	36·4	37·2	37·1	37·4	5·87
South Tyneside	39·5	39·1	39·5	39·5	38·1	38·1	39·1	39·0	37·9	−1·76
Sunderland	63·7	61·4	61·0	61·0	60·6	61·7	62·8	62·6	58·9	6·92
West Midlands										
Birmingham	163·7	156·6	163·5	162·5	161·0	156·1	177·2	176·2	180·3	9·77
Coventry	56·1	56·1	56·2	56·0	58·0	57·4	58·6	58·4	56·7	3·80
Dudley	30·3	30·3	31·1	31·2	31·3	30·6	34·1	33·9	34·7	11·86
Sandwell	40·7	36·6	36·6	36·4	42·7	42·9	49·4	49·1	50·0	22·31
Solihull	25·1	25·1	24·9	24·9	26·5	25·9	27·5	27·3	26·5	9·94
Walsall	40·2	37·1	37·3	37·8	36·3	35·5	42·7	42·4	43·5	18·66
Wolverhampton	43·7	40·4	40·4	40·8	43·3	42·4	44·9	44·6	44·2	13·51
West Yorkshire										
Bradford	99·9	100·0	100·1	100·2	103·5	102·7	110·5	110·3	110·0	19·55
Calderdale	41·2	40·9	41·9	42·0	41·3	41·7	43·0	43·0	43·2	9·85
Kirklees	78·0	75·6	76·2	76·2	82·8	82·1	86·6	86·4	88·0	16·96
Leeds	115·1	115·2	115·3	115·4	117·2	111·7	117·1	116·6	117·3	1·86
Wakefield	55·2	55·2	54·3	54·2	53·1	52·5	54·7	54·5	54·6	2·39
City of London	19·5	17·0	16·8	16·2	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·00
Camden	14·5	13·4	13·3	12·9	7·8	7·8	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·00
Greenwich	31·4	29·5	29·5	29·2	27·5	27·4	22·8	22·7	21·4	18·84
Hackney	42·4	41·6	41·9	41·8	41·9	40·9	42·7	42·7	41·2	25·41
Hammersmith and Fulham	32·1	31·8	31·8	31·6	32·6	32·1	32·6	32·5	30·7	14·56
Islington	25·7	25·2	26·4	27·4	27·5	28·4	21·7	21·6	0·0	−2·01
Kensington and Chelsea	13·1	12·4	13·5	13·0	11·0	15·0	10·6	10·5	7·2	46·99
Lambeth	51·4	47·1	51·4	51·2	52·5	54·5	44·2	44·1	32·4	8·10
Lewisham	48·4	46·0	44·1	44·0	44·2	44·5	42·6	42·5	38·7	5·32
Southwark	44·6	44·0	42·9	43·1	41·6	37·4	32·6	32·5	13·7	0·00
Tower Hamlets	28·9	26·1	28·4	28·3	23·7	25·8	22·4	22·3	18·9	1·46
Wandsworth	45·3	44·9	44·3	44·3	45·2	43·0	45·8	45·7	44·9	15·85
Westminster	42·3	39·0	38·8	37·6	22·3	22·2	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·00
Barking and Dagenham	27·1	27·0	26·4	26·3	25·9	26·4	25·7	25·6	24·3	20·51
Barnet	40·4	40·2	40·0	39·8	40·9	40·0	34·0	33·7	31·1	−3·79
Bexley	43·1	43·0	43·1	43·1	42·1	43·3	43·9	43·7	43·0	14·86
Brent	57·2	52·4	51·8	51·8	60·1	56·6	51·8	51·5	50·3	30·23
Bromley	49·1	49·0	49·2	48·9	47·1	46·2	43·2	43·0	41·5	−1·49
Croydon	54·2	54·0	53·1	52·6	51·3	50·3	43·7	43·4	41·7	−7·95
Ealing	52·6	52·5	52·3	51·8	57·5	57·8	54·6	54·4	53·6	17·25
Enfield	42·9	42·8	42·6	42·3	41·4	43·1	41·7	41·4	39·9	13·12
Haringey	58·3	56·1	57·1	57·0	60·0	59·2	51·7	51·6	50·2	19·25
Harrow	31·3	31·2	30·9	30·8	29·7	32·2	30·5	30·4	29·6	11·87
Havering	42·9	42·8	42·8	42·9	43·2	42·7	41·6	41·4	41·4	9·40
Hillingdon	29·8	29·6	28·8	28·6	24·5	25·4	20·4	20·1	18·3	−16·13
Hounslow	29·6	25·6	26·2	25·4	23·6	27·2	21·3	21·1	14·6	4·57
Kingston-upon-Thames	19·6	19·5	19·3	19·1	19·0	18·5	16·8	16·6	15·5	−0·96
Merton	29·8	29·7	29·7	29·5	28·4	28·0	26·2	26·1	25·5	1·90
Newham	64·7	61·3	60·3	60·2	70·1	71·2	68·9	68·7	72·6	30·44
Redbridge	39·4	39·3	39·1	39·0	40·7	40·0	38·6	38·4	37·5	8·72
Richmond-upon-Thames	24·9	24·8	24·9	24·7	22·4	21·8	18·4	18·2	16·4	−15·60

	1981-82				1982-83		1983-84		1984-85	*
	First supplementary report	Second supplementary report	Third supplementary report	Fourth supplementary report	First supplementary report	Second supplementary report	First supplementary report	Second supplementary report	First supplementary report	
Sutton	27·6	27·5	27·5	27·3	27·1	26·5	25·0	24·8	25·1	2·94
Waltham Forest	54·8	51·6	51·1	50·9	57·5	57·7	62·1	62·0	61·3	26·36
Greater Manchester	107·7	100·5	100·3	100·2	103·2	102·4	101·7	101·2	102·6	17·55
Merseyside	74·7	69·6	69·5	70·1	69·8	69·6	68·0	67·8	62·5	22·21
South Yorkshire	72·6	67·6	65·8	65·9	68·5	70·3	68·5	68·3	62·3	5·59
Tyne and Wear	69·3	65·4	65·2	65·2	72·9	73·9	75·6	75·4	75·8	24·42
West Midlands	80·8	70·4	73·0	73·6	69·9	66·6	68·3	67·7	65·8	19·75
West Yorkshire	102·3	96·8	94·7	94·9	95·2	94·9	100·6	100·3	103·0	11·70
Greater London Council	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	26·5	126·1	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·00
I.L.E.A.	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·00
Met Police M	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	137·6	136·6	137·8	+100·00

* Percentage change 1981-82 budget to 1984-85 budget.

Water Rates

Mr. Wainwright asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what he expects to be the impact of the proposals for targets for water authorities on the water rates levied in the Yorkshire water authority's area; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Macfarlane: The increase in charges is expected to be above the general rate of inflation, but I cannot be more precise because agreements on financial targets for individual water authorities have yet to be reached and the actual effect on charges will only become clear when the authority fixes its budget early next year.

Access to the Countryside

Mr. Greenway asked the Secretary of State for the Environment against what criteria grants are made to bodies concerned with access to the countryside; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: The Department's direct grants to bodies concerned with access to the countryside are made under the special grants programme. This programme is intended to assist national and regional voluntary organisations carrying out activities which further the Department's policy objectives. Priority is given to organisations encouraging practical voluntary action. Applications from voluntary organisations concerned with access to the countryside are considered against the same general criteria as other applications.

GLC (Staff)

Dr. Michael Clark asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what proportion of Greater London council staff he intends to retain after abolition in 1986; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: The successor bodies will in general determine how many of the GLC's staff they need after its abolition, but the majority of staff are expected to obtain posts in the new structure. The Government's estimate is that savings of about 3,500 posts, or £50 million annually, after taking account of staff needed outside local government, will result from rationalisation of local government in London following the GLC's proposed abolition.

Organisation for Economic Co-operational Development Group on Urban Affairs

Mr. Murphy asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the progress of the Organisation for Economic Co-operational Development Group on Urban Affairs following the 1983 Urban Ministers meeting; and if he will give an indication as to the sources of its current funding and the size of the contribution by Her Majesty's Government.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Following the Ministers meeting in 1983, a programme has been established, by the OECD group on urban affairs, consisting of projects on the urban economic development, urban services, urban housing finance, urban information and monitoring and a review of Japan's urban policies. The programme is funded from block contributions made to OECD by its 25 member countries. Her Majesty's Government's contribution to the administration of the programme in 1984 is approximately £16,000, some 7½ per cent. of the budget.

"A Better Future for the Uplands"

Viscount Cranborne asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has concluded his study of the report of the Countryside Commission "A Better Future for the Uplands"; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: The Countryside Commission's report raised a large number of important issues. These are being carefully considered and the Government hope to be able to make a response in the earlier part of next year.

GLC (Mortgage Account)

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what plans he has to consult individual mortgagors over his proposal to transfer the Greater London council's mortgage account to a successor body in the event of the Greater London council being abolished;

(2) if he will ensure that the distribution to the London boroughs of capital receipts accruing to the Greater London council mortgage account matches the current pattern of the Greater London council's spending of those receipts in the event of the Greater London council being abolished.

Sir George Young: I refer the hon. Member to my answers of 25 and 31 October to his identical written questions at columns *694* and *1047* respectively.

London Planning Commission

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if the proposed London Planning Commission will be required to vet each unitary borough development plan before it is adopted by the responsible borough council; if it will appear at inquiries into such plans; and what monitoring by the commission of borough planning decisions will be necessary to ensure successful implementation of strategic policies.

Mr. Macfarlane: The role of the London Planning Commission will be to assist the Secretary of State in preparing his guidance for local planning authorities in Greater London for the preparation of their unitary development plans, and to advise him on other matters relating to the planning and development of Greater London. It will not therefore have any direct function in relation to the statutory procedures for the preparation and adoption of a unitary development plan by a London borough council.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will now announce the terms of reference of his proposed London Planning Commission, the composition of its membership, the time scale for it to prepare its advisory strategic guidance for London once it is established, and the staffing resources it will require to do this.

Mr. Macfarlane: I refer the hon. Member to my answer to him of 25 October at column *697*.

Local Government Reform

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment, in the event of the abolition of the Greater London council, what arrangements will be made for the residuary body to meet the cost of payments due under the Pensions (Increase) Acts.

Sir George Young: I refer the hon. Member to clauses 58 and 70 of the Local Government Bill.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if, in the event of the abolition of the Greater London council, he will take steps to confer on successor bodies the power to pay gratuities to their employees under the provisions of section 18 of the Local Government Superannuation Act 1953.

Sir George Young: The residuary bodies and other successor authorities in local government will have the same gratuity powers as are available to local authorities in general.

Mr. Lofthouse asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give the value as a percentage of the total budget of the metropolitan county councils of those services which will pass wholly to the metropolitan district councils in the event that Cmnd. 9063 is implemented.

Mr. Waldegrave: From the available information in 1984-85 budget returns, services other than police, fire and revenue support for passenger transport (services which it is proposed should become the responsibility of district council joint boards) account for 36 per cent. of the metropolitan county councils' net current expenditure.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what arrangements he now proposes to make, in the event of the Greater London council being abolished, for the provision of scientific services on a metropolitan scale.

Sir George Young: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 16 November by my hon. Friend to my hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Mr. Hayes) at columns *378* and *379*.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether, in the event of the abolition of the Greater London council, regulation L 11 of the Local Government Superannuation Regulations 1974-84 will apply to staff whose pay is reduced as a result of the abolition of the council.

Sir George Young: No. Employees in this category will, if they wish, be entitled to claim separate benefits in respect of their two employments. In addition the Bill makes provision for some compensation for detriment suffered by staff moving to new jobs in local government service at lower pay.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if, in the event of the abolition of the Greater London council, he intends to seek to maintain the Greater London council's equal opportunities policy and training initiatives, including basic skills and second chance schemes.

Sir George Young: These are matters for the successor authorities.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if, in the event of the abolition of the Greater London council, it is the intention of the Government to apportion the Greater London council superannuation fund in respect of Greater London council staff transferred to the residuary body and the new successor bodies, including the Inner London education authority, the Fire Board and the London Planning Commission.

Sir George Young: The Greater London council's superannuation fund will be transferred to the London residuary body; and non-teaching staff of the new ILEA and non-uniformed staff of the new fire authority will continue to participate in that fund. The London Planning Commission will not employ staff of its own.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether, in the event of the abolition of the Greater London council, the successor bodies will each be given local authority status; and what arrangements, including what funds, will be made for superannuation payments.

Sir George Young: Most successor bodies will be existing local authorities. The new ILEA and the London Fire and Civil Defence Authority will have the powers of local authorities for most purposes. Superannuation arrangements are set out in clauses 57 and 58 of the Local Government Bill.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many staff he anticipates will be shed in the event of the abolition of the Greater London council.

Sir George Young: We estimate that there will be a net reduction of some 7,000 posts as a result of abolition of the GLC and MCCs, after taking account of increases outside local government. Roughly half will occur in London; the number of GLC staff left without jobs in the new structure need not be as great as this.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Lofthouse asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he has taken to increase the manpower of his Department to cope with the extra work load foreshadowed in the report for 1983 of the Chief Planning Inspector.

Mr. Macfarlane: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay, (Mr. Proctor) on 14 November at column *287*. Changes in demand levels and the deployment of manpower resources within the Department are reviewed regularly in the MINIS system.

Housing (London)

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment which body will be responsible for assessing the housing requirements of London as a whole in the event of the Greater London council being abolished.

Sir George Young: I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 25 October to his identical written question at columns *691* and *692*.

Loan Debt

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the weighted average interest rate on the loan debt of London boroughs in 1982-83 compared with that of the Greater London council.

Mr. Waldegrave: The information is contained in the CIPFA publication "Capital Expenditure and Debt Financing Statistics 1982-83"; a copy of which is in the Library.

Voluntary Housing Organisations (Funding)

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has received any indication from the London Boroughs Association of its policy towards funding the 61 voluntary housing organisations referred to under the proposed arrangements for collective grant-giving in the event of the abolition of the Greater London council.

Sir George Young: Yes. The London Boroughs Association has agreed to invite 61 voluntary organisations now funded by the GLC and engaged in provision for the single homeless to apply for grants under the proposed arrangements for collective funding, in the knowledge that in principle a grant for the service they provide has already been agreed.

Unitary Development Plans

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he made, prior to proposing that each London borough should prepare a unitary development plan in the event of the abolition of the Greater London council, of the relative costs in terms of money and staffing of processing such plans in place of the Greater London council's submitted alterations to the Greater London development plan.

Mr. Macfarlane: The proposals for unitary development plans were put forward after assessing the representations to the consultation paper on the "Reallocation of Planning Functions in the Greater London Council (GLC) and Metropolitan County Council (MCC) areas". They represent a simplification of development plans proposals and will avoid any duplication of effort which could arise if there were separate procedures for structure and local plans.

Recycling Centres

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment which local authorities run recycling centres at civic amenity sites.

Mr. Waldegrave: No central records are kept of which local authorities run recycling centres at civic amenity sites. In England, county authorities have a duty to provide civic amenity sites but this duty is sometimes carried out on their behalf by borough or district councils.

Historic Buildings

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment, in the event of the abolition of the Greater London council, what proposals he has for ensuring that historic buildings have continuity of support and facilities in the area of information technology and computer aided design facilities and data bases.

Mr. Macfarlane: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend to my hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Mr. Hayes) on 16 November 1984 at column *378-79*.

Directly-Elected Strategic Authority (London)

Mr. Leigh asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he is considering any proposal for a new directly-elected strategic authority for London.

Sir George Young: No.

Housing

Mr. Dubs asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will advise local authorities that families with young children should not be housed above the fourth floor of high rise blocks of flats.

Sir George Young: The Department's report "Families in Flats" was sent in 1981 to the local authorities known to have multi-storey family dwellings in their stock. It concluded that it is preferable for families with young children to occupy houses or flats below the second storey. My right hon. Friend does not consider that further advice is needed.

Prefabricated Concrete Houses

Dr. McDonald asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to extend the provisions of the Housing Defects Act 1984 to owner-occupiers of post-1960 prefabricated concrete houses purchased from local authorities and built by them; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: No. On the evidence available to my right hon. Friend a designation under section 1 of prefabricated concrete houses designed after 1960 would not be justified.

Dr. McDonald asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will provide an estimate of the number and types of prefabricated concrete houses built by local authorities in England and Wales after 1960.

Sir George Young: Departmental records indicate that about 33,500 prefabricated concrete houses (i.e. excluding flats and maisonettes) of 40 different types were built by local authorities and new towns in England in the period 1964 to 1979 inclusive, and in Wales in the period 1960 to 1979 inclusive. Information is not available for the years 1961 to 1963 for England, and 1980 to date for England and Wales.

Correspondence

Mr. Wainwright asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will make a substantive reply to the letter from the Advisory Council on Public Records dated 26 July 1984 addressed to the former Minister for Local Government the Lord Bellwin.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I hope that I shall be able to send a reply of substance before long. In the meantime, I am explaining the present position to the advisory council and shall keep the hon. Member informed.

Environmental Pollution (Report)

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when Her Majesty's Government intend to respond to the Royal Commission report on environmental pollution, Cmnd. 9149.

Mr. Waldegrave: The Government's response to the tenth report of the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution will be published next month.

Maltby Common

Mr. Barron asked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will place copies in the Library of the title deeds to Maltby Common as supplied to him and the counsel's opinion referred to in his answer on 22 November, *Official Report*, column *281*;

(2) from whom he received the title deeds concerning Maltby Common, which satisfied him in 1982 on the ownership question; and who these revealed to be the alleged owner of the common.

Mr. Macfarlane: I shall answer these questions shortly.

Local Government Expenditure

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many authorities have applied for redeterminations of the expenditure levels that he announced for rate-capped authorities in July.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: No authorities have applied for redeterminations. I shall be announcing rate limits very shortly, and therefore time is fast running out. If authorities do not apply I can only assume that they are content with the levels determined.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Dairy Quotas

Mr. Neil Hamilton asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has on the implementation of the European Economic Community's dairy quotas in the other member states.

Mr. MacGregor: We have pressed from the first for full details of implementation of dairy quotas in all Member States to be made available. As a result of our request in July, the Agriculture Commissioner made a report in September on the general legislative and administrative progress made in other member states. A list of the main legal instruments adopted was given in reply to the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) of 31 October 1984. Details of the progress made in cutting back milk production were given in reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor) on 19 November 1984 at column *76*.

We continued to insist on the importance of dairy quotas being implemented fairly and equally throughout the Community at the October Agriculture Council, and at the Agriculture Council on 12-13 November asked the Commission to take immediate steps if the arrangements for charging levy in November were not being properly applied in particular member states. In discussion it became clear that the French Government was not ready to collect levy in November.

The Commission decided as an interim measure to delay by 10 days the dates for the collection of the first payments under the supplementary levy arrangements. After further consideration the Commission is now adopting a measure which will require the levy for the first six months to be collected within 75 days after 30 September. The Commission have also said that they will immediately open infringement proceedings against any Member State not applying the system or not applying it properly. We shall continue to insist that these arrangements are respected.

Mr. Hargreaves asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has for alterations in the milk quota regulations.

Mr. MacGregor: As we have already indicated, we intend to provide for reallocation of quota purchased under the outgoers scheme to help small producers with under 200,000 litres of quota. This will require an addition to the regulations. We feel that the present regulations are too inflexible in relation to transferability of quotas and we shall be pressing in Brussels for changes giving more flexibility. We shall be consulting closely with the United Kingdom industry about the precise form of the quota transfer system we shall be seeking.

We have also been well aware that the inability to have full flexibility between wholesale and direct sales quotas poses many practical problems. However, in all our contacts with the Commission they have argued that the two quotas are not interchangeable. At recent Council meetings we have stressed once again the need for flexibility and the Agriculture Commissioner has agreed to consider what amendments might be put forward without undermining the system as agreed at the last price fixing.

Mr. Nicholson asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what has been the estimated cutback in milk production to date in the England and Wales board areas since milk quotas were implemented.

Mr. MacGregor: In the period April-September 1984 deliveries to the Milk Marketing Board in England and Wales were down 9·4 per cent. on the same period of last year.

Potatoes

Mr. Gale asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what has been the raw equivalent of processed potatoes so far imported in 1984; and what percentage of total consumption this represents.

Mr. MacGregor: During the period from 1 January to 30 September 1984 (the latest period for which figures are available) imports of processed potatoes into the United Kingdom amounted to 283,000 tonnes (raw equivalent) which represents around 7 per cent. of the total potato consumption in that period.

Mr. Gale asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what proposals he will make to control the quality and quantity of imported first early potatoes;

(2) what proposals he will make, in the light of paragraph 57 of the inspector's report on the public inquiry into the proposed amendments to the Potato Marketing Scheme 1955, to subject imported potatoes to the same grading and quality controls as domestic potatoes.

Mr. MacGregor: In 1979 the European Court of Justice ruled illegal any quantitative restrictions on imports of potatoes into the United Kingdom from other member states. The Government, however, hold regular consultations with the major exporting countries to facilitate matching volume, quality and timing of their supplies to the varying needs of our market.

The Government are continuing to examine with the Potato Marketing Board and the farmers' unions the question of grading and quality standards for imported potatoes.

Mr. Gale asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the criteria for the making of grants, in excess of the basic area 1985, under the special arrangements for first early potatoes.

Mr. MacGregor: This is a matter for the Potato Marketing Board.

Mr. Gale asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proposals are contained in the proposed amendments to the Potato Marketing Scheme 1955 (as amended) to increase the home market share of processed potatoes.

Mr. MacGregor: The board's amendments are designed generally to improve the operation of the scheme to the benefit of the whole of the potato industry in Great Britain.

Moreover, the Government have encouraged the board and the potato processors to examine together the opportunities for joint cooperation to promote the uptake of home-grown potatoes by the processing sector.

Eggs

Dr. Michael Clark asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will consider amending the egg marketing regulations to remove from wholesalers the option of downgrading but still marketing unsatisfactory eggs.

Mr. MacGregor: No. Downgraded consignments of eggs may only re-enter the shell egg market if they have been re-graded and re-classified, under supervision, into grade A. In fact, downgraded eggs are usually sent for manufacture into egg products for human or industrial use.

Grain Trade

Mr. John Carlisle asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what amount of feed wheat and feed barley have been delivered to intervention; and what tonnages are contracted forward.

Mr. MacGregor: 1·18 million tonnes of feed wheat and 0·63 million tonnes of barley were delivered into intervention stores in the period 1 August to 16 November 1984. A further 0·81 million tonnes of feed wheat and 0·09 million tonnes of barley were under offer to the Intervention Board on 16 November.

Mr. John Carlisle asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) whether he has received requests from the grain trade for export credit guarantees; and what his response has been;

(2) what requests he has received from the grain trade for financial assistance in the export of wheat and barley;

(3) whether he is satisfied that United Kingdom sellers of grain for export to third countries are not at a competitive disadvantage in their access to credit facilities, compared with their European counterparts.

Mr. MacGregor: We have received a number of representations from trade and farming organisations on this issue. We are considering what changes in existing export credit provision for cereals, if any, might be desirable or feasible, in consultation with the other Government Departments concerned and with the interested trade organisations.

Grain Disposal

Mr. John Carlisle asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to assist in the disposal of grain delivered to intervention stores.

Mr. MacGregor: Some minor improvements have already been made this season, in response to requests from traders, in the arrangements for the release of grain from intervention onto the home market, and we will continue to press for a relaxation of the Community rules concerning such release. The release of intervention stocks for export is a matter for the European Commission.

Food Products (Fat Content)

Mr. Home Robertson asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the bodies which are being consulted by his Department on the subject of proposed regulations concerning the fat content of food products.

Mrs. Fenner: We have made no proposals for regulations concerning the fat content of food products. My Department and the Department of Health and Social Security are however holding informal discussions with representatives of the food industry about the practicalities

of fat content labelling of food. We are also holding similar discussions with representatives of consumer organisations and enforcement authorities. Any proposals for regulations which may be made as a result of these discussions will be issued for full formal consultation in the usual way.

Bread and Flour Regulations 1984

Mr. Home Robertson asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the bodies which were consulted by his Department prior to the drafting of the Bread and Flour Regulations 1984.

Mrs. Fenner: I have placed a copy of the list of bodies and other interests consulted by my Department prior to the making of the Bread and Flour Regulations 1984 in the Library of the House.

EC (Food Surpluses)

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what were the total costs incurred by his Department in the storage of European Economic Community food surpluses in England in the last full year for which figures are available.

Mr. Jopling: Expenditure by the Intervention Board for Agricultural Produce on the storage and handling of intervention products in the United Kingdom during the 1983-84 financial year totalled £48·6 million. Separate figures for individual countries are not available.

Pesticide Residues

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress is being made in the negotiations in Brussels on proposals by the Economic Community Commission for maximum pesticide residue limits in certain foodstuffs; and if he will make a statement on their bearing on powers he intends to propose in the Food and Environment Protection Bill *[Lords.]*

Mrs. Fenner: There are Commission proposals for Council directives fixing maximum residue limits for pesticide residues in cereals for human consumption, foodstuffs of animal origin and animal feedingstuffs. Earlier this year the Council of Ministers approved a timetable of work which included adoption of these directives by 1 January 1985 but this now seems less realistic. Powers to implement these proposed directives have been included in the Food and Environment Protection Bill. Before we introduce regulations under these powers there will be wide-ranging consultation with interested parties.

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many pesticides have been considered and approved for safe use under the pesticides safety precaution scheme, during the life of the scheme, by his Department; and if he will list those pesticides approved; and if he will list those pesticides rejected, giving the reason in each case.

Mrs. Fenner: I regret that the information requested could only be provided at disproportionate cost. However, I can advise the hon. Member that currently there are approximately 4,400 pesticide products cleared for safe use in the United Kingdom: I will send him a list. Statistics relating to formal rejections under the pesticides safety precautions scheme (PSPS) would not give a clear picture of the operation of the scheme, because manufacturers frequently withdraw applications when they conclude that the difficulty of satisfying the safety requirements of PSPS makes further progress unlikely.

Soil Survey

Mr. Jim Spicer asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what steps he proposes to take to ensure the continued availability of comprehensive information on the properties and distribution of the nation's soils and their suitability for particular purposes;

(2) why he proposes to reduce the funds available to the soil survey of England and Wales.

Mrs. Fenner: We are considering the funding of the work of the Soil Survey of England and Wales following my Ministry's recent review of commissioned research and development in soil science. My Ministry reviews regularly the needs and priorities for all the research and development work it commissions to ensure that the funds available are spent to the best advantage. The survey is part of the Agricultural and Food Research Council. We shall be considering the views of the council and we have also consulted the new Priorities Board for Research and Development in Agriculture and Food about the future of the Survey. We shall not be taking a final decision until we have considered these views.

Food Labelling

Mr. Ashley asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he will announce proposals to improve food labelling; if he will issue a consultation document and provide a period for health professionals and educationalists and representatives of similar organisations to comment; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Fenner: We are currently considering the recommendations contained in the report by a panel of the Government's Committee on Medical Aspects of Food Policy (COMA) on diet and cardiovascular disease and we hope to be able to make an announcement within the next three months. If our conclusion, and that of our colleagues, should be that regulations under the Food Act are required, including further regulations on food labelling, we will follow the normal full consultation procedures required by section 118 of that Act.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 27 November 1984

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Legal Aid

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Attorney-General if he will give a breakdown by region of the total amounts paid out in legal aid in each of the last three years for which figures are available.

The Attorney-General: I assume that my hon. Friend is referring to those parts of the legal aid scheme administered by The Law Society through its legal aid area offices. Payment of legal aid bills by The Law Society is administered centrally and a breakdown of the figures by area offices could not be provided without disproportionate cost. The total gross payments made to solicitors and counsel by The Law Society in each of the last three financial years is as follows:

£ million

	1981-82	*1982-83*	*1983-84*
Civil legal aid	71·3	105·1	115·1
Criminal legal aid (magistrates' courts)	48·1	56·1	62·2
Legal advice and assistance	32·8	40·3	47·3

The net cost of the schemes, taking into account receipts by way of contributions, damages etc. was:

£ million

	1981-82	*1982-83*	*1983-84*
Civil legal aid	42·7	68·0	70·8
Criminal legal aid (magistrates' courts)	46·8	54·9	60·8
Legal advice and assistance	31·7	38·8	45·5

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Attorney-General if he will give a breakdown by region of the total number of complaints about delays in the processing of legal aid applications in each of the last three years.

The Attorney-General: This information is not collected.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Attorney-General how many staff are employed in each of the No. 8 and No. 9 regional offices processing applications for legal aid; and what was the total salary bill for such staff in the last year for which figures are available.

The Attorney-General: I assume that my hon. Friend is referring to the No. 8 (northern) and No. 9 (north eastern) legal aid area offices of the Law Society. The number of staff at present employed in each of those offices dealing with civil legal aid applications is eight (area 8) and 11 (area 9). The cost of the salaries of those staff in financial year 1984-85 is expected to be approximately £79,000 (area 8) and £102,000 (area 9).

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Attorney-General if he will give a breakdown by regional office of the average length of time taken to process an application for legal aid.

The Attorney-General: This information is readily available only on a national basis. In 1983-84 the average time taken to process an application for civil legal aid was 38 working days.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Attorney-General how many cases of applications for legal aid have been dealt with in the No. 9 and No. 8 regional offices in each of the last five years for which figures are available.

The Attorney-General: I assume my hon. Friend is referring to The Law Society's number 8 (northern) and number 9 (north-eastern) legal aid area offices. The figures for applications received in those offices for civil legal aid in the past five years are as follows:

	Area 8	*Area 9*
1979-80	15,857	24,545
1980-81	11,568	18,061
1981-82	12,386	18,886
1982-83	13,328	20,499
1983-84	15,074	22,619

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Attorney General if he will give a breakdown by region of the total numbers of applications for legal aid funding which were turned down in the last year for which figures are available.

The Attorney-General: The number of applications for civil legal aid which were refused by each of The Law Society's area offices in 1983-84 is as follows:

Legal Aid Area	*Refused on legal grounds*	*Refused on financial grounds*
No. 1 London (South)	923	467
No. 2 South-Eastern	785	211
No. 3 Southern	732	809
No. 4 South-Western	1,932	690
No. 5 South Wales	486	404
No. 6 West Midland	1,158	505
No. 7 North-Western	1,333	728
No. 8 Northern	1,666	253
No. 9 North-Eastern	2,578	378
No. 10 East Midland	1,283	441
No. 11 Eastern	1,105	387
No. 12 Chester and N. Wales	924	265
No. 13 London (East)	869	397
No. 14 London (West)	839	461
No. 15 Merseyside	1,418	462

Lithgow and Others

Mr. Rippon asked the Attorney-General in what respect the Government's pleadings in the case of Lithgow and others now before the European Court of Human Rights vary from those presented to the European Commission of Human Rights.

The Attorney-General: The handling of cases under the European Convention on Human Rights is the responsibility of my right hon. and Learned Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, but I will answer this question with his agreement. The main difference in the Government's pleadings in its memorial to the European Court of Human Rights from those in its observations to the European Commission of

Human Rights is that the Government have accepted the finding in the Commission's Report that there is inherent in Article 1 of the first protocol to the European Convention on Human Rights a right to compensation for the taking of the property of anyone within the jurisdiction of a contracting state where and in so far as the payment of compensation is necessary to preserve the appropriate relationship of proportionality between the interference with the individual's rights and the public interest. In accepting this finding the Government also of course accept the Commission's conclusion that the compensation actually paid in these cases met the requirements of Article 1.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Security

Mrs. Jill Knight asked the Lord Privy Seal if he will take steps to improve the arrangements so as to speed up security checks of honourable Members' parties visiting the Palace of Westminster.

Mr. Biffen: I have asked the authorities of the House to look into this matter and, if necessary, to ask the Accommodation and Administration Sub-Committee of the Services Committee to consider what new measures should be taken.

DEFENCE

Nuclear Submarines (Log Books)

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the security classification of the captain's log on nuclear submarines.

Mr. Stanley: Such documents have an individual security classification in accordance with their contents.

Equipment Procurement

Mr. Warren asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy on procurement of British equipment for the armed forces.

Mr. Butler: I refer my hon. Friend to the Answer which my predecessor, the hon. Member for Chertsey and Walton (Mr. Pattie) gave to the hon. Member for Bolton, South-East (Mr. Young) on 5 December 1983 at c. 28.

Trainer Aircraft

Mr. Neil Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for Defence what offset or counter-trade proposals are being offered by Switzerland and Brazil for the Royal Air Force to purchase a foreign basic trainer aircraft.

Mr. Butler: The tenders for the three foreign-designed aircraft to meet the basic trainer requirement all propose that substantial amounts of the work would be undertaken in the United Kingdom, but no formal proposals have yet been received for further offset.

HMS Conqueror

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Defence if any Ministers in his Department took part in any aspect of the de-briefing and associated activities of the crew of HMS Conqueror on its return to the United Kingdom after the Falklands war.

Mr. Stanley: No.

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether a permanent record of the movements of HMS Conqueror is made by the ship's internal navigation system.

Mr. Stanley: I shall answer shortly.

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Defence if any photographic reproduction or copy was made of the signals log of HMS Conqueror before it was destroyed.

Mr. Stanley: Not that we are aware.

Commander-in-Chief Fleet

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Defence on what occasions in the last three months he, or other Ministers in his Department, have met the Commander-in-Chief Fleet; and what subjects were discussed.

Mr. Stanley: In the last 3 months, the Commander-in-Chief Fleet has accompanied my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to a meeting of the nuclear planning group and has participated in a MINIS meeting with him. Commander-in-Chief Fleet has also met my noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces at a dinner. Official discussions between Service commanders and Ministers are held on an in confidence basis.

Flag Officer Submarines (War Diary)

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if the Flag Officer Submarines' war diary for the Falklands war has now been seen by any officials in his Department;

(2) when the Flag Officer Submarines' war diary for the Falklands war was compiled.

Mr. Stanley: The "War Diary" for the Falklands conflict of Flag Officer Submarines was compiled from records kept during the Campaign and submitted to the Commander-in-Chief Fleet and the Ministry of Defence in early November 1982. Copies have been available to officials in the Ministry since then.

Signals Logs

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Defence if, pursuant to his answer of 22 November, he will explain the differences between the captain's narrative account and report of proceedings.

Mr. Stanley: I assume that the hon. Member is referring to the answer by my right hon. Friend appearing in the *Official Report* for 22 November at column 226. The Queen's Regulations for the Royal Navy, a copy of which is in the Library, require commanding officers of ships to report their proceedings from time to time. Separate instructions to submarine commanding officers require them to maintain inter alia detailed narrative accounts of operations and exercises, which will be available for subsequent analysis, and from which the report will be compiled.

Soviet Mig 29 Fulcrum

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether the Royal Air Force currently possesses an aircraft that compares in performance and role to the Soviet Mig 29 Fulcrum.

Mr. Stanley: We assess that the Fulcrum is optimised for the battlefield air superiority role. There is no RAF aircraft with a comparable primary role. The primary air defence task of the Royal Air Force is the protection of the integrity of the United Kingdom air defence region, for which the Tornado F2 is optimised.

European Fighter Aircraft

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether the Royal Air Force are satisfied that the SNECMA M-88 engine will give the proposed European fighter aircraft the thrust/weight ratio the Royal Air Force require.

Mr. Butler: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him on 10 July at column *448-49*, which made clear that Ministers have agreed in principle on the need for a new advanced fighter engine to be developed and produced for the European fighter aircraft and that current designs would not be suitable.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether the proposed European fighter aircraft that the chiefs of staff have agreed upon will have the required radius of action for operations on the central front.

Mr. Butler: The European staff target, signed on October 11, takes into account the requirement to operate on the central front.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will estimate the number of jobs that the proposed European fighter aircraft is expected to provide to British Aerospace.

Mr. Butler: Entry into the European fighter aircraft programme would result in considerable work for the British aerospace industry, but it is too early to quantify this in terms of jobs.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many aircraft the Royal Air Force will require of the proposed European fighter aircraft.

Mr. Butler: It would be premature to quote numbers at this stage.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether the 9·5 tonne weight specification agreed to by the chiefs of staff for the proposed European fighter aircraft would enable the aircraft to carry the RB-199 engine and still carry out its specified roles.

Mr. Butler: The mass of the aircraft is the subject of current studies. So far as the engine is concerned, I have explained in my reply to one of the hon. Member's earlier questions today that current designs would not be suitable.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence what will be the estimated cost of the proposed European fighter aircraft.

Mr. Butler: It is premature to speculate, I would not expect to have reliable cost estimates until the end of a project definition phase.

Royal Air Force (Fighter Aircraft)

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence by what date the Royal Air Force requires a future fighter aircraft for its needs on the central front to be in service.

Mr. Butler: It is envisaged that the European fighter aircraft would replace Royal Air Force Phantoms and Jaguars from the mid-1990s.

Experimental Aircraft Project

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence how much money his Department has invested in the experimental aircraft project to date.

Mr. Butler: It is a long-standing policy of Her Majesty's Government to treat information relating to procurement contracts as commercially confidential.

Jaguar Aircraft

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will give the reasons for the withdrawal of Jaguar aircraft from Germany;

(2) which aircraft are currently carrying out the roles previously carried out by the Jaguars in Germany.

Mr. Stanley: The RAF's Jaguar aircraft in Germany are being replaced in the strike/attack role by the more modern and effective Tornado GR1.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence what the Royal Air Force intends to do with the Jaguar aircraft that have been withdrawn from Germany.

Mr. Stanley: The intention is that for the most part they will be used to maintain the Jaguar Squadrons that we plan to run on in the UK.

NATO Exercises

Dr. Marek asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will specify those exercises in the list contained in his reply of 22 November to the hon. Member for Wrexham which involved Pershing II missiles.

Mr. Stanley: I cannot add to the reply I gave to the hon. Member on 15 November at c. *348*.

Members' Questions

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Defence what criteria he uses in declining to answer questions on the grounds of the disproportionate effort which would be involved.

Mr. Heseltine: I shall answer shortly.

Naval Log Books

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) in what circumstances Royal Navy signal log books are destroyed;

(2) in what circumstances signals log books from Royal Navy vessels could not be destroyed;

(3) how many signals log books of Royal Navy vessels which served in the Falklands during the hostilities in 1982 have been destroyed.

Mr. Stanley: [*pursuant to his reply*, 22 November 1984, c. *335*]: In accordance with standing instructions, signals logs containing copies of signals received and sent are maintained. There is no requirement to retain these logs permanently, nor will there normally be any occasion to remove them from the ships or submarines concerned. Under standing instructions, they are kept for a period of

three months and then destroyed. Some messages may be retained but that is a matter for the officers of the ship or submarine. It is therefore unlikely that any complete signals logs from the period of the Falklands conflict have been retained.

Collaborative Arms Projects

Mr. Arnold asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will list all the collaborative arms projects in which Britain is involved with her European NATO allies, with the dates of commencement and completion, and the names of the companies which are parties to the contracts.

Mr. Butler: The major collaborative equipment projects in which the United Kingdom is involved with her European NATO allies and for which current contracts or arrangements exist are as follows:

Equipment	*Commencement of United Kingdom Involvement†*		*Main Companies (a) United Kingdom (b) European*
Tornado	1968	*(a)*	British Aerospace Rolls Royce
		(b)	MBB, Turbo-union; Mauser; Aeritalia; Fiat
EH101	1979	*(a)*	Westland
		(b)	Agusta
European Fighter Aircraft	1983	*(a)*	British Aerospace Rolls Royce
		(b)	Dassault Snecma Aeritalia Fiat MBB/Dornier MTU CASA
NATO Identification System*	1977	*(a)*	Plessey Cossor British Aerospace Ferranti
		(b)	Siemens/ESG LMT
Sidewinder/AIM 9L*	1978	*(a)*	British Aerospace
		(b)	BGT
Lynx/Puma/ Gazelle	1967	*(a)*	Westland
		(b)	SNIAS
NFR 90*	1984	*(a)*	British Shipbuilders
		(b)	Thomson CSF MTG Fincantieri CNI Divisione Costuzioni Militeri; HSA; Expresa National Bazan
Sea Gnat	1977	*(a)*	Hunting Engineering
		(b)	No major company
Paris Sonar	1967	*(a)*	No major company
		(b)	Thomson CSF
FH70	1967	*(a)*	Vickers; ROFs
		(b)	Rheinmetall; Ota Melara
SP70	1973	*(a)*	ROFs
		(b)	Rheinmetall; Ota Melara
MLRS Phase I*	1979	*(a)*	Hunting Engineering
		(b)	SNIAS Difesa Spazio RTG
Milan	1976	*(a)*	MSDS
		(b)	TRT; MBB; SNIAS
TRIGAT	1979	*(a)*	British Aerospace
		(b)	MBB; SNIAS
M483 Bomblet*	1980	*(a)*	ROFs
		(b)	Eurometal
ASRAAM/ AMRAAM*	1980		There are no current contracts.
MLRS Phase III*	1982		

* Also involves the United States of America and United States companies

† None has yet been completed.

Commander Wreford-Brown

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the postings of Commander Wreford-Brown, Commander of HMS Conqueror in May 1982 from that date until the present; how much time he has been on sick leave during that period; and whether he has had to have any specialist medical treatment.

Mr. Stanley: Since commanding HMS Conqueror, Commander Wreford-Brown has served on the staff of Flag Officer, Plymouth, has commanded HMS Valiant and is currently serving on the staff of Flag Officer, Submarines. Between appointments he has taken normal leave. Though we do not comment publicly on the health of individual service men, it would be quite wrong to draw any inferences from this as to the health of this particular officer.

Type 22 Frigates

Sir David Price asked the Secretary of State for Defence how long has now elapsed since he first received the tenders for the two type 22 frigates to determine which warship builders should receive the orders; when he expects to award the contracts; and what factors have caused the delay.

Mr. Lee: Tenders for the two ships were originally invited in July 1983 and were received in October of that year. As I announced on 24 July, the tenders lapsed before a decision could be reached. The Government therefore decided to seek new tenders for these vessels. These have now been received and are being considered. As I said on 24 July, at columns 814-15, we hope to place orders before the end of the year.

BAOR Families (Health Care)

Mrs. Ann Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has concerning the numbers of members of families of British forces personnel in Germany who were given medical treatment in each of the last five years as *(a)* inpatients and *(b)* outpatients.

Mr. Lee: The numbers, in thousands, of service dependants treated in British service hospitals in Germany for the years 1979 to 1983 incusive are as follows:

	Inpatients (new cases)	*Outpatients (new cases)*
1979	18·1	27·8
1980	19·1	26·2
1981	18·9	26·3
1982	18·4	29·3
1983	17·9	29·8

Mrs. Ann Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the total expenditure on health care provision for the families of British forces personnel in Germany in each of the last seven years for which figures are available.

Mr. Lee: Outturn figures of medical expenditure are not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate effort. Estimated provision in 1983-84 for armed forces medical services in Germany amounted to some £39·2 million. Provision for 1984-85, also at 1983-84 prices, is about £39·8 million. These figures cover all medical services for both service personnel and their dependants. It is not possible to provide separate expenditure on health care provision for dependants only.

Mrs. Ann Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many doctors have served the families of British forces personnel in West Germany in each of the last five years for which figures are available.

Mr. Lee: The numbers of Ministry of Defence employed medical officers serving in Germany at 31 March for the years 1982 to 1984 were as follows:

	Number
1982	245
1983	242
1984	240

Figures for earlier years are not readily available. Most medical officers treat both service personnel and dependants.

Mrs. Ann Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the total number of deaths of members of the families of British forces personnel in West Germany in each of the last five years; and if he will give a comparison of the rates per thousand population of such deaths with the United Kingdom.

Mr. Lee: The number of deaths of members of the families of British forces personnel in West Germany in each of the last five years is as follows:

	Number
1979	106
1980	101
1981	103
1982	93
1983	89

Information is not readily available on comparative family mortality rates.

Mrs. Ann Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has concerning the number of home visits made by British medical staff to the homes of the families of British forces personnel in Germany in recent years.

Mr. Lee: The number of such visits is not recorded centrally.

The value of home visits is well recognised and service dependants are eligible to receive such visits. The responsibility for deciding for or against a visit lies with the medical officer, who must balance the advantages of a visit against such factors as: the loss of time to treat other patients; his availability to cover emergencies; the better facilities at the medical centre for further examination and treatment; and transport facilities for patients to the medical centre for those patients unable to attend by their own means.

General Belgrano

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Defence if the captain of HMS Conqueror asked at any time for a change in the rules of engagement to enable him to sink the General Belgrano.

Mr. Stanley: No.

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions an order was transmitted to the captain of HMS Conqueror to sink the Argentine cruiser General Belgrano.

Mr. Stanley: I will answer shortly.

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether the information contained in the message forms of HMS Conqueror has been retained.

Mr. Stanley: As my right hon Friend the Secretary of State for Defence told the hon. Member on 22 November, all operational messages of importance are recorded in Flag Officer, Submarines' war diary.

Wakefield (Rainfall)

Mr. Harrison asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will list the figures for rainfall recorded by the Meteorological Office at Wakefield sewerage works on 1, 2, 3, and 4 November 1983 and 1, 2, 3 and 4 November 1984, respectively;

(2) if his Meteorological Office is able to state what degree of rainfall occurred in the Wakefield area on 1, 2, 3, and 4 November 1984.

Mr. Lee: The data for November 1984 are not immediately available. I shall write to the right hon. Gentleman as soon as possible.

Cruise Missiles

Mr. D.E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Defence on what date the second flight of cruise missiles became operational with the 501st Tactical Missile Wing at Greenham common.

Mr. Heseltine: In early October.

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many exercises involving transporter erector launchers and launch control centres driving off the base have taken place since the initial operating capacity of cruise missiles at Greenham common.

Mr. Stanley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 20 November, at column 88.

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether units of the 501st Tactical Missile Wing at Royal Air Force Greenham common have passed all their tactical evaluation tests.

Mr. Stanley: The information of the performance of units in tactical evaluation exercises is classified and cannot be released.

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether he is satisfied that the basing of cruise missiles at Royal Air Force, Molesworth will not be adversely affected by radio and radar emissions from Royal Air Force Alconbury.

Mr. Stanley: Yes.

Naval Log Books

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Defence when the signals log of HMS Conqueror during the Falklands campaign was destroyed; on whose authority; and at what level the decision was taken.

Mr. Stanley [*pursuant to his reply*, 22 November 1984, c. *335*]: HMS Conqueror's signals log covering the period of the Falklands campaign was destroyed over the period to February 1983. The destruction is carried out under the authority of the Defence Council.

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Defence when the routine destruction of signal logs of nuclear submarines was introduced in the Royal Navy; and by whose authority.

Mr. Stanley [*pursuant to his reply*, 22 November 1984, c. *335*]: Available records show that the routine destruction of signals logs has been the practice since at least 1963. The destruction is carried out under the authority of the Defence Council.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Metropolitan Police (Graded Response Times)

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will list the Metropolitan Police areas where graded response times have been implemented;

(2) if he will publish the detailed graded response times which operate in the police area covering Leyton and Leytonstone.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis tells me that an experimental scheme has been introduced in Croydon but that he has not yet prepared guidelines for the introduction of graded response throughout the force area. Graded response does not operate on the basis of fixed response times. Its purpose is to make more effective use of available manpower by grading police response to 999 calls in the light of an assessment of the urgency of each call and the likely result of immediate police action.

Telephone Tapping

Mrs. Peacock asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the proposed legislation on telephone tapping will give the police access to the results of telephone metering.

Mr. Brittan: In the light of the relevant findings of the European Court in the Malone case, the Government are considering whether it would be appropriate to include provisions governing the disclosure of metering information in this Session's Bill on the interception of communications. A statement setting out the scope and content of the Bill will be made in due course.

Mr. and Mrs. Saad Ali

Mr. Frank Field asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to reply to the letter written to him on 2 August from the hon. Member for Birkenhead about Mr. and Mrs. Saad Ali of 47 [illegible]kside road, Birkenhead.

Mr. Waddington: Mr. and Mrs. Saad Ali have now been interviewed. I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as we have received and considered the report of the interview.

Dr. Alan Clift

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the status of the person who authorised his Department's press release of 14 September 1977 which announced Dr. Clift's suspension; and if Dr. Clift was given prior notice of the press release.

Mr. Brittan: The press release was issued following consultations with the then Home Secretary. It does not appear that Dr. Clift was given prior notice of it.

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make available to an independent arbitrator acceptable to Dr. Clift's solicitor the complete report of the police investigation into Dr. Clift's work, the statements by his Department's staff in the trial of Messrs. Morgan, Brown and Cowley, and the annual staff reports on Dr. Clift for the period 1972 to 1974 so that an independent arbitrator can judge whether or not they are relevant to the issues which were being considered by the departmental retirement board.

Mr. Brittan: No. I am satisfied that Dr. Clift's position was fully and properly considered by the departmental retirement board and the Civil Service Appeal Board.

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how long it took for it to become clear that Dr. Clift's work did not reach an acceptable standard of professional competence; by what process it was made clear; whose view it was that it had become clear; and how much certainty was attached to the view that professional incompetence had become clear.

Mr. Brittan: I would refer the right hon. Member to what my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State said in reply to the Adjournment debate on 15 November, at columns 889-94.

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many cases were handled by Dr. Clift during his 24 years as a Home Office forensic scientist; if he will give the total number of cases in which he was involved when a conviction was quashed; in how many and which of the cases where a conviction was quashed Dr. Clift's evidence was found unreliable because *(a)* of his discrediting and *(b)* it was challenged by other forensic experts who re-examined or re-evaluated the original forensic evidence; and in how many of these cases re-examination of the original material took place.

Mr. Brittan: It has not proved possible to ascertain the total number of cases handled by Dr. Clift. As I have previously told the right hon. Member, a scrutiny of the records then available had yielded a total of approximately 1,500 instances in which Dr. Clift had examined material. More recently, further laboratory records have been located as a result of which an additional 80 or so instances, which we are examining, have come to light.

We do not have comprehensive information about the number of cases in which Dr. Clift was involved where the conviction was quashed on appeal, though we know of five where the conviction was quashed following a reference to the Court of Appeal or, in Scotland, the High Court of Justiciary, and one case where the conviction was quashed by the Court of Appeal following an appeal by the person convicted. On three cases recently heard by the Court of Appeal, I would refer the right hon. Member to the reply given to a question from him on 15 November, at column 303. In another referred case, heard by the court in 1978, a forensic expert who re-examined some original material gave evidence which was in variance to that of Dr. Clift. On the one Scottish case, I would refer the right hon. Member to what was said by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department in and Adjournment debate on 15 November, at columns 890-91; Dr. Clift's contribution was assessed by other forensic scientists; no original samples were re-examined. In the other case, in which leave to appeal was given by the Court of Appeal in 1981, the court quashed the conviction, which was regarded as resting solely on scientific evidence, having regard to the serious criticisms advanced about Dr. Clift's evidence in the Scottish case. Dr. Clift's contribution was assessed by another forensic scientist, but I understand that no evidence was given. No original samples were re-examined.

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will name his Department's officials who took part in the discussions between 5 and 8 September 1977 which culminated in the decision taken on 8 September to suspend Dr. Clift; and say whether at this stage or on 9 September when Dr. Clift was informed of his suspension he was invited to have representation of any kind.

Mr. Brittan: The officials were the then principal establishment officer, under secretary in charge of personnel management in the establishment department, under secretary in charge of the Police technical services department, controller of the Forensic Science Service, head of establishment division 5, and director and assistant director of the Birmingham forensic science laboratory. In accordance with normal practice Dr. Clift was not invited to have representation at that stage.

Early Retirement Board

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the position of his Department's employees whose future is being considered by his Department's early retirement board; if they have an automatic right to be legally represented; and if they or their legal representatives have the right to cross-examine his Department's witnesses.

Mr. Brittan: Staff appearing before a departmental retirement board are told they may be assisted by a friend, who may be a staff association representative. These are not legal proceedings and legal representation would not normally be considered appropriate.

Post Mortem Tests

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how the secretor status of a dead person is determined; how reliable is the test; and in what circumstances there is a risk of contamination invalidating the test.

Mr. Brittan: The secretor status of a dead person can be determined by a form of blood grouping (the Lewis group system) or by the grouping of the saliva on a mouth swab. The reliability of the tests depends on the condition of the samples; tests on badly contaminated samples may not be reliable and should not be used.

Public Houses (Flexible Hours)

Mr. Mason asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with the National Union of Licensed Victuallers and representatives from the brewery trade on flexible hours for public houses; if he is proposing to introduce legislation on this matter; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: I met the National Union of Licensed Victuallers a year ago for a general discussion. Both I and officials have also met representatives of the brewing industry. These discussions have touched on the question of flexible hours in public houses.

My right hon. and learned Friend has no immediate plans to reform the licensing law, but we are keeping the matter under review.

London Sikh Community (March and Rally)

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement outlining the nature of the request which the London Sikh community submitted to the Metropolitan police recently on the holding of a march to Hyde park and a meeting in the park; and what decision he has made on these requests.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Members of the Sikh community in London informed the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that it was their intention to hold a religious meeting on 18 November followed by a march through London to commemorate those Sikhs recently killed in India. The plans were for a religious service to take place in Hyde park from 12.30 pm to 2.00 pm; at 2.30 pm those assembled would march to Jubilee gardens via Hyde park corner, Victoria street, Westminster bridge and York road.

The Commissioner was of the opinion that his powers to give directions under section 3(1) of the Public Order Act 1936 would be insufficient to prevent serious public disorder. He therefore sought the Home Secretary's consent to an order under section 3(3) of the Act prohibiting, from 17 November to 24 November, the holding of all public processions within the Metropolitan police district, except those customarily held of a religious, educational, festive or ceremonial character. My right hon. and learned Friend gave his consent to the order on 16 November. In the light of this decision my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment withdrew the permission he had initially granted for the use of Hyde park as a meeting and assembly point.

Police and Fire Services

Mr. Lofthouse asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any plans to extend his existing powers over police and fire services to control in addition civilian staff levels.

Mr. Giles Shaw: None, except for the possible use of those discretionary interim joint board controls the Government propose in clause 80 of the Local Government Bill.

Winson Green Prison (Prisoners' Letters)

Mr. Terry Davis asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether any letters written by Mr. Raja, Mr. Riaz and Mr. Siddique, who are on remand at Winson Green prison, have been withheld by the governor, deputy governor or prison officers.

Mr. Mellor: No letter from any of the three prisoners named has been stopped under the provisions of standing order 5.

Greenham Common (Policing Costs)

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the chief constable of Thames Valley about the cost of policing the most recent off-base exercise by units of the 501st Tactical Missile Wing at Greenham common; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I understand that the information about additional costs is not yet available.

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the chief constable of Thames Valley about the cost of policing the off-base exercises by units of the 501st Tactical Missile Wing at Greenham common, since such exercises began; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

ENVIRONMENT

British Medical Association (Anti-smoking Campaign)

69. **Mr. Pavitt** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many meetings Ministers in his Department have held with the British Medical Association to discuss its campaign to curb sports sponsorship to promote the sale of cigarettes; which Ministers were involved on each occasion; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Macfarlane: The sponsorship of sport by tobacco companies is already restricted by a voluntary agreement between the industry and the Government. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services, and my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Health and Social Security, have had one recent meeting with the association, during which sponsorship was discussed. I have had no meetings with the association.

Welwyn Hatfield District Council

Mr. Murphy asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what consultations the Welwyn Hatfield district council has had with his officials regarding the extension of the right to buy consequent upon the Housing Act 1984.

Sir George Young: Apart from correspondence about one leasehold property, there have been no consultations between my officials and the council about the extension of the right to buy. I am writing to my hon. Friend about the new provisions as they affect dwellings for the elderly and the disabled.

Mr. Alan Benjamin

Mr. Spearing asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give further details of the curriculum vitae of Mr. Alan Benjamin, whom he has appointed to the London Docklands Development Corporation; whether he has any overlapping financial interests in respect of the functions of the corporation; how many days a week Mr. Benjamin will be engaged on the business of the corporation; and what arrangements are being made for his remuneration.

Sir George Young: As the hon. Member will know from the Department's press notice issued on 12 November, Mr. Benjamin is a director of the CAP Group. He was previously director-general of the Computing Services Association (1975-80) and director of corporate communication for International Computers Ltd. He is a chartered accountant and a Fellow of the British Computer Society.

Mr. Benjamin has no financial interests which overlap with the functions of LDDC. In case such a conflict of interest should occur, the corporation's standing orders require members to declare any direct or indirect financial interest in a matter under consideration at a meeting of the corporation and to refrain from taking part in discussing or voting on the matter.

Mr. Benjamin's appointment, which is for a period of three years, involves a commitment of about half a day a week. The salary based on this commitment, which is not pensionable, is currently £3,615 per annum.

Democratic Unionist Party (Rally)

Mr. Stephen Ross asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what terms were imposed in connection with the recent Democratic Unionist party rally in Trafalgar square.

Mr. Macfarlane: Permission was given, not for a Democratic Unionist party rally in Trafalgar Square, but for a public meeting organised by the Apprentice Boys of Derry (Londonderry) Thames and Avon branch Murray Club on 17 November.

The organisers assured my Department that this would be a prayer meeting with hymns, not a political rally. However, in the light of what took place I have instructed my Department to pursue with the organisers what appears to be a breach of their undertaking.

Orwell Estuary

Mr. Weetch asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he anticipates being able to designate the area to the north-west of Felixstowe in the Orwell estuary as an area of special scientific interest.

Mr. Waldegrave: I understand that the Nature Conservancy Council hopes to issue notice of its intention to notify the Orwell estuary as a site of special scientific interest within the next few months.

Drainage (Wakefield)

Mr. Harrison asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussions have taken place in the current year between his Department, the Yorkshire water authority, and the Wakefield metropolitan district council regarding drainage, with particular reference to water courses, conduits and sewerage, in the Wakefield metropolitan district.

Mr. Macfarlane: None in the current financial year. Any discussions which Wakefield metropolitan district council may have had with the Yorkshire water authority are entirely a matter between these two authorities.

Local Government Reform

Mr. Freud asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what measures he proposes to take in respect of the Greater London council research library in the event of the abolition of the Greater London council; and if he will make a statement on the future of the library.

Sir George Young: No decision has yet been taken on future arrangements for the Greater London research library.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment which voluntary organisations are, to his knowledge, opposing abolition of the Greater London council because they have become too dependent on the Greater London council for financial support as indicated in his speech to the annual general meeting of the National Council for Voluntary Organisations on 12 November.

Sir George Young [*pursuant to his reply*, 23 November 1984, c. *312*]: In his speech my right hon. Friend was issuing a general warning about the dangers to voluntary organisations of becoming over-dependent on particular sources of public funding—whether central or local government—and the way in which this could compromise their independence.

Local Authorities (Statements of Accounts)

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects the form of local authority statements of accounts to be prescribed by regulation; and what he expects this form to be.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: In the light of comments received in response to their consultation paper issued earlier this year, my right hon. Friend, together with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales, proposes to make regulations which will first apply to local authorities' statements of accounts for the financial year beginning 1 April 1986, and which will specify both the accounts to be included in these statements and particular items to be disclosed. My right hon. Friends propose that the regulations should require statements of accounts which

(i) contain both individual accounts for each main fund and consolidated accounts showing an authority's overall financial position;
(ii) have a standard service based analysis of income and expenditure;
(iii) have a balance sheet prepared on the "deferred charges" basis thereby focusing on an authority's outstanding liabilities rather than on the historic cost of its fixed assets;
(iv) contain notes to the accounts providing additional information; and
(v) are in a form suitable for integration with annual reports.

The details of the regulations will be subject of further consultation, in particular with the local authority associations, the Audit Commission, and with the accountancy profession.

Maltby Common

Mr. Barron asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will place copies in the Library of the title deeds to Maltby common as supplied to him and the counsel's opinion referred to in his answer on 22 November, *Official Report*, column 281.

Mr. Macfarlane [*pursuant to his reply*, 26 November 1984, c. *401*]: No. The title deeds and the counsel's opinion referred to are not his to place in the Library.

Mr. Barron asked the Secretary of State for the Environment from whom he received the title deeds concerning Maltby common, which satisfied him in 1982 on the ownership question; and who these revealed to be the alleged owner of the common.

Mr. Macfarlane [*pursuant to his reply*, 26 November 1984, c. *401*]: The deeds were received from Messrs. Allen and Overy, solicitors acting for the Earl of Scarbrough. They satisfied the Department that the Earl of Scarbrough was the owner of Maltby common.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL FOR SCOTLAND

Dr. Alan Clift

Mr. Ashley asked the Solicitor-General for Scotland if the Scottish Crown lawyers had a meeting with Dr. Clift in May 1973 to discuss evidential evidence for the forthcoming John Preece trial; and if the blood group of the murdered woman was a subject of discussion at the meeting.

The Solicitor-General for Scotland: Prior to the trial of John Preece there was a meeting between members of the Crown Office legal staff and Dr. Clift. Dr. Clift was given at that meeting a report prepared in connection with another case to use as a style for the reports he had to produce for the Scottish court proceedings, his earlier statement being in a form appropriate only for English procedure. Discussion was limited to the style of presentation. There was no discussion of the blood group of the murdered woman.

WALES

Hospitals (Food Poisoning)

Mr. Gregory asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many cases, as opposed to outbreaks, of food poisoning in hospital premises in Wales were reported for each year since 1978.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Data on cases of food poisoning and salmonellosis in hospital premises are not available separately for Wales.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Ethiopia

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has received from Her Majesty's ambassador in Addis Ababa about the number of deaths from famine, or disease related to famine, in Ethiopia during the month of November; and what progress has been made in alleviating the situation since the international relief effort began to take effect over recent weeks.

Mr. Raison: I shall discuss these matters with the ambassador during my visit and will write to my hon. Friend after I return.

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will make a statement on the progress of the Ethiopian disaster relief project since the Minister for Overseas Development's speech to the House on 14 November, *Official Report*, columns 777-80.

Mr. Raison: Since the end of last month about £3·5 million has been spent or committed on the provision and shipment of relief supplies for Ethiopia: Details are as follows:

	Item	*Cost £ million*	*Status*
1.	Landrover spare parts, two new engines and 500 tyres for Ethiopian Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC).	0·10	Tyres being shipped December. All other items dispatched by air 16 November.
2.	Ten new landrovers for RRC.	0·09	Shipped 24 November.
3.	Two mobile workshops with full complement of equipment and tools for RRC.	0·05	Air freighted 17 November.
4.	Ten dumper trucks and spares for Assab Port.	0·35	Ordered. Depart mid-January 1985 by sea.
5.	Two grain conveyors and spares for two existing conveyors for Assab Port.	0·05	Conveyors and spares ordered: depart mid-January 1985 by sea.
	2,000 needles for grain bagging machines for Assab Port.		1,500 needles by Air Mail on 25 November, 500 to follow late-December.
6.	Airfreight costs for International Committee of the Red Cross.	0·45	Awaiting ICRC request.
7.	Six landrovers for Embassy (1) and British voluntary agencies, and freight costs.	0·15	Four sent by air early November; Two to go by sea in December.
8.	Drilling rigs for Ethiopian Water Commission (EWWCA), back-up truck and equipment, drilling technician.	0·36	One rig, with truck and equipment, to be shipped mid-January 1985. One awaiting technical advice.
9.	Five 30-tonne trucks for Catholic Fund for Overseas Development.	0·25	Ordered. Depart early December by sea.
10.	Seeds and tools for OXFAM.	0·10	Oxfam authorised to purchase locally.
11.	Airfreighting of various equipment for Disasters Emergency Committee.	0·10	Completed 2 November.
12.	Food monitors, mechanics and other manpower (provisional).	0·20	Recruitment in hand.
13.	Internal transport for British food aid.	0·75	Expenditure will begin when food arrives.
14.	Tents for League of Red Cross societies.	0·09	Supplied 3 November.
15.	Airfreight of blankets, polythene sheets etc. for Red Cross.	0·05	Sent 17 November.
16.	500 tarpaulins for covering grain trucks, 50 kilometres of cable and rope, and tarpaulin repair kits.	0·15	Estimated dispatch date: early January 1985.
17.	Shipment of 3,000 tonnes of grain.	0·21	Estimated for dispatch at end of December.
		3·50	

ENERGY

Onshore Petroleum Licensing

Mr. Skeet asked the Secretary of State for Energy when he intends to introduce new arrangements for onshore petroleum licensing.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: The Petroleum (Production) (Landward Areas) Regulations 1984 SI No. 1832 were laid before the House on 26 November 1984.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Higher Education (Recruitment Initiative)

Mr. Evennett asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the progress of the new blood recruitment initiative in higher education.

Mr. Brooke: Under the three-year scheme announced by my right hon. Friend in December 1982, a total of 592 posts have been allocated to the universities for the academic years 1983-84 and 1984-85, of which 488 are in the natural sciences. The allocation of posts for 1985-86 will be announced by the University Grants Committee in due course. My right hon. Friend is considering the advice of the UGC that some kind of new blood scheme will continue to be necessary after 1985-86.

Open University

Mr. Freeman asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received concerning the future financing of the Open University; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: My right hon. Friend and I have received 1,455 letters, and one petition signed by 600 people. Most of the representations which have been passed to us by right hon. and hon. Members have been from Open University staff and present and past students. A small number of letters have also been received from noble lords, the Northern Ireland Assembly, professional bodies, local trades councils, borough and city councils, and interest groups.

School Leavers (Knowsley)

Mr. Sean Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has as to the school leaving rate at 16 years of age among pupils in the borough of Knowsley.

Mr. Dunn: In January 1984, 18·8 per cent. of those pupils in maintained secondary schools in Knowsley who were aged 15 a year earlier were now aged 16. This implies that the school leaving rate by January 1984 of those reaching 16 in the academic year 1982-83 in Knowsley was 81·2 per cent. Some of these school leavers will have continued in full-time education in further education establishments.

School Closures (Lancashire)

Mr. Robert Atkins asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on his policy toward school closures in Lancashire.

Mr. Dunn: My right hon. Friend's policies towards school closures are set out in circulars 2/80, 2/81 and 4/82, copies of which I am sending to my hon. Friend. Every proposal that comes to my right hon. Friend for decision, whether for a school in Lancashire or elsewhere, is given careful consideration in the light of these policies and the particular circumstances of the individual case.

Graduates (Science and Engineering)

Mr. Warren asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what estimates he has made of the number of students expected to graduate at degree level in science and in engineering in each of the next five academic years; and how this compares with Her Majesty's Government's forecasts of anticipated demand.

Mr. Brooke: The figures on projected graduate output are as follows:

(000's)

	*Science**	*Engineering*	*Total*
1984-85	23·2	12·6	35·8
1985-86	23·6	13·6	37·2
1986-87	24·8	14·3	39·1
1987-88	24·8	14·8	39·6
1988-89	24·4	14·6	39·0
1989-90	24·5	14·6	39·1

* Exludes medical and social science.

There are no detailed figures available for anticipated demands for science and engineering graduates. However, this question was considered with regard to information technology related subjects by the Information Technology Skills Shortages Committee, whose first report concluded that the market could comfortably absorb more graduates from these disciplines. While we are still considering our response to this report, the Government have nevertheless already taken substantial measures to increase the number of science and engineering graduates. The Information Technology in Higher Education Initiative, which my right hon. Friend announced in December 1982, will provide an additional 5,000 higher diploma, undergraduate and postgraduate places in electronics engineering and computer science in the universities and the public sector of higher education by 1985. As a result of the planning exercise conducted recently by the National Advisory Body for local authority higher education, there will be a significant shift in subject balance within local authority higher education (LAHE) in 1984-85 towards scientific, technological and business-related subjects. First-year intakes to full-time and sandwich courses in engineering are planned to increase by 15 per cent. in 1984-85 over 1982-83 and intakes in mathematics and computing, including most LAHE information technology courses, are planned to rise by 49 per cent. Finally, in response to a request from the University Grants Committee, universities have indicated that at their new levels of staffing and funding the admission of over 3,000 additional students, mainly in scientific and technological subjects, might be achieved in both 1984-85 and 1985-86. These changes are reflected in the above figures.

"Corporal Punishment in Schools"

Mr. Evennett asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what responses he has received to the consultation document, "Corporal Punishment in Schools"; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dunn: Responses were received from over 90 organisations and individuals and were carefully considered in deciding the scope and content of the legislation we shall be introducing to allow parents to exempt their children from corporal punishment in schools.

Graduates (Information Technology)

Mr. Ashdown asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is *(a)* the number of students

graduating in information technology-related subjects in the current year and *(b)* the projected demand for graduates in information technology-related subjects for the current year and for the following five years.

Mr. Brooke: In 1984-85 some 3,100 first-degree students are expected to graduate in electronic engineering and some 2,600 in computer science, from universities and public sector institutions in Great Britain.

Detailed demand projections of the kind indicated cannot be made with any precision and future estimates vary widely. The question of future demand for graduates in this field was, however, recently considered by a committee chaired by my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South-West (Mr. Butcher), Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. A copy of its first report is in the Library.

Research Councils (Budgets)

Mr. Coombs asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what were the budgets for the five research councils in the years 1980-81, 1981-82, 1982-83 and 1983-84; and what are the estimated budgets for the current financial year.

Mr. Brooke: The research council's grants-in-aid from the science budget are as follows:

Cash, £ million

Council	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*
Agricultural and Food Research Council	37·5	42·1	43·6	46·0	46·5
Medical Research Council	72·7	101·7	107·5	113·7	117·2
Natural Environment Research Council	46·7	54·3	58·0	62·5	65·9
Science and Engineering Research Council	204·0	216·8	234·4	254·5	278·8
Economic and Social Research Council	20·3	20·7	20·9	22·4	22·0
TOTAL	381·2	435·6	464·4	499·1	530·4

Notes:
(1) The figures for 1980-81, 1981-82 and 1982-83 are outturn figures, taken from the published Appropriation Accounts.
(2) The figures for 1983-84 and 1984-85 are taken from Supply Estimates.
(3) Income in respect of commissioned research from Government Departments and other bodies is not included.

School Meals and Milk

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many schools have reduced their service of school meals and milk during each of the last three years; and what information he has as to how many dinner ladies have had to accept reductions in negotiated levels of wages and conditions during the same period.

Mr. Dunn: This information is not collected centrally.

Equality of Opportunity

Mr. Freud asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what measures he proposes to introduce, following his statement at the meeting of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Education Ministers, to promote equality of opportunity in areas within his Departmental responsibility.

Sir Keith Joseph: The Government's aim is to raise the standards achieved by all pupils, bearing in mind the evidence (including that in reports by Her Majesty's Inspectorate) of existing disparities between the performance of pupils in schools in very similar circumstances. I believe that significant progress will be made through our plans to improve the training of teachers; to seek broad national agreement on the objectives of the curriculum; to introduce changes in the examination system which will reinforce effective teaching in our schools; and to bring in via pilot schemes records of achievement for all school leavers.

Higher Education

Mr. Freud asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the estimated effect on the demand for places in higher education of *(a)* the abolition of the minimum grant and *(b)* the means-testing of academic fees.

Mr. Brooke: The projections of demand for higher education published in "Report on Education 100" (July 1984) take as their starting point the propensity to enter higher education experienced in 1981 (variant X) and in 1983 (variant Y). This was a product of the then current level of student grant and of other factors affecting demand. The report recognises that changes in the level of student grant and in other factors could affect demand, but it is not possible to project with any confidence the effect of any particular change in this complex of factors.

Education Standards

Mr. Freud asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what study has been, or will be, made by his Department of the implications for the demand for A-level, further education and higher education places of his statement to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Education Ministers in Paris regarding the objective of seeing 80 to 90 per cent. of all pupils reaching or surpassing at age 16 the standards now associated with the average.

Sir Keith Joseph: The projections set out in DES "Report on Education 100" take account of trends towards an increased proportion of young people obtaining the qualifications for entry to higher education. The Department will monitor closely the demand for post-16 education, including changes associated with the Government's policies to improve the standards achieved by pupils of compulsory school age.

Primary School, Saltley

Mr. Terry Davis asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) when he expects to take a decision on the proposal to open a new primary school at Leigh road, Saltley;

(2) when his Department received a proposal from the City of Birmingham council for a new primary school at Leigh road, Saltley.

Mr. Dunn: The authority published these proposals on 10 August 1983 and submitted them to my right hon. Friend on the same date; subsequently it requested my right hon. Friend on 24 November 1983, if he were minded to approve the proposals, to modify their date of implementation from September 1984 to September 1985. My right hon. Friend realises that all concerned are now anxious for an early decision. He will announce that decision as soon as he has completed his consideration of all the circumstances of the case.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Computers (Special Schools)

68. **Rev. Martin Smyth** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he has any plans for increasing provision for the availability and use of computers in special schools; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Pattie: I am at present reviewing all expenditure on support programmes of this kind and will make a statement when it is completed. However, the hon. Member may like to know that my Department financed the production of a pack of 25 computer programmes for use by teachers of children with moderate learning difficulties. This pack, known as "Microspecial", is being made available at no cost to a number of special schools throughout the United Kingdom and will also be available for purchase.

Cocom Agreement

Mr. Batiste asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what is the average length of time taken to grant an export licence to a British company under the consultative committee agreement when the consent or agreement of other consultative committee agreement partners is necessary;

(2) what criteria are used to determine whether licences under the COCOM Agreement can be granted at the discretion of Her Majesty's Government; and whether consultation and agreement with other countries is necessary;

(3) if he will describe the procedures followed by his Department in considering applications by British companies for licences for export of equipment covered by the COCOM Agreement including *(a)* where the grant of the licence is within the discretion of Her Majesty's Government and *(b)* where consultation and agreement with others is required; and if he will indicate whether he has any proposals for the modification of these procedures.

Mr. Channon: The scope of COCOM's controls on exports of equipment and technology, including whether licences may be issued at national discretion, is established by unanimous agreement of the member Governments in accordance with agreed strategic criteria. In considering applications for export licences, my Department, having determined that a licence is indeed required, seeks the views of other Government Departments with an interest, whether or not the issue of that licence also requires the approval of our COCOM partners. Information on the average length of time to grant licences when such prior approval is necessary is not readily available. I have no proposals for the modification of these procedures, but they are kept under regular review.

Mauritius

Mr. Greenway asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he is taking to improve the volume of trade between Mauritius and the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Channon: I see considerable scope for a modest increase in trade between the United Kingdom and Mauritius. For this reason, my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, who visited Mauritius in October 1983, signed a memorandum of understanding with the Government of Mauritius for a £12·25 million aid and credit package. Under this agreement projects mutually acceptable to both Governments will have access to funding from the package. A number of such projects have already been identified and disbursements are expected to start shortly.

Mr. Greenway asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what were the trading figures between the United Kingdom and Mauritius in each year since the independence of Mauritius and up to the latest date for which figures are available.

Mr. Channon: The information is as follows:

Value £ million

	United Kingdom imports (cif)	*United Kingdom exports (fob)*		*United Kingdom imports (cif)*	*United Kingdom exports (fob)*
1969	21·6	4·8	1977	96·7	34·6
1970	22·3	5·9	1978	123·2	31·6
1971	17·3	8·4	1979	115·7	30·5
1972	27·0	8·1	1980	138·9	24·9
1973	28·3	10·5	1981	97·4	21·6
1974	48·5	20·0	1982	119·4	20·8
1975	104·6	24·3	1983	129·0	22·6
1976	99·9	28·4	*1984	106·9	18·9

* January to September.

Sources: "Annual Statements of Overseas Trade" of the United Kingdom (1969-75) and *Overseas Trade Statistics of the United Kingdom* (1976 onwards).

Note: Figures for 1970 and subsequent years are in accordance with revision 2 of the Standard International Trade Classification and are on the statistical basis currently in use. Figures for 1969 are in accordance with the original version of the classification, but in the case of United Kingdom trade with Mauritius the difference between the two methods of calculation is negligible.

Price Commission

Mrs. Peacock asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has any plans to re-establish a price commission combining the roles of the Monopolies Commission and the Office of Fair Trading.

Mr. Fletcher: No.

Discriminatory Discounts

Mr. Ashdown asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the Binder Hamlyn price and area survey being conducted for the Office of Fair Trading into discriminatory discounts is due to be published.

Mr. Fletcher: This survey forms part of the Director General of Fair Trading's fact-finding exercise aimed at updating some of the statistical information in the Monopolies and Mergers Commission report on discounts to retailers. The results of the exercise are unlikely to be available for publication until well into next year.

Microprocessor Application Programme and Innovation Schemes

Mr. Ashdown asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he has any plans to withdraw support for the microprocessor application programme or the support for innovation schemes.

Mr. Pattie: I announced on 12 November that, pending the completion of a review of the Department's support for industrial research and development, the Department would not accept any new applications for certain categories of project support. Among these are research and development projects from single firms on standard "support for innovation" terms—this would cover projects under the microelectronics application project (MAP).

I cannot anticipate the outcome of the review.

Airwaves (Abuse)

Mr. Terlezki asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much money is spent each year combating the abuse of the airwaves; and whether the abuse is increasing.

Mr. Butcher: In 1983-84 my Department spent around £1·3 million on combating illicit use of radio. It is not clear whether abuse of the airwaves is increasing. Complaints of radio interference fell from a peak of 73,300 in 1982 to 55,800 in 1983 and are likely to show a further decline this year. On the other hand, complaints about pirate broadcasting have increased and correspondence about abuse of citizens' band continues at a serious level.

Computers in Schools

Mr. Evennett asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much his Department has spent in each of the last three years on computers in schools.

Mr. Butcher: The Department of Education and Science has no responsibility for the purchase of equipment by individual schools as such—spending is primarily a matter for individual local authorities. The DES has been able, however, through the microelectronics education programme, to provide software development and teacher training support for the introduction of microcomputers.

The Department of Trade and Industry, however, has run three schemes during the period in question under which schools have been able to apply for a 50 per cent. grant towards the purchase of a set of computer equipment.

The cost of each of these three schemes, the first of which began in 1981, is as follows:

Micros in schools scheme (for secondary schools)

1981-82 £ million	*1982-83* £ million	*1983-84* £ million
1·2	1·8	0·4

Micros in primary schools

1982-83 £ million	*1983-84* £ million	**1984-85* £ million
1·5	5·5	1·4

Micros in schools extension scheme

1983-84 £	**1984-85* £
850,000	785,000

* To date.

Small Businesses

Mr. Ashdown asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has any plans to improve the acquisition of reliable statistics on small businesses, with particular regard to their average life expectancy and the main problems confronting them.

Mr. Trippier: I have no plans to impose additional form-filling burdens on small businesses, but I am conscious of the need for reliable statistics and am encouraging greater use of both official and commercially collected data. My Department's work on average life-expectancy was published in *British Business* on 12 August and 7 October 1983. Copies were placed in the Library. The problems confronting small businesses are continuously monitored.

EC (Regional Development Fund)

Dr. Glyn asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much the United Kingdom has been allocated from the European regional development fund for areas affected by the decline of the steel, shipbuilding and textile industries; and when the funds will be available.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The measures adopted by the Council of Ministers in January 1984 provide a total of £89 million ERDF aid towards eligible steel (£19 million) and shipbuilding (£10 million), as well as first-time aid (£60 million) for textile areas. The United Kingdom Government are contributing a further £12·5 million. The aid package will continue until 31 March 1989, or until exhausted if earlier.

Assistance is available for the conversion of disused buildings into suitable premises for small firms (up to 200 employees) and environmental improvements, as well as aid to small firms through the provision of consultancy and common services; help on technical innovation and information; additional investment; access to risk capital; and the establishment or extension of counselling services and economic promotion agencies. The United Kingdom Government contribution will relate to the aids to small firms. Copies of leaflets setting out the full range of services for small firms will be placed in the Library.

The following are the provisional allocations to eligible areas, which were fixed on 1 February 1984 for the duration of the programmes:

Provisional Allocation of Second Round of ERDF Aid and Additional United Kingdom Central Government contributions to Steel, Shipbuilding and Textile areas

£ million

*Area**	*Steel Areas*	*Shipbuilding Areas*	*Textile Areas*	*Total*
Scotland				
Strathclyde†	1·8	4·4	—	6·2
Assisted Areas in Tayside	—	—	4·2	4·2
Total Scotland	1·8	4·4	4·2	10·4
Northern Ireland				
Belfast†	—	1·1	—	1·1
Northern Ireland	—	—	14·9	14·9
Total Northern Ireland	—	1·1	14·9	16·0
Wales				
Clwyd†	2·2	—	—	2·2
South Glamorgan†	0·8	—	—	0·8
West Glamorgan† (including parts of Port Talbot TTWA located in Mid-Glamorgan)	2·4	—	—	2·4
Gwent†	2·5	—	—	2·5
Llanelli TTWA	0·8	—	—	0·8
Total Wales	8·7	—	—	8·7
England				
Cleveland†	2·1	0·8	—	2·9
Assisted Areas in Durham (including Consett TTWA)	2·0	—	—	2·0
Tyne and Wear†	—	3·2	—	3·2
Total North East England	4·1	4·0	—	8·1
Merseyside†	—	2·0	—	2·0
Workington TTWA	0·6	—	—	0·6
Lancashire (Eligible Areas)	—	—	8·0	8·0
Greater Manchester (Eligible Areas)	—	—	20·2	20·2
Total North West England	0·6	2·0	28·2	30·8
West Yorkshire (Eligible Areas)	—	—	20·3	20·3
Assisted Areas in Humberside (including parts of Scunthorpe TTWA located in Lincolnshire)	3·4	—	—	3·4
Assisted Areas in South Yorkshire (including Sheffield TTWA)	2·2	—	—	2·2
Total Yorkshire and Humberside	5·6	—	20·3	25·9
Corby TTWA†	1·2	—	—	1·2
Total England	11·5	6·1	48·4	66·0
Total United Kingdom	22·0	11·6	67·5	101·1

Notes:
* Areas as defined in EC regulations.
† Included in first round of ERDF aid measures.

British Telecom

Mr. Gould asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what total sums will be paid by way of commission to City institutions arising from the flotation of British Telecom shares.

Mr. Butcher [*pursuant to his reply*, 26 November 1984, c. *352*.]: The costs of the British Telecom flotation can be broadly divided into two categories: those that can be estimated now, and those that depend upon the take up of the offer.

Costs that can be estimated now include:

	£ million
Underwriting the United Kingdom portion	14·6
Underwriting the overseas portion	7·8
Commissions to United Kingdom priority applicants for "Placing Shares" (see part IV, section 13 of the prospectus)	30·9
Commissions to United Kingdom priority applicants for commitment shares (see part IV, section 13 of the prospectus)	21·1
Commissions to brokers for priority applications	4·7
Foreign commissions	20·8-22·5
Fees for advice from merchant bankers, brokers, solicitors, accountants and so on	7·0
Pre-prospectus advertising	7·6
Prospectus advertising	3·0
Other marketing costs, including printing prospectuses	6·9
Miscellaneous, including other foreign costs	2·5
Total of costs that can be estimated now	126·9-128·6

Other costs, which depend upon the level of applications, the numbers of shares allotted and the continuing pattern of share ownership include:

(i) the cost of supplying to British Telecom employees free shares to the value of £70·20 and matching shares up to a maximum of £200·20, together with a 10 per cent. discount on applications up to £2,080 and the administration of this scheme;

(ii) the cost of supplying telephone rental vouchers (worth £18 each) and bonus shares to those shareholders who are and remain eligible for these incentives, together with the costs of administering these schemes;

(iii) certain charges made by the receiving bankers and registrars for handling applications and subsequent administration; and

(iv) the commissions to intermediaries set out in part IV, section 14(d) of the prospectus.

Most of the above costs include VAT at 15 per cent.

PRIME MINISTER

USA (President)

Q36. **Mr. Latham** asked the Prime Minister when she next expects to meet the President of the United States of America.

The Prime Minister: I hope to have an early opportunity to meet President Reagan again.

Law of the Sea Convention

Q70. **Mr. Douglas** asked the Prime Minister if she will make a statement on the co-ordination of policy between the Foreign Office and the Department of Transport in relation to the United Kingdom's attitude to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

The Prime Minister: There is close consultation between the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department of Transport, including consultation on our policy towards the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

Handsworth, Birmingham

Q102. **Ms. Clare Short** asked the Prime Minister whether she has any plans to visit the Handsworth area of Birmingham.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

Government Policies

Q115. **Dr. Marek** asked the Prime Minister what steps Her Majesty's Government take to ensure that their policies benefit the United Kingdom as a whole.

The Prime Minister: The particular needs of individual regions and counties within the United Kingdom are taken fully into account in the formulation of the Government's policies.

Engagements

Mr. Parry asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 27 November.

Mr. Leigh asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 27 November.

Q11. Mr. Ward asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 27 November.

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House I shall be having further meetings later today. This evening I hope to have an audience of Her Majesty the Queen.

Gwynedd

Mr. Wigley asked the Prime Minister when she next plans to visit Gwynedd.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

EMPLOYMENT

Youth Training Scheme

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will provide a breakdown by ethnic origin of those *(a)* applying to and *(b)* accepted on the youth training schemes in Waltham Forest; and if he will break down each figure by sex.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Information is not available on the numbers of young people applying for the youth training scheme. In the London borough of Waltham Forest, the number of entrants to the youth training scheme by ethnic origin and sex for the period April 1984 to mid-November 1984 was as follows:

Ethnic Origin	*Sex*		*Total*
	Male	*Female*	
Asian	16	7	23
African/West Indian	55	51	106
White/European	206	126	332
Other	10	3	13
Total	287	187	474

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for Employment whether he will make a statement on the future of mode B schemes within the youth training scheme.

Mr. Peter Morrison: I shall reply to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for Employment what are the current mode B schemes approved and in operation within Leicestershire; which of them are fully subscribed; and how many youth training scheme students are enrolled on each one.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The information requested is in the following table:

Mode B youth training scheme provision in the Leicestershire area at 31 October 1984

Scheme Title	*Approved Places*	**Number of Trainees*
Leicester City		
Leicester information technology centre	30	16
Volcraft training workshop	20	16
Red Cross community project	20	20
Leicester City Council community project	70	31
Weaving workshop	10	5
Highfields induction training scheme	70	70
County community project	310	243
Leicestershire employment education project	45	37

Scheme Title	Approved Places	*Number of Trainees
FG training workshop	60	57
Family services unit	6	6
National Elfrida Rathbone society scheme	25	22
Leicester training workshop	85	57
Leicester employment rehabilitation centre†	15	15
Harborough		
South Leicestershire youth training scheme	50	39
Ashby Magna training workshop	45	13
Coalville		
St. James training workshop	40	28
Hinckley		
Hinckley training workshop	35	32
Earl Shelton opportunity programme	40	22
Alpha Project	60	31
Loughborough		
Loughborough training workshop	90	74
92212 Locomotive	10	7
Loughborough information technology centre‡	30	30
Melton Mowbray		
Melton Would-Workers	35	34
Melton College of Further Education†	15	7
Oakham		
Rutland employment consortium	40	15
	1,256	927

* Includes both 1983-84 and 1984-85 entrants.
† Mode B2 scheme.
‡ All approved places on this scheme are occupied by 1984-85 entrants.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Winnick asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list in order the 60 parliamentary constituencies in England where the rate of unemployment is highest, indicating in each case the percentage of the total work force unemployed; and if he will state the percentage increase in each constituency which has taken place since such constituency analysis first became available.

Mr. Alan Clark: Unemployment rates for parliamentary constituencies are not available. Information on the changes in unemployment by constituencies since June 1983 is available in the House of Commons Library.

Mr. Freud asked the Secretary of State for Employmment whether he will list in the *Official Report* the number of people currently unemployed in north-east Cambridgeshire; what percentage of the working population this represents; and how many have been unemployed *(a)* for three months or more and *(b)* for over one year.

Mr. Alan Clark: Unemployment totals for parliamentary constituencies are now available in the House of Commons Library. Unemployment rates are available only for travel-to-work areas and for counties. Information on the duration of claimant unemployed in parliamentary constituencies will become available next year.

Pay Statements

Mr. Prescott asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he is satisfied that the industrial tribunal system adequately ensures that workers receive pay slips and written statements from their employers.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: My right hon. Friend and I are satisfied that the relevant provisions of the Employment Protection (Consolidation) Act 1978, including the right to refer complaints to an industrial tribunal, provide adequate protection to employees with regard to written pay statements and statements of the main terms and conditions of employment.

Unemployment Benefit Offices (North West)

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many unemployment benefit offices in the north west of England are currently operating a system of monthly signing on only; and if he will specify the offices in question.

Mr. Alan Clark: There are no unemployment benefit offices in the Department's north-west region currently operating a system of monthly signing. Some did operate monthly for a short period recently, but have now returned to the normal fortnightly system. As usual special signing arrangements will apply over Christmas.

Regional Benefit Investigation Team (Stockport)

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many weeks the regional benefit investigation teams are spending in Stockport looking at Department of Employment officers and claimants.

Mr. Alan Clark: The north-west regional benefit investigation team is not currently working in Stockport nor does it have any immediate plans to do so.

Wages Inspectorate

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many firms were inspected by the Wages Inspectorate in each of the last five years; and of those firms inspected how many were found to be underpaying at least one of their workers.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The information is given in the following table:

	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983
Establishments inspected by visit	34,807	34,657	24,399	23,272	26,332
Establishments inspected by other methods	18,014	15,337	13,494	16,242	16,226
Total	52,821	49,994	37,893	39,514	42,558

	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983
Establishments found to be underpaying one or more workers	10,969	12,154	10,074	9,269	9,842
Workers underpaid as a percentage of those whose pay was checked by all methods	9·5	9·9	12·4	6·2	6·3

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many wages inspectors and other staff have been employed by the Wages Inspectorate in each of the past five years; and what has been the cost to public funds.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The figures requested are given in the following table:

	October each year				
	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983
Outdoor inspectors in post	160	155	117½	116	116
Other divisional staff in post	122½	125½	110½	95	96
Cost in the relevant financial year (£ million)	2·71	3·34	2·74	2·77	2·99

Mr. Gerald Howarth asked the Secretary of State for Employment for each of the past five years *(a)* how many workers' wages were examined by the Wages Inspectorate, *(b)* how many workers were paid arrears of wages as a result of examination by the Wages Inspectorate, *(c)* what was the total arrears in wages paid, and *(d)* what was the average arrears paid per worker examined.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The information requested is given in the following table:

	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983
Workers whose pay was checked by visit	244,941	269,134	181,974	165,118	139,305
Workers whose pay was checked other than by visit	Not available	26,357	23,830	162,509	193,548
Total	244,941	295,491	205,804	327,627	332,853
Workers paid arrears	22,457	28,373	24,117	18,562	18,494
Arrears paid	£1,511,760	£2,100,512	£2,037,930	£1,861,783	£1,860,110
Average arrears paid per worker checked	£6·17	£7·11	£9·90	£5·68	£5·59

Since 1979, in addition to checks by visit, a number of other successful methods for checking the pay of workers have been developed. A detailed explanation of the inspectorate's methods of checking pay and the results in 1983 is given in pages 451 and 452 of the October 1984 issue of *Employment Gazette*. A copy has been placed in the Library.

Mr. Gerald Howarth asked the Secretary of State for Employment what measures have been taken to simplify the Wages Inspectorate regulations since the problems of compliance were first pointed out in the *Employment Gazette* in 1977.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The scope for simplifying wages orders is limited by the complexity of the provisions included in them which are matters for the councils themselves. The Department of Employment has over the years encouraged and assisted wages councils to simplify their orders as much as possible. Many councils have taken steps to try to make the meaning of their orders clearer and some have included guidance notes to aid users. More recently, the Wages Inspectorate has prepared brief digests of the main provisions of the orders of the seven largest councils. These cover about 90 per cent. of all wages council workers.

Wages Councils

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many staff have been employed by his Department's secretariat servicing wages councils in each of the last five years.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The number of staff in post in the office of wages councils, which provides the secretariat for the councils, on 1 October in each of the last five years was as follows:

	Numbers
1980	15
1981	16
1982	14
1983	12
1984	11

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Secretary of State for Employment what was the cost of maintaining the wages councils, including his Department's secretariat, for each of the past five years.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The cost of maintaining wages councils, including the cost of the Wages Inspectorate, for each of the past five years is set out below.

	£ million
1979-80	4·325
1980-81	4·277

	£ million
1981-82	4·067
1982-83	3·839
1983-84	4·029

Mr. Gerald Howarth asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish a list of the backdated awards made by wages councils over the past five years.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: A list of backdated awards is as follows:

Wages council	*Effective date of award*	*Date of issue of wages orders*
1979		
Aerated waters (Scotland)	17 September	27 September
Aerated waters (E and W)	26 March	13 June
Boot and shoe repairing	12 February	3 May
Button manufacturing	1 October	8 November
Coffin furniture and cerement making	1 December	6 February
Cotton waste reclamation	28 April	3 June
Flax and hemp	23 July	14 September
General waste materials reclamation	28 July	10 August
Hat, cap and millinery	2 April	22 June
Laundry	20 February	1 March
Licensed non-residential establishment	15 January	14 February
Licensed residential and restaurant	6 October	5 December
Linen and cotton handkerchief etc.	4 June	5 June
Made-up textiles	1 December	20 February
Ostrich and fancy feather etc.	23 October	26 November
Perambulator and invalid carriage	23 April	13 June
Retail bespoke tailoring	4 June	12 July
Retail food and allied trades	3 December	3 March
Retail trades (non-food)	8 October	5 November
Toy manufacturing	23 June	20 July
Unlicensed place of refreshment	18 June	3 August
1980		
Aerated waters (Scotland)	15 September	18 September
Aerated waters (E and W)	1 January	6 March
Button manufacturing	6 October	3 November
Coffin furniture and cerement making	1 December	27 January
Cotton waste reclamation	28 April	14 May
Flax and hemp	23 July	13 August
General waste materials reclamation	28 July	29 August
Hat, cap and millinery	1 April	18 April
Linen and cotton handkerchief etc.	2 June	8 July
Made-up textiles	1 December	17 February
Ostrich and fancy feather etc	20 October	10 November
Perambulator and invalid carriage	21 April	13 May
Retail bespoke tailoring	28 January	5 February
Retail food and allied trades	1 December	27 February
Toy manufacturing	23 June	30 June
Unlicensed place of refreshment	18 June	6 August
1981		
Boot and shoe repairing	12 February	20 February
Button manufacturing	19 October	27 November
Cotton waste reclamation	27 April	8 May
General waste materials reclamation	28 July	13 October
Hat, cap and millinery	2 April	19 May
Laundry	20 February	2 April
Made-up textiles	1 December	13 January
Retail food and allied trades	6 April	28 April
Sack and bag	June	24 June
Toy manufacturing	22 June	13 July
Unlicensed place of refreshment	15 June	6 July
1982		
Aerated waters (England and Wales)	1 January	12 January
Button manufacturing	19 November	17 January
Clothing manufacturing	1 January	9 February
General waste materials reclamation	28 July	9 August
Hat, cap and millinery	1 April	23 April
Licensed residential and restaurant	6 October	8 October
Made-up textiles	1 December	9 December
Ostrich and fancy feather etc.	1 January	14 January
Perambulator and invalid carriage	19 April	14 May
Retail bespoke tailoring	31 March	13 April
Retail food and allied trades	5 April	27 April
Retail trades (non-food)	5 April	21 April
Sack and bag	1 May	9 July
Toy manufacturing	21 June	23 July
Unlicensed place of refreshment	14 June	23 June
1983		
Button manufacturing	21 November	21 December
Clothing manufacturing	1 January	9 February
Coffin furniture and cerement making	1 December	17 January
Flax and hemp	20 July	25 August
Hairdressing undertakings	11 April	31 May
Laundry	20 February	8 April
Licensed non-residential	15 January	4 February
Linen and cotton handkerchief etc.	18 July	29 July
Made-up textiles	1 December	6 December
Ostrich and fancy feather etc.	1 January	12 January
Retail food and allied trades	4 April	29 April
Retail trades (non-food)	4 April	8 April
Sack and bag	30 May	1 July
Toy manufacturing	20 June	18 July
Unlicensed place of refreshment	30 June	19 September

Mr. Gerald Howarth asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many prosecutions were brought by wages councils over the last five years.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The numbers of employers prosecuted for offences under the Wages Councils Act 1979 were 12 in 1979, eight in 1980, 10 in 1981, seven in 1982 and two in 1983.

CIVIL SERVICE

Civil Service Appeal Board (Dr. Clift)

Mr. Ashley asked the Minister for the Civil Service who sat on the Civil Service appeal board which considered the procedures followed in Dr. Clift's case; if there were any forensic experts; for how long they sat; if

they considered the evidence of the reports of the forensic scientists invited by Dr. Clift to comment on his Department's conclusions on his work; what other forensic experts gave oral or written evidence; and what was their status.

Mr. Hayhoe: The Civil Service Appeal Board is an independent body. Its remit covers appeals from civil servants under notice of dismissal or compulsory early retirement (other than on medical grounds) and those who consider themselves to have been debarred unfairly from undertaking political activities. Its hearings are informal. It takes oral and written evidence from the appellant and the employing department and the sole criterion for decision is "fairness". Its findings are relayed to the appellant and the employing department but are not made public.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Taxation Statistics

Mr. Jackson asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the total number of individuals who *(a)* pay income tax, *(b)* have a taxable income after allowances of £1,000 or less and *(c)* have a taxable income of more than £1,000 but less than £3,000.

Mr. Moore: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

Mr. Jackson asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will tabulate in the *Official Report* his Department's contemporary estimates of the numbers of *(a)* taxpayers at the time of the Budgets of the years 1979 to 1984 inclusive and *(b)* persons taken out of the income tax system as a result of the changes made in those Budgets.

Mr. Moore: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

Personal Incomes (Statistics)

Mr. Jackson asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what were the contempory estimates of numbers of persons with earnings above the minimum limit for national insurance contributions at the time of the autumn statements in each of the years 1979 to 1984 inclusive; and what were the estimates for the numbers brought below that limit by the changes made in each of those years.

Mr. Moore: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Chief Electoral Officer

Mr. William Ross asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what sums were allocated to and spent by the chief electoral officer in Northern Ireland in each of the last three years for training his staff; how much of these sums was expended on (a) training full-time employees, (b) training part-time employees, in each electoral office, (c) training prospective presiding officers and their prospective clerks and (d) those who were the prospective officers in charge of a polling station; what percentage of the total this represented in each of these categories; in which electoral offices the sums were expended; and how much was expended in each such office.

Mr. Scott: The information requested concerning electoral offices is not available because training of full-time and part-time staff in these offices is conducted in-service under the supervision of the chief electoral officer or the relevant deputy electoral officer as appropriate.

In the light of experience at the Northern Ireland Assembly elections in 1982, the chief electoral officer requested special additional funds for the training of presiding officers, senior presiding officers and other temporary senior election staff. The then Secretary of State agreed in May 1983 that an appropriate annual sum should be made available. A sum not exceeding £27,000 was allocated for financial year 1983-84 and the same sum for financial year 1984-85.

Allocation of funds between electoral offices is a matter for the chief electoral officer; information in the form required cannot be provided except at disproportionate cost. I understand that expenditure for financial year 1983-84 and so far in financial year 1984-85 by electoral offices was as follows:

Electoral Office	*Financial Year 1983-84* £	*Financial Year 1984-85* £
Ballymoney	2,141·37	nil
Hillsborough	1,450·00	669·68
Newtownards	1,592·86	702
Belfast 'A'	1,702·50	1,983·20
Belfast 'B'	1,652·50	nil
Banbridge	2,427 12	nil
Londonderry	815·13	1,074·70
Dungannon	1,611·69	nil
Omagh	1,102·36	nil
Newtownabbey	1,857·24	nil
Total	16,352·77	4,429·58

Note: The number of electoral offices has been increased during the period in question and some locations have changed. The table above shows the distribution of funds according to the present electoral organisation.

TRANSPORT

Coachbuilding

Mr. Canavan asked the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of the effect on the coachbuilding industry of the new proposed transport legislation.

Mr. David Mitchell: Our proposals are designed to stop the decline in the use of bus services and are therefore likely to be in the long-term interests of those involved in vehicle manufacture.

Motor Cycles and Cars (Accident Statistics)

Mr. Penhaligon asked the Secretary of State for Transport, for the last five years for which figures are available what was the number of 16, 17, 18, 19, 20 and 21-year-olds killed while driving motor bikes and cars, respectively.

Mrs. Chalker: Fatalities among car and motorcycle (including moped) drivers are as follows for the last three years. Further years would incur disproportionate costs.

Motor cycle rider fatalities

Age	16	17	18	19	20	21
1981	37	172	148	122	75	61
1982	27	146	143	106	74	60
1983	34	90	83	103	78	63

Car driver fatalities

Age	16*	17	18	19	20	21
1981	6	24	42	64	53	41
1982	1	29	60	65	61	54
1983	0	29	50	52	47	44

* Persons driving illegally

Fatality rates for motorcyclists and car users of various ages are shown in tables E and F of "Road Accidents Great Britain 1980", a copy of which is in the Library.

Mr. Penhaligon asked the Secretary of State for Transport what is his Department's estimate of the total number of miles driven by 16, 17, 18, 19, 20 and 21-year-olds on motor bikes and in motor cars, respectively.

Mrs. Chalker: The information is as follows:

Estimated miles driven (millions) in 1983: Great Britain

Ages	Motor Cycles	Motor Cars
16	1,600	—
17		600
18		1,150
19		1,650
20		2,050
21		2,550

The figure for motor cycles includes mopeds. It cannot be disaggregated by age-group, because the available data are based on a small sample of motor cycles in 1978-79.

Heavy Goods Vehicles (Anti-spray Devices)

Mr. Terry Lewis asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will introduce measures to compel the use of anti-spray devices on heavy goods vehicles for use in wet weather.

Mrs. Chalker: Statutory Instrument 1984 No.: 1543 requiring lorries to be fitted with spray-reducing equipment was laid before Parliament on 10 October this year. The effect is that new lorries and existing heavy trailers must be fitted with the necessary equipment from various dates between 1 May 1985 and 1 October 1987.

A259 (Improvements)

Mr. Warren asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the improvements scheduled or under consideration on the A259 between 1985 and 1989 and between 1990 and 1994.

Mrs. Chalker: The information requested is as follows:

Main Programme for start of construction April 1987 onwards
- Rye bypass
- Winchelsea bypass

Regional Programme
- Guestling Thorn diversion
- Icklesham bypass
- Brooklands diversion
- Brenzett Junction

The timing of these schemes will depend on the progress of the statutory procedures and the availability of funds. In addition, studies of options for improvements between New Romney and Hythe and for a western bypass of Hastings are in hand.

London Commuter Services

Mr. Fallon asked the Secretary of State for Transport what is the level of the Government subsidy to British Rail in respect of London commuter services.

Mr. David Mitchell: Grant for the public services obligation is paid to the British Railways Board in respect of the passenger rail network as a whole, and not in respect of individual services. The board's annual report for 1983 records that the London and south-east sector's loss in that year, before payment of PSO grant, was £274·9 million.

Dogs

Mr. Terlezki asked the Secretary of State for Transport, in view of the number of dog-related road accidents, if he will introduce legislation requiring dogs to be kept on leads in or near public highways.

Mrs. Chalker: I do not consider that the problem justifies legislative controls beyond the powers in section 31 of the Road Traffic Act 1972 which enable local authorities to designate roads on which it would be an offence to allow dogs without leads. However, we shall continue to give advice such as that which is already contained in the "Highway Code".

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Milk Quotas

Mr. Hargreaves asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress there has been on payments to the European Community by member states under the milk quota scheme.

Mr. MacGregor: We have pressed from the first for full details of implementation of dairy quotas in all member states to be made available. As a result of a request in July, the Agriculture Commissioner made a report in September on the general legislative and administrative progress made in other member states. A list of the main legal instruments adopted was given in reply to the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) on 31 October 1984. Details of the progress made in cutting back milk production were given in reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor) on 19 November 1984, at column 76.

We continued to insist on the importance of dairy quotas being implemented fairly and equally throughout the Community at the October Agriculture Council, and at the Agriculture Council on 12-13 November we asked the Commission to take immediate steps if the arrangements for charging levy in November were not being properly applied in particular member states. In discussion it became clear that the French Government were not ready to collect levy in November.

The Commission decided as an interim measure to delay by 10 days the dates for the collection of the first payments under the supplementary levy arrangements. After further consideration the Commission is now adopting a measure which will require the levy for the first six months to be collected within 75 days after 30

September. The Commission has also said that it will immediately open infringement proceedings against any member state not applying the system or not applying it properly. We shall continue to insist that these arrangements are respected.

Land Drainage

Mr. Harrison asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) when he will publish the inter-departmental review of land drainage which was completed by October 1983 and which has not yet reported;

(2) when he will report on the land drainage review which took place prior to October 1983; and when the consultation document will be issued.

Mrs. Fenner: The consultation paper on the financing and administration of land drainage, flood prevention and coast protection is under urgent consideration. We intend to issue it as soon as it is practicable to do so.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Southern Lebanon

Dr. Michael Clark asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement with regard to possible British participation in an expanded United Nations force in southern Lebanon; and whether he will specify what type of assistance Britain could provide, at what level and for how long and under what conditions.

Mr. Luce: We have long supported the expansion of UNIFIL to monitor the early and complete withdrawal, on a basis agreed by negotiation, of the Israeli forces in occupation of south Lebanon and to contribute to the restoration of the Lebanon Government's authority there. We would be willing to consider a request from the United Nations for further logistic support of the type we already provide to UNIFIL.

Disarmament

Mr. Michie asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the graduated and reciprocated initiatives in tension reduction procedure of nuclear disarmament supported by the United Nations General Assembly.

Mr. Luce: I shall write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Michie asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will publish the text of the review of the implementation of the recommendations and decisions adopted by the General Assembly at its tenth special session, "Unilateral Disarmament Measures: Report of the Secretary General"; and what is the policy of Her Majesty's Government towards this review.

Mr. Luce: Copies of the United Nations study on unilateral nuclear disarmament measures are being placed in the Library.

We believe that this study, which was produced by four neutral and non-aligned representatives and presented to the Secretary-General, lacks balance and depth, and does not advance progress towards nuclear disarmament.

Mr. Michie asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proposals the United Kingdom delegation to the Geneva conference of the United Nations Committee on Disarmament will present regarding *(a)* nuclear test ban, *(b)* cessation of the nuclear arms race and nuclear disarmament, *(c)* prevention of nuclear war, and *(d)* arrangements to assure non-nuclear weapon states against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons.

Mr. Luce: As United Kingdom working papers tabled at the conference on disarmament in 1983 indicated, an effective nuclear test ban is impossible without adequate verification safeguards. We are ready to continue the search for solutions at the conference in 1985. We trust others will join us.

Together with our allies, we shall play our part in the work of any ad hoc committees which the conference may decide to re-establish in 1985 on cessation of the nuclear arms race, prevention of nuclear war and arrangements to ensure non-nuclear weapons states against use or threat of use of nuclear weapons. We will pursue any proposal which makes a practical contribution to progress on arms control.

Mr. Michie asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what measures his Department is taking to provide United Nations General Assembly resolution 38/73E about an immediate bilateral nuclear arms freeze either independently or through a joint declaration.

Mr. Luce: The United Nations General Assembly resolution to which the hon. Member refers is directed at the United States and the Soviet Union. It requests them to report to the General Assembly on the implementation of a bilateral nuclear arms freeze. The questions of a United Kingdom report does not arise.

We and our allies did not support this resolution. A freeze would perpetuate the present imbalance in favour of the Soviet Union and would remove the incentive for the Russians to negotiate reductions; adequate verification would also be extremely difficult.

Law of the Sea Convention

Mr. Anderson asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will veto any decision by the Council of Ministers that the European Economic Community as an organisation should sign the Law of the Sea Convention before the deadline on 9 December.

Mr. Rifkind: I refer the hon. Member to the reply which my right hon. and learned Friend gave on 9 November, at column 41-42, to my hon. Friend the Member for Bedfordshire, North (Mr. Skeet). We have as yet taken no final decision on signature of the convention. We remain in touch with other members of the Community on this matter.

Extradition

Mr. Terlezki asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the countries with which the United Kingdom does not have an extradition treaty or any corresponding arrangement under the Fugitive Offenders Act 1967.

Mr. Renton: The countries are as follows:

Afghanistan
Algeria
Andorra
Angola
Bahrain
Benin
Brazil
Brunei
Bulgaria
Burkina
Burma
Burundi
Cambodia
Cameroon
Cape Verde
Central African Republic
Chad
China
Comoros
Congo, People's Republic of
Costa Rica
Djibouti
Dominican Republic
Egypt
Equatorial Guinea
Ethiopia
Gabon
German Democratic Republic
Guinea
Guinea-Bissau
Holy See
Honduras
Indonesia
Iran
Ivory Coast
Japan
Jordan
Korea, Republic of
Kuwait
Laos
Lebanon
Libya
Liechtenstein
Madagascar
Maldives
Mali
Mauritania
Mongolia
Morocco
Mozambique
Nepal
Niger
Oman
Pakistan
Philippines
Qatar
Rwanda
Sao Tome and Principe
Saudi Arabia
Senegal
Somali Democratic Republic
South Africa
Soviet Union
Spain
Sudan
Suriname
Syria
Togo
Tunisia
Turkey
United Arab Emirates
Vanuatu
Venezuela
Vietnam
Yemen Arab Republic
Yemen, People's Democratic Republic of
Zaire

Export Promotion (Cost)

Mr. Fallon asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the cost of export promotion by his Department in European Economic Community and European Free Trade Association countries.

Mr. Rifkind: There are no separate figures available for the cost of export promotion alone by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in the countries of the European Community and the European Free Trade Association. The total cost of commercial work performed by Her Majesty's embassies and subordinate posts in the European Community including export promotion, trade policy and protection and the promotion of inward and outward investment was approximately £11·3 million in the financial year 1983-84. For the rest of western Europe the equivalent figures was £5·4 million.

United Nations

Mr. Murphy asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's policy towards the United Kingdom's continued membership of the United Nations on the basis of its current activities and financing.

Mr. Renton: We will continue to play a constructive role within the United Nations.

Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus

Mr. Murphy asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement of Government policy regarding the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus in the light of the recent United Nations talks.

Mr. Renton: We continue to recognise only one Cypriot state: the Republic of Cyprus under the Government of President Kyprianou.

Guatemala

Mr. Tony Lloyd asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what conditions the United Kingdom would expect to be met before resuming consular relations with Guatemala.

Mr. Renton: In accordance with article 2 of the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations it is not normal international practice to impose any preconditions. The establishment of consular relations between states takes place by mutual consent.

Mr. Tony Lloyd asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the official level talks with the Guatemala authorities referred to in his answer to the hon. Member for Stretford on 13 November, *Official Report*, column *173*, will include discussions about aid.

Mr. Renton: The talks referred to will not include discussions about aid.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Richard Page asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the total number of his Department's commercial staff deployed in embassies overseas, from the latest available figures.

Mr. Renton: There are 585 UK-based and senior locally engaged staff engaged wholly or mainly on commercial work in overseas posts. When taken with others who spend part of their time on commercial work, this gives a total effort of 571 man years. These staff are supported by about 600, mainly locally recruited, secretarial and clerical staff. In addition, heads of post spend a significant proportion of their time on commercial work.

Mr. Richard Page asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the proportion of his Department's commercial staff to all staff; and how that proportion has changed over the last 20 years.

Mr. Renton: One third of Diplomatic Service and senior locally engaged manpower (excluding support staff) is committed to commercial work. There are no comparable records for 20 years ago.

Mr. Richard Page asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if there are any plans to increase the percentage of his Department's commercial staff in embassies overseas.

Mr. Renton: The number of staff engaged in commercial work in overseas posts is kept under constant review and adjusted in light of changes in requirements.

Mr. Richard Page asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the procedure for training his Deprtment's commercial staff.

Mr. Renton: All officers selected for commercial work undergo an intensive five-week course, to which many private firms and organisations contribute. Each officer then undertakes an individual programme of visits to interested firms. Similar, but shorter, arrangements apply to locally engaged staff. Commercial officers are occasionally brought to London for briefing on specific industries.

Overseas Posts

Mr. Richard Page asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what regulations govern the length of appointment in post overseas.

Mr. Renton: The length of appointment in overseas posts is varied according to the circumstances of the post and the grade and function of the officer. Generally, the standard tour length for Diplomatic Service officers of second secretary rank and above is 24 months. There are shorter tour lengths of 18 and 12 months for specified posts. Where the tour length is 24 months, postings normally comprise two tours. At the specified posts officers serve a three-year posting of either two 18-month or three 12-month tours. Postings for other staff may be shorter.

VE Day Celebrations

Mr. Cartwright asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to ensure that the Soviet Union is represented at any celebrations of the 40th anniversary of VE Day.

Mr. Renton: We have no present plans for any official British celebration of this anniversary. The question of Soviet representation does not therefore arise.

Hong Kong

Mr. Harris asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the reports of the assessment office and independent monitoring team submitted as part of the arrangements to test the acceptability in Hong Kong of the draft agreement on the territory's future.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: These reports have now been received. On 29 November a White Paper containing the reports will be laid before the House and published. The report of the assessment office will provide an assessment of opinion in Hong Kong on the draft agreement between Her Majesty's Government and the Government of the People's Republic of China and on the arrangements for the future of Hong Kong which it sets out. The report will include factual summaries of all views expressed and an overall assessment of the extent of acceptance by the people of Hong Kong of the draft agreement.

The independent monitors will state in their report whether they are satisfied with the way the assessment office has discharged its duties.

Copies of submissions to the assessment office will be placed in the Library of the House with the consent of the organisations concerned. Two volumes of evidence will be made available at the same time as the publication of the White Paper. A further volume will contain the evidence received by the assessment office towards the end of the consultation period: this is still being translated. It is hoped that this final volume will be placed in the Library of the House before the debate on the draft agreement.

SCOTLAND

Health Authorities (Food Hygiene)

Mr. Gregory asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will estimate expenditure incurred for training in food hygiene by health authorities in Scotland in each year since 1978; and what is the planned expenditure for 1984 and 1985.

Mr. John MacKay: This is a matter for individual health boards. Information is not held centrally.

Hospital Kitchens

Mr. Gregory asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how much expenditure took place on modernising hospital kitchens in Scotland in each year since 1978; and what is the planned expenditure for 1984 and 1985.

Mr. John MacKay: Expenditure on modernising hospital kitchens is met from health boards' ordinary capital programme allocations and the information sought is not held centrally.

Nursery Education

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the percentage of three and four-year-olds in Tayside region receiving nursery education in the latest two years; and what are the corresponding figures for Scotland.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The latest available information is set out in the following table:

Numbers and percentages of three and four year old pupils in education authority nursery schools in Tayside and Scotland for 1982 and 1983*

Authority	Three year-olds				Four year-olds				Three and four year-olds			
	1982		1983		1982		1983		1982		1983	
	No.	Per cent.	No.	Per cent.	No.	Per cent.	No.	Per cent.	No.	Per cent.	No.	Per cent.
Tayside	849	18	756	16	1,248	29	1,356	30	2,097	23	2,112	23
Scotland	11,929	19	11,501	17	22,482	38	24,855	39	34,411	28	36,356	28

* Includes both full-time and part-time pupils.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the average annual number of people in employment in Dundee in each year since 1974.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Estimates on this basis are not available. But the estimated numbers of employees in employment in Dundee job centre area in June of each of the years 1974 to 1978 were 91,168; 93,304; 89,981; 89,112; and 89,412 respectively; and for September 1981 the estimated number was 81,607. Consistent estimates for the remaining years are not available.

Education Expenditure

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to be able to publish information on education expenditure by local authorities for 1983-84.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Summary expenditure and income information for education and other local authority services will be published in "Scottish Local Government Financial Statistics 1983-84" as soon as possible after all relevant statistical returns have been received from local authorities.

Mental Patients (Dental Care)

Mr. Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what provision of dental care he recommends for inmates of long-stay geriatric mental and mentally handicapped hospitals.

Mr. John MacKay: The dental care of such patients is usually undertaken by salaried dental staff employed by Health Boards, though general dental practitioners are sometimes given part-time appointments to carry out this work. It is for health boards to determine the level of dental care that is provided under these arrangements.

Librarianship and Information Studies (Honours Degree)

Mr. Craigen asked the Secretary of State for Scotland when the Scottish Education Department will give approval to an honours degree course in librarianship and information studies; and what is the nature of the assessments undertaken by the Department to ascertain the demand among libraries for such a course.

Mr. Allan Stewart: With the approval of the Scottish Education Department, Robert Gordon's Institute of Technology at present offers a degree course in librarianship and information studies, which is validated by the Council for National Academic Awards. Before approval could be given to any proposal by RGIT for an extension of the course to honours level it would be for RGIT to provide adequate evidence of employer demand and thus of enhanced future employment prospects for potential students, together with a clear indication of the additional resources required. The Scottish Education Department would need to be satisfied that the resource implications were acceptable, that the extended course would fit appropriately into the overall pattern of higher education in Scotland and that demand for it was not met elsewere in the system. There is no current proposal before the Department either for extension of the RGIT course or for the introduction of an honours degree course elsewhere.

International Youth Year

Mr. Alton asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what financial or other support his Department has given to the Scottish International Youth Year secretariat.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Grants given to the national co-ordinating committee for Scotland since 1 April 1983 amount to £34,794.

Coal Industry Dispute

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list, for the 1,320 persons charged with offences since the beginning of the mining strike, what offences each has been charged with.

Mr. Ancram: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. and learned Friend the Solicitor-General for Scotland on 31 October 1984 at column 1293-5, which contains all the information readily available.

Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowances

Mr. Corrie asked the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he will now announce the detailed arrangements for the payment of enhanced rates of hill livestock compensatory allowances in the Highlands and Islands Development Board area.

Mr. John MacKay: The enhanced rates will be introduced with effect from 1 January 1985. My right hon. Friend has decided to grade the enhanced rates on eligible hill cows, but not on sheep, in accordance with the farm-by-farm grading system in the former Scottish winter keep scheme. My right hon. Friend has made an administrative scheme under the powers contained in section 4 of the Congested Districts Act 1897 which, subject to clearance by the European Commission, will result in the payment of the following rates of hill livestock compensatory allowances on eligible hill cows and on specially qualified hill sheep within the Highlands and Islands Development Board area:—

	£ per cow	£ per specially qualified sheep
Class A holdings	47·00	6·80
Class B holdings	54·00	6·80
Class C holdings	57·50	6·80

Those who are within the small part of the Highlands and Islands Development Board area outwith the congested districts will be paid by means of an arrangement with the Highlands and Islands Development Board.

The Scottish islands special grant scheme, which terminates on 31 December 1984, will not be renewed, but farmers and crofters in the islands, where there is generally a high proportion of C grade holdings, will benefit particularly from the enhanced rate which the C grade holdings will attract.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Rayner Scrutinies (Reports)

14. **Mr. Favell** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many reports from the first group of Rayner type scrutinies have been published; and what further action he is planning.

Mr. John Patten: Five reports of Rayner type scrutinies in the NHS have been published and a sixth will be published shortly. A further two are under consideration within the Department and one more is awaited.

The five published scrutinies have all been sent to health authorities, either for consultation or implementation. We will be issuing further advice when we have considered the comments we have called for.

These five scrutinies identify total potential savings of around £57 million a year plus further substantial savings from sale of surplus property. We propose to launch a further round in the new year to build on the excellent work already begun.

School Clothing (Single Payments)

15. **Mr. Kirkwood** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will introduce regulations to allow local offices of his Department to make single payments for items of school clothing to all claimants with dependent children in receipt of supplementary benefit.

Mr. Whitney: We have no plans to do so. Education authorities in England and Wales have powers and in Scotland a duty to provide help with school clothing where they consider it necessary.

Mental Health Act 1983

16. **Mr. Proctor** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what progress has been made in implementing the Mental Health Act 1983; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Progress in implementing the Mental Health Act continues to proceed satisfactorily.

45. **Mr. Meadowcroft** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services on how many occasions during October 1984 a hospital has declined to confirm that it is able to accept a patient pursuant to the provisions of sections 35, 36 or 38 of the Mental Health Act 1983; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: The information requested is not available.

Blindness Allowance

17. **Mr. Roger King** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many representations he has received proposing the introduction of a blindness allowance.

35. **Mr. Wigley** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many representations he has received *(a)* from hon. Members and *(b)* from other persons concerning the need for a blind person's allowance.

60. **Mr. Fisher** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what representations he has received about the payment of an allowance to all registered blind people to compensate them for the additional costs brought about by their handicap.

Mr. Newton: We have received approximately 170 communications mainly from hon. and right hon. Members, referring to a campaign for a blindness allowance, organised by the National Federation of the Blind, the National League of the Blind and Disabled and the Royal National Institute for the Blind. I also met recently with a delegation from these organisations.

39. **Mr. Butterfill** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will bring forward proposals for the introduction of a means-tested blindness allowance to replace the existing range of benefits available to the blind; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to him on 22 October at column *514*.

Benefits (Take-up)

18. **Mr. Freud** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services with what estimate of the take-up rate of supplementary benefits his Department is currently working in calculating its expenditure plans on those benefits for the coming year.

Mr. Whitney: Expenditure plans are based on changing trends in the number of beneficiaries and therefore take account implicitly of changes in take-up.

Strikers (Supplementary Benefit)

19. **Mr. Barron** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will introduce legislation to reintroduce the payment of £15 per week of supplementary benefit to the families of trade unionists on strike.

Mr. Newton: No.

Newcastle Computer Dispute

20. **Mr. Freeman** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what steps the Government propose to take to end the disruption to social security payments from Newcastle; and if he will make a statement.

40. **Sir William van Straubenzee** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on the current industrial dispute at his Department's computer centre at Newcastle.

Mr. Newton: We have made every effort to end this dispute on the basis of an offer which means that no one need lose take-home pay. I am pleased to say that the

striking members of two of the three unions involved have overwhelmingly accepted this offer and have agreed arrangements to return to work tomorrow. The offer has however been rejected by striking members of the Civil and Public Servants Association, despite a recommendation to accept by their national officials. We urge those still taking action to re-examine swiftly their position; meanwhile we are considering what further steps should be taken to restore the service that pensioners and the public are entitled to expect.

Mentally Sick Persons

21. **Mr. Greenway** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what inquiries are made before a mentally sick person is returned to live alone in the community; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: This will depend entirely on the circumstances of each individual case. Consultant psychiatrists are responsible for discharge decisions and we should expect them to assure themselves that appropriate aftercare arrangements have been made, where necessary. It should be remembered, however, that most patients are not detained and are free to discharge themselves whenever they choose.

Employers' National Insurance Contributions

22. **Mr. Yeo** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what would be the cost of abolishing employers' national insurance contributions for all employees earning less than £100 per week.

Mr. Whitney: The Government Actuary calculates that should the national insurance fund lose the income from secondary contributions in respect of all employees earning less than £100 per week, the cost would be around £930 million in 1984-85 terms.

Board and Lodging Allowances

23. **Mr. Aitken** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what savings he expects to make in his Department's expenditure on supplementary benefit provision for board and lodgings claimants; and if he will make a statement.

24. **Mr. Batiste** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what action he is taking to check that charges made by private residential homes are reasonable.

Mr. Newton: My right hon. Friend hopes to publish proposals for consultation shortly.

25. **Mr. Malins** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will consider introducing legislation to require either officers of the Department of Health and Social Security or local authorities to inspect board and lodging and hotel accommodation for the homeless to ensure satisfactory standards as a pre-condition of the Department of Health and Social Security making grants for such board and lodgings.

Mr. Newton: Local authorities already have powers under housing legislation to inspect houses in multiple occupation and enforce standards. They also have a wide range of powers in relation to hotels, under the Public Health Act 1936, the Food and Drugs Act 1955, and the Fire Precautions Act 1971.

It is for the individual supplementary benefit claimant to find his own accommodation. If the only lodgings he is able to find are of a poor standard, he will nonetheless be paid sufficient benefit to enable him to meet a reasonable charge. Where, however, DHSS staff become aware of an establishment which gives cause for concern, they are expected to draw it to the attention of the local authority so that appropriate action can be taken.

National Health Services (Demand)

26. **Mr. Chapman** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is his estimate of the likely increase in demand for National Health services in the next five years.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Demographic change is estimated to increase demand for hospital and community health services by about 1 per cent. a year over the next five years. It is not possible reliably to estimate other increases in demand that continue to arise as a result of medical advances and social changes.

Disabled People

27. **Mr. Wareing** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how much has been spent by his Department since 18 November 1983 on publicity to counter discrimination against disabled people amongst the general public; and if he will make a statement.

64. **Mr. Ashley** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he proposes to introduce any legislation to outlaw discrimination against disabled people.

Mr. Newton: The Government have no plans for general anti-discrimination legislation or publicity, but we have already legislated to promote and protect disabled people's interests in the fields of education, telecommunications and transport, and in relation to parts of the social security system. We have also taken initiatives such as the Fit for Work campaign and the establishment of the English access committee. We will continue to take appropriate steps to promote the integration of disabled people; for example my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment will shortly be bringing forward proposals for new building regulations to ensure disabled people's right of access to new public buildings.

Dentists (Treatment Costs)

28. **Mr. Geoffrey Robinson** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many dentists provided treatment in 1983 at an average cost of more than twice the national average treatment cost.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as the information is available.

Joint Financing (North-East)

29. **Mr. Boyes** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what money is to be made available by his Department for joint financing schemes in the north-east in the next financial year.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Joint finance allocations for 1985-86 will be announced shortly.

Social Security Reviews

30. **Mr. Eggar** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on the current state of his social security reviews.

Mr. Newton: The review teams are assessing the evidence they have received and are aiming to conclude their work by the end of this year. We shall then draw the results together with a view to publishing our conclusions and proposals in the early part of next year.

43. **Mr. Sayeed** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he has finished taking oral and written evidence on the social security reviews.

Mr. Newton: It is assumed that all those intending to submit written evidence to the reviews have now done so. Nineteen public sessions have been held at which oral evidence was heard, and no other such sessions are planned.

38. **Mr. Lewis Stevens** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services, when he expects to publish his conclusions on the reviews of social security.

Mr. Newton: Conclusions, and proposals for changes arising from the review, are expected to be published in the early part of 1985.

Prescription Charges

31. **Mr. Gerald Howarth** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will consider introducing prescription charges set as a proportion of the cost of drugs prescribed, rather than continue the present system of flat-rate charges.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We have no plans to do so.

Maternity Units (Rural Areas)

32. **Mr. Latham** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will make a statement on the policy of his Department on the maintenance of maternity units in small local hospitals in rural areas; and what evidence is available to him of the wishes of mothers-to-be for the retention of these facilities.

Mr. John Patten: Our general view is that women should be encouraged to have their babies in a hospital offering the range of obstetric, paediatric and supporting services that is necessary to cope with any emergency. Some small consultant and GP maternity units, which do not have all such facilities, may be required in certain rural areas on geographical or social grounds. Responsibility for determining the pattern of maternity services best suited to local needs and circumstances must rest with the district health authority concerned. We would expect the wishes of mothers-to-be to be represented to those authorities by community health councils, the views of which are always carefully considered by my right hon. Friend if he is asked to make any final decision about the closure or change of use of a hospital, including small local hospitals.

Organ Donors

33. **Mr. Montgomery** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether there has been an increase in the number of donors coming forward snce the launch of the organ card campaign.

Mr. John Patten: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply to the hon. Member for Eccles (Mr. Carter-Jones) on 30 October at column *964*.

South-East Thames (Regional Strategy)

34. **Mr. Stanbrook** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what representations he has received following the publication of the outline regional strategy 1985-1994 by the South-East Thames regional health authority.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We have received one letter, about the period allowed for consultation before publication of the strategy.

Youth Training

36. **Mr. John Townend** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he has any plans to change the system whereby young people who turn down a youth training scheme place are still eligible for social security benefits.

Mr. Whitney: Under section 20(1)*(e)* of the Social Security Act 1975 a person who without good cause refuses a reasonable opportunity of receiving training is disqualified for receiving unemployment benefit for up to six weeks. Any supplementary benefit to which the person may be entitled is reduced for the same period, normally by 40 per cent. of the personal scale rate. These sanctions apply to young people who turn down a youth training scheme place. We have no plans to change these provisions.

Solvent Abuse

37. **Mr. Janner** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will take further action to prevent solvent abuse.

Mr. John Patten: I refer the hon. and learned Member to my replies to my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) on 26 July, *Official Report*, at column *770-71* and on 14 November at column *289*.

Benefits

41. **Mr. Ron Davies** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what percentage of the population of England and Wales is relying on state benefits at the latest available date.

Mr. Newton: Estimates derived from the family expenditure survey data indicate that in 1981 at least 24 per cent. of people in England and Wales were in families where social security benefits comprised at least 50 per cent. of total family income; the major factor being that retirement pensions form over half the income of some 80 per cent. of those over retirement age. These estimates are subject to sampling error and do not include people who are living in institutions. The proportions will be underestimated to some extent since the data on which they are based do not take account of the actual income of people who have been sick or unemployed for less than three months at the time of the survey interview; instead the individual's income reflects the normal income when in work.

55. **Mr. Loyden** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what steps he is taking to protect the real value of social security and other benefits.

Mr. Newton: Most benefits have been increased by more than the rise in prices since this Government came to office. In particular, between the uprating in 1978 and this year's, retirement pension has increased by seven percentage points more than the retail prices index. There is also full provision in the social security programme for an uprating in November 1985 based on the assumed rise in prices in the twelve months to the previous May.

Mr. Freud asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will list in the *Official Report* for the following social security benefits, in each case *(a)* nationally and *(b)* in the East Anglian region (i) the take-up rate, (ii) the average weekly amount unclaimed and (iii) the total annual value of the unclaimed benefits for (1) family income supplement, (2) supplementary benefit, (3) one-parent benefit and (4) free school meals, at the latest date for which figures are available and in each of the preceding three years.

Mr. Whitney: Not all the information requested is available. The data on take-up of benefits do not allow for regional break-downs to be made. National estimates on an annual basis are available only for one-parent benefit. Estimates of take-up of means-tested benefits are made from analyses of survey data and these are not made annually. The latest available estimates for Great Britain are given in the table:

	*Year**	*Take-up rate (per cent.)*	*Average weekly amount unclaimed £.p*	*Total annual value of unclaimed benefit £ million*
Family income supplement	1981-82	about 50	8·30	57
	1978-79	about 50	3·80	15
Supplementary benefit†	1981	71	10·50	760
	1979	70	5·60	355
One-parent benefit‡	1982-83	75	3·43	20
	1981-82	70	3·11	25
	1980-81	66	2·68	22
	1979-80	60	2·18	17
Free school meals‖	1980	81	not known	not known

Notes:

* Estimates for family income supplement in 1981-82, supplementary benefit and free school meals relate to calendar years; for one-parent benefit to fiscal years; and the 1978-79 estimate for family income supplement was derived from Family Finances Survey data collected between October 1978 and September 1979.

† The estimates for 1979 and 1981 are not directly comparable because of the introduction of automatic heating additions in 1981.

‡ Estimates relate to those who stand to gain from claiming the benefit.

‖ This Department of Education and Science estimate relates to take-up among children in families in England receiving supplementary benefit or family income supplement. There are no comparable estimates for earlier years. No estimates of take-up in Scotland and Wales are available.

Supplementary Benefits (Trade Disputes)

42. **Mr. Fatchett** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he is satisfied with the supplementary benefits regulations in relation to trade disputes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: I am satisfied that the regulations provide an appropriate framework for the assessment and payment of those involved in trade disputes.

Smoking

Mr. Dubs asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he has any proposals to discourage smoking.

44. **Mr. Willie W. Hamilton** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what new initiatives he intends to take to curb cigarette smoking.

Mr. John Patten: The Government are concerned to reduce smoking in this country and are taking action on a wide range of fronts to achieve this aim. In the last Budget the duty on cigarettes was increased by 10p per packet. During the year we have given an extra £½ million to the Health Education Council for its anti-smoking campaigns, while the grant to Action on Smoking and Health for 1984-85 has been increased by 12 per cent. To help reduce the risk to people who continue to smoke we have recently concluded a voluntary agreement with the tobacco industry which will bring about a further reduction in the average tar yield of cigarettes and provide a good deal of extra money for research into the effects of tobacco product modification.

Special attention is being paid to discouraging smoking among young people. Recent Government action in this field has included the publication of new guidelines for retailers on illegal sales of cigarettes to children under 16 and an increase in the maximum penalty for this offence. In addition, a leaflet has been sent to schools drawing attention to the dangers of smoking and two further research studies of children's smoking habits have been commissioned.

The Government will continue vigorously to discourage smoking at every opportunity and strive to achieve further progress in dealing with this major public health problem.

Abortions

46. **Mr. Amess** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many National Health Service abortions have been carried out since the enactment of the Abortion Act; and how many there have been to date in the current year.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Between 1968 and the end of March quarter 1984, the number of National Health Service abortions carried out in England and Wales was 831,825. The provisional number for the March quarter 1984 was 16,708.

NHS (General Managers)

48. **Mr. Maples** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many general managers have now been appointed in the National Health Service.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: General manager appointments have now been settled in 12 regional health authorities, 38 district health authorities and four special health authorities.

Local Health Authorities (Membership)

49. **Mr. Ashton** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what instructions he has given to local health authorities regarding political affiliations and sympathies of their existing or new members.

Mr. John Patten: None.

Health Care Systems (Comparisons)

50. **Mrs. Rumbold** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he has recently made a comparative study of the administrative cost of the health care systems with the United States of America, France and Sweden; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: No recent comparison has been made.

Social Security (No. 2) Act 1980

51. **Mr. John** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he has proposals to amend section 6 of the Social Security (No. 2) Act 1980.

Mr. Whitney: We have no plans to amend this section.

Hospital Beds (London)

52. **Mr. Dobson** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what has caused the increase to 115,000 in waiting lists for hospital beds in London.

Mr. John Patten: Out of the 31 London health districts, waiting lists decreased in 12 districts between March 1983 and March 1984 and increased in 19 districts. We do not have sufficient information to identify any significant trends but the increase over the year in the numbers awaiting treatment must be seen alongside the evidence of increased patient services being provided in the NHS in London. The latest figures, for the year to December 1983, show an increase over the previous year of 27,946 in the number of inpatients treated, 19,539 more day cases and 104,270 more outpatient attendances in acute specialties.

Community Health Councils (Visits)

53. **Mr. Madden** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will introduce legislation to give rights to members of community health councils to visit regularly elderly people and others staying in private homes registered by area health authorities or local authorities.

Mr. John Patten: No. Community health Councils are not concerned with services provided outside the National Health Service. By agreement with the private sector, councils can already visit private homes where people are being treated as National Health Service patients.

Cot Deaths

54. **Mr. Nicholls** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what steps his Department is taking to investigate the causes of cot deaths.

Mr. John Patten: The Department is expecting shortly the report of a major multicentre study of post-natal mortality, that it has been funding over the last seven years, which may throw some light on our understanding of cot deaths. We shall be considering carefully the implications of its findings, and the outcome of a seminar to be held on this subject in the new year, with regard to both the need for further basic research into this subject and the delivery of relevant health services.

Area Health Authorities (Waiting Lists)

56. **Mr. Sheerman** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services which three area health authorities have the longest waiting lists for *(i)* ear, nose and throat and *(ii)* orthodontic treatment.

Mr. John Patten: Information is available centrally only on inpatient waiting lists and this is given in the table. About half of all admissions to hospital are immediate, and many of those on waiting lists already have a planned date of admission. Only seven district health authorities have inpatient waiting lists for orthodontics.

National Health Service Hospitals

Speciality	*District Health Authority*	*Number of persons on in partient waiting list at 31 March 1984*
Ear, nose and throat	South Birmingham	3,767
	South Tees	2,526
	Bloomsbury	2,416
Orthodontics	Worthing	39
	Merton and Sutton	23
	North Lincolnshire	10
	Brighton	10

Forest Hospital, Buckhurst Hill

57. **Sir John Biggs-Davison** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what representations have been received by his Department against the threatened closure of the Forest hospital, Buckhurst Hill.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Formal consultation by Waltham Forest health authority on its proposal to close Forest hospital is not yet completed. We are now receiving letters from members of the public. They are being passed to the health authority so that they can be considered together with other comments received, and the writers are being told.

NHS (Property Statistics)

58. **Mr. David Atkinson** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many houses, flats and bedsitters are owned by the National Health Service; and what is their total market value.

Mr. John Patten: The NHS in England owns some 100,000 units of staff residential accommodation of which over 20,000 are houses and flats and over 70,000 are bedsitter or hostel type accommodation. The total market value has been estimated to be in the region of £1,100 million.

Drugs (Expenditure)

59. **Mr. Maude** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what proportion of total National Health Service

expenditure was attributable to the cost of drugs in the latest year for which figures are available compared with 1975.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The proportion of total National Health Service expenditure attributable to the cost of drugs was 7·8 per cent. in the financial year 1975-76 and, provisionally, 10·9 per cent. for 1983-84.

Death Grant

62. **Mr. James Hamilton** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he will make a statement on the death grant.

Mr. Newton: I refer the hon. Member to the reply which I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner).

Maternity Services

63. **Mr. Peter Bruinvels** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what recent improvements his Department has sought in the maternity services.

Mr. John Patten: The Government have emphasised to health authorities, in their document, "Care in Action", the priority they attach to improvements in the maternity services. We have asked authorities to take action to improve their maternity services, where necessary, in the light of the advice given by the maternity services advisory committee, which the Government set up in 1981; and we will be asking regional health authorities in due course to report back on the action taken.

Disposable Syringes

65. **Mr. Beith** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will now make disposable syringes available on National Health Service prescriptions to diabetics dependent on insulin.

Mr. John Patten: We cannot justify the considerable additional cost of making such single-use syringes generally available on prescription to all insulin-dependent diabetics. If it is medically essential for a particular patient to use them they may be supplied through the hospital service.

St. George's Hospital, Tooting

66. **Mr. Tom Cox** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the present financial help given by his Department towards the rebuilding of St. George's hospital, Tooting, SW17.

Mr. John Patten: The approved building cost of current capital schemes for the redevelopment of St. George's hospital, Tooting is £27 million; of which £20 million is provided from DHSS funds and £7 million from the University Grants Committee.

Students (Benefits)

67. **Mr. Speed** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the entitlement to benefit of a full-time student over 18 years of age living away from home with no dependants and no income or parental support.

Mr. Whitney: I assume my hon. Friend is referring to supplementary benefit and housing benefit. A full-time student over 18 years of age, living away from home with no dependants and no income or parental support, is excluded from supplementary benefit during term time because he is not available for work, with the exception of disabled students with restricted job prospects. During vacations he can claim benefit subject to the normal rules. He will be entitled to housing benefit throughout the academic year according to the level of his rent and/or rates.

Pensioners (Scale Margin)

47. **Mr. Andrew Bowden** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services, if he will reconsider the decision to alter the available scale margin for pensioners over 70 years of age.

Mr. Newton: We have no plans to do so. Supplementary pensioners receive the long-term rate of benefit. This higher rate was originally given partly in order to remove the need for claimants receiving it to claim additions to their benefit for special needs such as extra heating or special diets. The whole of the difference between this rate and the ordinary rate of benefit was therefore deducted from any additions for special needs to which claimants were entitled: it was not intended that claimants should have both. The difference between the two rates has increased to, for example, £11·55 for a couple from this week, but the deduction from additions for special needs remained at 50p for 16 years. It was reasonable therefore to increase the deduction to £1 a week, and to apply it once again to heating additions as was the case before 1973. No one will be worse off in cash terms as a result of these changes and they have enabled us to extend automatic heating additions to supplementary pensioner householders aged 65 to 69 and to pay heating additions at the higher rate of £5·20 a week to all supplementary pensioner householders aged 85 or over.

Heating Allowance

61. **Mrs. Clwyd** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on the decrease in the heating allowance paid to retirement pensioners from 29 November 1984.

Mr. Newton: Supplementary benefit heating additions are being increased from this week in line with the rise in fuel prices over the year to last May. For reasons set out in the answer I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Mr. Bowden) we decided that it would be reasonable to increase to £1, and reapply to heating additions the "available scale margin" deduction for additions for special needs given to people receiving the higher long-term rate of supplementary benefit. No one will be worse off in cash terms as a result of these changes, and they have enabled us to extend automatic heating additions to supplementary pensioner householders aged 65 to 69, and to pay heating additions at the higher rate of £5·20 a week to all supplementary pensioner householders aged 85 or over. Overall, we expect to spend some £400 million this financial year on heating additions after allowing for the effect of the changes referred to above: this is some £20 million more than was spent in 1983-84 and about £140 million more in real terms than was spent in 1978-79.

Supplementary Benefit

Mr. Anderson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what information he has on the numbers of supplementary benefits claimants of 25 years or under who have moved from their parents' homes in the most recently available period, broken down into the following categories *(a)* those who were treated as non-householders in their new accommodation, *(b)* those who were treated as boarders in their new accommodation and *(c)* those who were treated as householders or joint householders in their new accommodation;

(2) what are the most recently available figures for the numbers of young supplementary benefit claimants who are living in their parents' homes, broken down into the following categories: *(a)* 16 and 17 year olds, *(b)* 18 to 20 year olds and *(c)* 21 to 25 year olds; and what was the average amount of benefit paid for each of these groups;

(3) what are the most recently available figures for the numbers of young supplementary benefit claimants who are treated as boarders, broken down into the following categories: *(a)* 16 and 17 year olds, *(b)* 18 to 20 year olds and *(c)* 21 to 25 year olds; and what was the average amount of benefit paid to each of these groups.

Mr. Newton: I shall let the hon. Member have such information as is available as soon as possible.

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the number of people who were refused unemployment or supplementary benefit for failing to take up suitable employment in the United Kingdom in 1983.

Mr. Whitney: I refer the hon. Member to the reply by my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Dr. Boyson) to him on 14 May at column *67-68* where he gave the figure for refusal of unemployment benefit in 1983 as 1,896. I regret that the corresponding figure for reductions of supplementary benefit is still not available as processing of the statistics has been delayed by the strike at our Newcastle computer centre.

NHS (Griffiths Inquiry)

Sir David Price asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what progress he has made in implementing the recommendations of the Griffiths inquiry into the management of the National Health Service.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Health authorities are making good progress in implementing the recommendations of the management inquiry report in accordance with the guidance issued by the Government in June. The appointment of general managers, as a key step in carrying forward the other recommendations in the Report, is broadly on schedule: we have agreed to proposals, for action in all RHAs, 107 DHAs, and four SHAs. Of these five Regional and 72 district health authorities have opted for open advertisement. Appointments have now been settled in 12 regional health authorities, 41 district health authorities and four special health authorities.

Maternity Services Advisory Committee

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) when the next report of the maternity services advisory committee will be published;

(2) what will be the next task of the maternity services advisory committee.

Mr. John Patten: The maternity services advisory committee's third report is expected early in the new year. We shall be considering then arrangements for its publication, and the question of the committee's future.

Distressed Neonates

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many distressed neonates referred from peripheral hospitals to *(a)* neonatal intensive care units and *(b)* special care baby units have been rejected in each region.

Mr. John Patten: This information is not collected centrally.

NHS Hospitals (Food Hygiene)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what proposals he has to ensure a more thorough standard of hygiene and food preparation in National Health Service hospitals, especially in geriatric hospitals.

Mr. John Patten: We have no reason to believe that the general standards of hygiene and food preparation in National Health Service hospitals are unsatisfactory. We shall consider whether further actions is required when the repot of the inquiry into the outbreak of food poisoning at the Stanley Royd hospital, Wakefield is received.

Clinical Wastes (Disposal)

Mr. Proctor asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on the second report of the working party on the disposal of clinical wastes in the London area.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The report's recommendations, which concern wastes arising from general medical and dental practice, will be considered in the context of guidance about the disposal of such wastes which our Department is preparing.

Benzodiazepines

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many doses of benzodiazepines were administered in hospitals in each of the last five years in *(a)* Merseyside regional health authority, *(b)* East Berkshire regional health authority, *(c)* Greater Manchester regional health authority and *(d)* Wessex regional health authority.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: This information is not available.

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) how many prescriptions for benzodiazepines were issued in each of the last five years for those people aged 16 to 24 years, 25 to 34 years, 35 to 44 years, 45 to 60 years and over 60 years:

(2) what was the total number of prescriptions for benzodiazepines issued by year during the last five years; and what was the regional breakdown.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The number of NHS prescriptions for benzodiazepines dispensed by community pharmacists in England for the last five years is as follows:

	Millions
1979	25·7
1980	23·9
1981	24·2
1982	24·4
1983	23·3

Information on the regional pattern could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Information on the age breakdown of patients for whom they were prescribed is not available.

Pensioners

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what were the total numbers of people in the United Kingdom in receipt of *(a)* retirement pension only, *(b)* supplementary pension only, *(c)* retirement pension and supplementary pension, *(d)* all public sector pension schemes and *(e)* retirement pension and a public sector pension, in 1983.

Mr. Whitney: The available information is as follows:

1983

	Thousands
Retirement Pension only *(a)*	7,773
Supplementary Pension only *(b)*	90
Retirement Pension and Supplementary Pension *(c)*	1,604
Public Sector Pensions *(d)*	2,320

Sources:

(a) Social security statistics September/November 1983.

(b)-(c) Social security statistics December 1983.

(d) The Government Acturary's Survey of Occupational Schemes: 1979 (HMSO)—latest available estimates.

Note:

The Government Actuary's Survey of Occupational Pension Schemes is published quadrenially and figures from the 1983 survey are due to be published shortly. Whilst no estimates are available of the number of public sector occupational pensioners who also have a state retirement pension it is likely that almost all people over pension age who have a public sector occupational pension will also have a state retirement pension.

Heating Additions

Mr. McCrindle asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many pensioners currently receive heating additions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: The final results of the "Annual Statistical Enquiry" for December 1983 are not yet available. Provisional figures suggest that the number of supplementary pensioners receiving heating additions in December 1983 was somewhat over 1·4 million.

Mr. McCrindle asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if he will estimate the additional number of pensioners who will benefit from the extension of heating additions; and if he will make a statement.

(2) what extra help the very elderly will receive following changes in calculating additions for heating; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: We estimate that about 80,000 supplementary pensioners aged 65 to 69 will receive basic rate heating additions (£2·10 a week) and about 90,000 aged 85 or over will receive higher rate heating additions (£5·20 a week) from this week as a result of changes we have made to the supplementary benefit regulations. Taken together with the associated change to the available scale margin, the net effect will be to give those affected over 85 up to £2·60 a week more than they would otherwise have received — the exact figure varying according to what other additional payments they were receiving previously.

Hospital Beds

Mr. Howell asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many unoccupied hospital beds there were in England in 1983.

Mr. John Patten: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

RHA General Managers (Appointments)

Mr. Terry Davis asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many appointments of general managers by regional health authorities have not been confirmed by the Minister of Health.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Every regional health authority's proposals for appointing a general manager are being discussed with Ministers before the authority proceeds to formal appointment. Twelve appointments have been made and two remain to be made.

Housing Benefit

Mr. McCrindle asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he is yet in a position to estimate the number of additional staff employed by local authorities to administer the housing benefit scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: Final figures are not yet available for 1983-84 but on the basis of estimates so far received from local authorities, about 3,500 additional staff are being employed. The fact that this is more than originally estimated is probably due to a number of factors including a marked increase in take-up, which would have affected the staffing requirement in the Department if the work had not been taken on by local authorities. The independent review of the housing benefit scheme, which is due to report to my right hon. Friend by the end of the year, is looking, among other things, at ways of simplifying the scheme and improving its administration.

Free Prescriptions

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what proportion of branded medicines obtainable without a prescription which were supplied in 1983-84 under prescription were supplied to people entitled to free prescriptions; and what proportion these prescriptions represented of the £120 million per year he referred to on 8 November, *Official Report*, column *226*.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke [*pursuant to his reply*, 13 November 1984, c. *218*]: In 1983, the latest year for which information is available, 81 per cent. of prescriptions for medicines obtainable without a prescription in the groups covered by the measures to which my right hon. Friend referred on 8 November, at column *226*, were supplied to people claiming exemptions from prescription charges, including those covered by prepayment certificate; and these prescriptions represented around 50 per cent. of the £120 million per year to which my right hon. Friend also referred.

Housing Benefits Scheme

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on the report of the National Audit Office on the housing benefits scheme.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to the reply*, 19 November 1984, c. *64*]: The National Audit Office report records the results of an initial examination of the housing benefits scheme and gives some provisional findings about the administrative difficulties that arose during its first year of operation. Those difficulties are being examined by the independent review of the scheme now being conducted under the chairmanship of Mr. Jeremy Rowe, CBE. The review has been asked to examine the structure and scope of the scheme with a view to simplifying it and improving its administration by local authorities.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 28 November 1984

ENERGY

Power Stations

Mr. Gould asked the Secretary of State for Energy how much extra oil has been used in the current year to date to blend with coal burnt in power stations; and if he will estimate its effect on sulphur and other discharges into the atmosphere.

Mr. Goodlad: The amount of oil burnt with coal in public sector power stations in England and Wales is an operational matter for the Central Electricity Generating Board. On the basis of equivalent heat content, the average amount of sulphur in fuel oil and in coal is very similar. The substitution of oil for coal in power stations is thus unlikely to have a significant effect on sulphur and other discharges into the atmosphere. Discharges into the atmosphere will continue to be subject to monitoring by Her Majesty's Alkali and Clean Air Inspectorate.

Mr. Gould asked the Secretary of State for Energy, further to his reply dated 15 November, *Official Report*, column 335, concerning the price of fuel deliverd to power stations, whether he will provide separate figures for heavy fuel oil.

Mr. Goodlad: Separate figures for heavy fuel oil are not readily available.

NCB (Enterprise) Ltd.

Dr. Mawhinney asked the Secretary of State for Energy how much of the initial finance of the Coal Board Enterprise Company has so far been allocated.

Mr. Peter Walker [*pursuant to the reply*, 26 November 1984, c. *609*]: I informed the House that the initial funds of £5 million provided to the new company by the National Coal Board would be kept under review. I have today agreed to the National Coal Board doubling the funds available to NCB (Enterprise) Ltd. from £5 million to £10 million. This figure will be kept under review and will be increased further when the need arises. I am pleased that the company has already received 150 inquiries.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Pension Funds

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will publish in the *Official Report* an estimate of the amount of interest on central Government debt payable to pension funds in the current financial year.

Mr. Ian Stewart: No statistics are collected on interest paid by the central Government to pension funds, and a reliable estimate cannot be provided.

Small Workshops (Allowances)

Mr. Grylls asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to extend section 73 of the Finance Act 1982 granting 100 per cent. allowances for very small workshops beyond its terminal date of 26 March 1985.

Mr. Moore: I have no such plans.

Value Added Tax

Mr. Spearing asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received from the Commission of the European Communities concerning value added tax coverage on specific items.

Mr. Hayhoe: The EC Commission has sent the United Kingdom Government a reasoned opinion under article 169 of the Treaty of Rome, alleging that certain aspects of the VAT zero rates in force in the United Kingdom are contrary to the provisions of the sixth VAT directive. The United Kingdom Government do not accept the Commission's views.

Newspapers and Magazines (VAT)

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has had from the Scottish Daily Newspaper Society against the imposition of value added tax on newspapers and magazines; and what was the nature of his reply.

Mr. Hayhoe: I have noted press reports about representations on this subject being made by the Scottish Daily Newspaper Society but they have not yet reached me. When they do I will reiterate that although the Government are committed to a shift in the burden of taxation from taxes on earnings to taxes on spending, we have no set views at present on how this might best be done.

Japan (Bilateral Talks)

Mr. Franks asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the outcome of the recent bilateral talks between British officials and officials of the Japanese Ministry of Finance.

Mr. Lawson: I had suggested these talks to seek to ensure that the freedom with which Japanese banks and securities houses operate in London was matched by freer access for British financial institutions wishing to operate in Japan.

I believe the talks were valuable. Following the talks practical steps were taken promptly in Tokyo to deal with certain outstanding applications by British firms for securities licences, and to liberalise restrictions on British and other foreign banks in Tokyo. I look for further progress in the next year or so by the Japanese authorities in liberalising their financial markets and opening them to overseas competition.

Taxation Statistics

Mr. Jackson asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the total number of individuals who *(a)* pay income tax, *(b)* have a taxable income after allowances of £1,000 or less and *(c)* have a taxable income of more than £1,000 but less than £3,000.

Mr. Moore [*pursuant to his reply*, 27 November 1984, column *445*]: The latest estimates for 1984-85 are:

Taxable income range	*Individuals paying tax* millions*
Less than £1,000	3·4
£1,001 to £3,000	6·5
Over £3,000	13·9
Total	23·8

* Including taxpaying wives.

Mr. Jackson asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will tabulate in the *Official Report* his Department's contemporary estimates of the numbers of *(a)* taxpayers at the time of the Budgets of the years 1979 to 1984 inclusive and *(b)* persons taken out of the income tax system as a result of the changes made in those Budgets.

Mr. Moore [*pursuant to his reply*, 27 November 1984, c. *445*]: The latest estimates are as follows:

Thousands

	*Number of taxpayers**	*Number of taxpayers* if allowances had remained at the level of the previous year*	*Difference*
1978-79	25,900	—	—
1979-80	25,900	27,200	1,300
1980-81	25,200	26,500	1,300
1981-82	24,800	24,800	0
1982-83†	24,600	25,800	1,200
1983-84†	24,100	25,350	1,250
1984-85†	23,800	24,650	850

* Including taxpaying wives.

† Provisional.

In each case the latest estimate of the effect of the Budget changes on taxpayer numbers is within 100,000 of the estimate made at the time of the Budget concerned.

Income Tax

Mr. Fisher asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of total income tax was paid by people with the highest *(a)* 5 per cent., *(b)* 10 per cent. and *(c)* 20 per cent. of incomes in each of the last 10 financial years for which statistics are available.

Mr. John Moore [*pursuant to his reply*, 22 November 1984, c. *271*]: The information requested is given in the table. Estimates are not available for 1979-80 or 1980-81.

	Percentage shares of total taxes on incomes			
	1971-72	*1972-73*	*1973-74*	*1974-75*
Top 5 per cent. of tax-units*	33·2	35·1	32·8	30·6
Top 10 per cent. of tax-units*	44·7	46·7	44·2	42·2
Top 20 per cent. of tax-units*	61·2	63·2	60·4	58·7
Total taxes on income (= 100 per cent.) £ mill	6,411	6,572	8,047	11,847

	Percentage shares of total taxes on income				
	1975-76	*1976-77*	*1977-78*	*1978-79*	*1981-82*
Top 5 per cent. of tax-units*	28·0	27·6	28·6	27·7	29·4
Top 10 per cent. of tax-units*	39·5	39·3	40·4	39·6	42·1
Top 20 per cent. of tax-units*	56·7	56·5	57·8	57·3	60·3
Total taxes on income (= 100 per cent.) £ mill	15,988	18,306	18,158	20,185	30,966

* A tax-unit can be either a married couple or a single person over school-leaving age.

Source:

CSO estimates from Survey of Personal Incomes and Family Expenditure Surveys.

Personal Incomes (Statistics)

Mr. Jackson asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what were the contemporary estimates of numbers of persons with earnings above the minimum limit for national insurance contributions at the time of the autumn statements in each of the years 1979 to 1984 inclusive; and what were the estimates for the numbers brought below that limit by the changes made in it in each of those years.

Mr. Moore [*pursuant to his reply*, 27 November 1984, c. *445*]: Information is not available in precisely the form requested, but the table shows the estimated effect on the number of class 1 contributors of the increases in the lower earnings limit in 1980-81 to 1985-86. The table gives estimates of the average number of employees in the United Kingdom for whom class 1 contributions were payable, and for each of the years an estimate of the additional number of employees who would have been liable for contributions if the lower earnings limit (LEL) had not been increased in that year.

	Estimated average number of employees for whom class 1 contributions were payable	*Estimated number of employees excluded from contributions by the increase in the LEL*
1980-81	20,500,000	400,000
1981-82	19,500,000	400,000
1982-83	18,750,000	225,000
1983-84	18,750,000	250,000
1984-85	19,000,000	125,000
1985-86 (forecast)	19,250,000	115,000

TRANSPORT

A12 (Crash Barriers)

Mr. St. John-Stevas asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether it remains his policy to re-erect crash barriers along the A12 motorway in Chelmsford.

Mrs. Chalker: No provision has been made to incorporate crash barriers in the A12 Chelmsford bypass. I am however considering again whether they can be justified under the Department's criteria.

Liverpool

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on his recent visit to Liverpool.

Mr. Ridley: I visited the port of Liverpool on Friday 23 November and opened a new £2½ million grain and animal feed discharge facility at Seaforth. The installation was financed by Continental Grain, one of the world's largest grain trading and processing companies, and will bring more business and employment opportunities to Merseyside. This type of private enterprise investment in a port illustrates the evolving spirit of co-operation and partnership between ports and their customers and has my full support.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Nuclear War (Precautions)

82. **Mr. Neil Thorne** asked the Attorney-General whether Her Majesty's Government have made provision for the secure storage of information about land and property ownership in the event of nuclear war.

The Attorney-General: I can only answer for the Land Registry's records for which no specific provision has been made.

Divorce

Mr. Dubs asked the Attorney-General when he expects to complete the research project into the financial consequences of divorce.

The Attorney-General: The Office of Population Censuses and Surveys hopes to complete the research project into the financial consequences of divorce by December 1985.

Illegitimacy

Mr. Dubs asked the Attorney-General if he plans to implement the Law Commission's recommendation on illegitimacy.

The Attorney-General: The Law Commission's recommendations have been accepted by the Government. They will be implemented when resources become available, though this will not be during the current Session.

Legal Aid

Mr. Dubs asked the Attorney-General how many applications for criminal legal aid have been made since March 1984; and in how many cases the applications were *(a)* granted initially, *(b)* refused, *(c)* the rights of recourse were exercised and *(d)* the applications were successful on recourse.

The Attorney-General: Complete statistical returns from the courts for the quarters 1 April—30 June and 1 July—30 September are not yet available. Information so far received shows that the Crown court granted 99 per cent. of applications to it for legal aid for trials, 98 per cent. of those for committals for sentence, and 36 per cent. for appeals. The magistrates' courts granted 99 per cent of applications to them for legal aid for committals for trial, and 89 per cent. (91 per cent. indictable, 65 per cent. summary-only) for all trials before them. In the same period, 1,496 applications to criminal legal aid committees were made under the recourse provisions, and 993 of these were granted.

"Court Business"

Mr. Dubs asked the Attorney-General if he will publish the circulation list of the journal *Court Business* published by the Lord Chancellor's Department; and on what basis other people and organisations can obtain it.

The Attorney-General: "Court Business" is primarily a bulletin for the guidance of staff of the Lord Chancellor's Department and for the information of the judiciary. The Lord Chancellor has no plans to make it more widely available or to publish the circulation list but would be ready to reconsider this if there was evidence of demand adequate to justify the expense of either operation.

Lenient Sentences (Appeals)

Mrs. Peacock asked the Attorney-General on what criteria he will refer lenient sentences to the Court of Appeal under the proposed new legislation.

The Attorney-General: The purpose of the proposed provision as at present formulated is to provide a means of enabling sentences which appear inappropriate on the basis of established sentencing principles, which raise novel issues of sentencing, or which otherwise raise questions of public concern, to be reviewed by the Court of Appeal consistently with the principle that these are matters for the courts. Assuming the proposed legislation is enacted in substantially its present form I would expect to use the new power sparingly and on the basis of a careful assessment of the extent to which the sentence in question falls outside accepted norms of its implications for the public interest. I do not equate the public interest with the vociferous media and other criticism which occasionally accompanies an excessively lenient sentence and which may be out of all proportion to its significance.

Justices' Clerks

Mr. Nicholas Brown asked the Attorney-General what is the mechanism for inviting clerks to the justices to seek early retirement; and what arrangements are made in this respect.

Mr. Mellor: I have been asked to reply.

Under section 25 of the Justices of the Peace Act 1979, the appointment of a justices' clerk, subject to the approval of the Home Secretary, is a matter for the magistrates' courts committee, and the clerk then holds office during the committee's pleasure. For termination of an appointment, whether on early retirement grounds or otherwise, the Secretary of State's approval is required only where the magistrates for the division or divisions for which the clerk is appointed do not consent to the decision. Justices' clerks are pensionable under the Local

Government Superannuation Regulations 1974 (SI 520/1974) and retiring awards would be calculated in accordance with those regulations.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

International Year of Peace

Mr. Alton asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on his Department's response to the draft programme for the International Year of Peace, 1986, approved by the United Nations General Assembly.

Mr. Brooke: The Government's contribution to the International Year of Peace 1986 is the responsibility of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs.

"Parental Influence in Schools"

Mr. Evennett asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what responses he has received to the Green Paper, "Parental Influence in Schools"; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dunn: Responses to the Green Paper have been received from over 700 individuals and organisations. In the light of these, the Government are now carefully considering the way ahead and will make an announcement in due course.

Swann Committee (Report)

Mr. Thurnham asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he can now announce a publication date for the Swann committee report on the education of ethnic minorities.

Mr. Dunn: I understand that the committee hopes to deliver its final report to my right hon. Friend in the near future.

Student Councils

Mr. Alton asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the policy of his Department towards the setting up of representative student councils in schools and colleges; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: Provision is normally made in the articles of government of public sector institutions of further and higher education for the establishment of a students' union, one of whose functions will be to represent the views of students in discussion with institutional authorities. Whether to set up a school council is best left to individual schools to decide in the light of their own needs and circumstances.

International Youth Year

Mr. Alton asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what grants or other financial contributions his Department has made to the English, Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish International Youth Year secretariats, respectively; and what conditions were placed on the use of those grants.

Mr. Brooke: Grants made to the national co-ordinating committee for England since February 1983 amount to £75,514. The award of grant is subject to the provisions of the Education (Grant) Regulations 1983 and Government accounting arrangements apply. Grants for the committees in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are the responsibilities of my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland, for Wales and for Northern Ireland, respectively.

Secondary Schools (Community Links)

Mr. Alton asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what his Department has done to encourage close links between secondary schools and local industry, commerce and other parts of the local community; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Keith Joseph: The Government recognise the importance of such links as a means of promoting mutual understanding, enhancing pupils' knowledge of how the nation earns its wealth, and helping to prepare young people for adult and working life.

The Department is committed to providing a lead on school-industry matters, but responsibility for local links rests with local education authorities and local communities. The Department wrote to chief education officers on 15 March 1983 drawing attention to the importance which the Government attach to links with industry and commerce and it has subsequently been in contact with a number of employers and employers' organisations on the role that employers might play.

The Department is in close touch with, and in some cases provides financial support for, national organisations whose principal function is to promote local liaison activities, including work experience. It is also actively involved in the preparations for Industry Year 1986 which include considerations of how school-industry activities can be expanded and strengthened.

Opportunities for the further development of co-operation between schools, local employers and the wider community are being provided by the Department's programme of development projects for lower attaining pupils. The Department's microelectronics education programme is also providing a stimulus. The Department is also associated with a number of European Community projects which are exploring the further development of links between schools and the wider community in member countries.

The Department works closely with the Manpower Services Commission on all aspects of the technical and vocational education initiative, which is also promoting local links, and with the Department of Trade and Industry on all matters relating to school-industry liaison.

Books

Mr. Sean Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will provide figures showing spending on books alone by each local education authority in England and Wales *(a)* in terms of their overall allocation and spending per pupil and *(b)* in cost and real terms using 1979-80 as the base year for each of the last five years for which figures are available.

Mr. Dunn: [*pursuant to his reply*, 26 November 1984, c. *353*]: Figures are not readily available to prepare a complete answer in the form requested for the five-year period in question, but within the time available it has been possible to calculate the following data:

Local education authority expenditure per pupil on the provision of books in primary and secondary schools—England
(1982-83 prices)

	Primary						Secondary					
	1978-79		1980-81		1982-83		1978-79		1980-81		1982-83	
	Cost terms £	Real terms £	Cost terms £	Real terms £	Cost terms £	Real terms £	Cost terms £	Real terms £	Cost terms £	Real terms £	Cost terms £	Real terms £
LEA												
Barking	5·8	5·4	4·8	4·9	4·9	4·9	9·6	8·9	10·2	10·3	7·7	7·7
Barnet	8·1	7·5	8·6	8·7	9·2	9·2	16·6	15·3	13·8	14·0	13·4	13·4
Bexley	7·3	6·8	5·9	5·9	6·9	6·9	16·9	15·6	13·4	13·6	15·1	15·1
Brent	8·0	7·4	9·4	9·5	7·7	7·7	15·3	14·1	14·8	15·0	11·1	11·1
Bromley	9·6	8·9	7·4	7·5	7·2	7·2	12·8	11·9	10·8	10·9	10·5	10·5
Croydon	7·2	6·6	6·2	6·3	6·4	6·4	14·3	13·2	11·4	11·5	11·0	11·0
Ealing	7·6	7·1	6·8	6·9	6·6	6·6	15·9	14·7	11·1	11·3	11·9	11·9
Enfield	7·6	7·1	5·2	5·2	7·0	7·0	11·5	10·7	8·7	8·8	12·5	12·5
Haringey	10·7	9·9	7·6	7·7	7·1	7·1	12·0	11·1	10·4	10·6	12·4	12·4
Harrow	7·6	7·1	6·2	6·3	6·1	6·1	18·5	17·1	14·6	14·9	11·7	11·7
Havering	N/A	N/A	1·8	1·8	1·2	1·2	N/A	N/A	1·6	1·7	2·3	2·3
Hillingdon	17·9	16·5	16·8	17·0	N/A	N/A	35·1	32·4	31·8	32·2	N/A	N/A
Hounslow	6·7	6·2	6·8	6·9	6·7	6·7	13·2	12·2	11·8	12·0	11·5	11·5
Kingston	2·9	2·7	3·9	3·9	5·7	5·7	8·8	8·1	9·4	9·5	10·0	10·0
Merton	5·5	5·1	5·2	5·2	N/A	N/A	9·9	9·2	9·1	9·3	N/A	N/A
Newham	5·2	4·8	4·9	5·0	4·3	4·3	11·2	10·4	11·2	11·4	11·6	11·6
Redbridge	4·2	3·9	6·9	7·0	9·2	9·2	12·2	11·3	14·9	15·1	14·0	14·0
Richmond	5·0	4·7	5·3	5·4	5·4	5·4	8·9	8·3	10·9	11·1	8·4	8·4
Sutton	5·5	5·1	10·2	10·3	11·7	11·7	10·7	9·9	9·0	9·2	9·2	9·2
Waltham Forest	7·6	7·1	6·4	6·5	7·9	7·9	14·8	13·7	11·4	11·5	13·0	13·0
Inner London	9·1	8·4	8·8	8·9	9·8	9·8	18·5	17·1	16·9	17·1	17·1	17·1
Birmingham	4·9	4·5	4·0	4·0	4·6	4·6	10·4	9·6	7·9	8·0	8·5	8·5
Coventry	7·3	6·8	6·0	6·1	7·0	7·0	11·5	10·7	8·9	9·0	9·8	9·8
Dudley	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Sandwell	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Solihull	4·9	4·5	3·4	3·4	4·0	4·0	9·3	8·6	6·6	6·7	8·2	8·2
Walsall	2·6	2·4	7·5	7·6	N/A	N/A	4·9	4·5	11·7	11·9	N/A	N/A
Wolverhampton	6·0	5·6	5·9	5·9	6·8	6·8	11·1	10·2	10·3	10·5	11·1	11·1
Knowsley	7·2	6·6	6·0	6·1	4·4	4·4	10·4	9·6	7·6	7·7	6·7	6·7
Liverpool	7·8	7·2	5·2	5·2	7·9	7·9	19·5	18·0	8·0	8·1	11·1	11·1
St. Helens	5·5	5·1	4·1	4·2	4·3	4·3	9·8	9·0	7·5	7·6	6·9	6·9
Sefton	4·6	4·2	4·7	4·8	5·9	5·9	8·1	7·5	8·3	8·4	9·4	9·4
Wirral	4·6	4·2	5·3	5·4	6·4	6·4	9·6	8·9	7·1	7·3	9·5	9·5
Bolton	6·2	5·7	6·0	6·1	7·9	7·9	8·8	8·1	7·6	7·7	9·3	9·3
Bury	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Manchester	5·2	4·8	5·9	5·9	5·4	5·4	9·6	8·9	10·1	10·2	11·5	11·5
Oldham	1·5	1·4	18·6	18·9	2·6	2·6	1·0	0·9	29·8	30·2	0·4	0·4
Rochdale	N/A	N/A	5·3	5·4	4·7	4·7	N/A	N/A	6·7	6·8	7·1	7·1
Salford	6·0	5·6	5·2	5·2	6·9	6·9	8·6	8·0	6·9	7·0	8·4	8·4
Stockport	3·9	3·6	6·4	6·5	7·4	7·4	10·4	9·6	10·5	10·7	11·3	11·3
Tameside	9·9	9·1	8·2	8·3	9·0	9·0	13·2	12·2	10·4	10·6	11·4	11·4
Trafford	16·1	14·9	15·2	15·5	4·4	4·4	30·1	27·8	21·1	21·4	1·1	1·1
Wigan	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	4·1	4·1	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	8·9	8·9
Barnsley	7·5	6·9	7·7	7·8	7·9	7·9	9·8	9·0	8·3	8·4	8·2	8·2
Doncaster	8·9	8·3	5·2	5·2	5·8	5·8	10·9	10·1	7·7	7·8	9·7	9·7
Rotherham	7·0	6·5	6·1	6·2	4·3	4·3	8·0	7·4	6·1	6·2	6·3	6·3
Sheffield	10·1	9·3	10·0	10·1	11·8	11·8	7·3	6·8	6·4	6·5	6·4	6·4
Bradford	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	0·6	0·6	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	1·0	1·0
Calderdale	6·8	6·3	5·9	5·9	6·2	6·2	8·8	8·1	7·6	7·7	8·5	8·5
Kirklees	4·2	34·9	6·7	6·8	8·5	8·5	8·1	7·5	13·6	13·8	14·7	14·7
Leeds	5·2	4·8	4·2	4·3	0·9	0·9	7·0	6·5	5·5	5·6	0·8	0·8
Wakefield	7·5	6·9	7·0	7·1	8·5	8·5	9·9	9·2	8·3	8·4	4·7	4·7
Gateshead	5·2	4·8	5·6	5·7	5·6	5·6	7·3	6·8	8·1	8·2	8·0	8·0
Newcastle	9·8	9·0	6·0	6·1	7·8	7·8	14·3	13·2	10·0	10·1	10·6	10·6
North Tyneside	6·7	6·2	6·6	6·7	8·3	8·3	9·8	9·0	15·9	16·2	11·8	11·8
South Tyneside	7·3	6·8	8·2	8·3	8·4	8·4	12·7	11·7	11·6	11·8	10·9	10·9
Sunderland	5·0	4·7	4·3	4·4	3·7	3·7	7·2	6·6	9·4	9·5	5·8	5·8
Isles of Scilly	12·5	11·6	4·2	4·3	N/A	N/A	11·9	11·0	9·0	9·2	N/A	N/A
Avon	4·2	3·9	3·5	3·6	5·1	5·1	8·6	8·0	6·0	6·1	9·4	9·4
Bedfordshire	5·0	4·7	4·2	4·3	9·5	9·5	12·4	11·4	8·1	8·2	17·0	17·0
Berkshire	7·5	6·9	7·6	7·7	8·7	8·7	13·8	12·8	12·3	12·5	13·9	13·9
Buckinghamshire	8·5	7·8	8·1	8·2	10·5	10·5	12·8	11·9	10·7	10·8	11·1	11·1

	Primary						Secondary					
	1978-79		1980-81		1982-83		1978-79		1980-81		1982-83	
	Cost terms £	Real terms £	Cost terms £	Real terms £	Cost terms £	Real terms £	Cost terms £	Real terms £	Cost terms £	Real terms £	Cost terms £	Real terms £
Cambridgeshire	7·2	6·6	6·7	6·8	6·3	6·3	12·2	11·3	12·0	12·1	9·8	9·8
Cheshire	1·3	1·2	4·2	4·3	4·6	4·6	6·3	5·9	6·1	6·2	5·8	5·8
Cleveland	6·2	5·7	4·6	4·6	5·4	5·4	11·2	10·4	8·0	8·1	8·3	8·3
Cornwall	9·9	9·2	8·6	8·7	9·8	9·8	14·8	13·7	10·3	10·5	11·8	11·8
Cumbria	9·3	8·6	7·9	8·0	9·9	9·9	10·2	9·5	8·2	8·3	10·1	10·1
Derbyshire	5·7	5·3	5·6	5·7	7·7	7·7	10·7	9·9	9·1	9·3	10·6	10·6
Devon	6·8	6·3	7·6	7·7	7·5	7·5	10·2	9·5	12·7	12·8	9·9	9·9
Dorset	7·3	6·8	7·0	7·1	7·9	7·9	11·5	10·7	9·6	9·8	10·0	10·0
Durham	3·7	3·5	3·3	3·3	6·2	6·2	8·3	7·7	6·8	6·9	8·6	8·6
East Sussex	7·2	6·6	6·9	7·0	8·1	8·1	13·2	12·2	11·0	11·2	11·6	11·6
Essex	7·0	6·5	5·6	5·7	5·8	5·8	8·9	8·3	7·3	7·4	7·2	7·2
Gloucestershire	7·2	6·6	6·7	6·8	9·4	9·4	8·8	8·1	7·6	7·7	9·5	9·5
Hampshire	4·9	4·5	4·2	4·3	5·7	5·7	9·1	8·4	7·9	8·0	9·3	9·3
Herefordshire and Worcestershire	7·8	7·2	6·4	6·5	7·9	7·9	12·5	11·6	10·0	10·1	9·7	9·7
Hertfordshire	9·1	8·4	7·9	8·0	8·5	8·5	13·2	12·2	9·7	9·9	9·9	9·9
Humberside	5·7	5·3	7·5	7·6	6·5	6·5	9·1	8·4	8·4	8·6	9·6	9·6
Isle of Wight	9·4	8·7	7·3	8·4	15·0	15·0	14·5	13·4	10·9	11·1	14·7	14·7
Kent	7·6	7·1	4·5	4·5	5·5	5·5	12·5	11·6	6·6	6·7	9·7	9·7
Lancashire	4·6	4·2	5·5	5·6	6·2	6·2	8·1	7·5	7·7	7·8	7·1	7·1
Leicestershire	6·3	5·9	6·6	6·7	7·9	7·9	11·1	10·2	9·3	9·4	11·1	11·1
Lincolnshire	7·6	7·1	5·6	5·7	6·8	6·8	12·7	11·7	9·1	9·3	10·9	10·9
Norfolk	5·4	5·0	4·7	4·8	5·0	5·0	9·6	8·9	8·6	8·6	8·7	8·7
North Yorkshire	11·7	10·8	9·4	9·5	10·5	10·5	12·4	11·4	10·1	10·2	10·8	10·8
Northamptonshire	6·2	5·7	5·0	5·1	5·8	5·8	10·1	9·3	10·4	10·6	11·1	11·1
Northumberland	8·6	8·0	6·4	6·5	7·1	7·1	14·9	13·8	10·2	10·3	10·1	10·1
Nottinghamshire	8·6	8·0	6·7	6·3	9·9	9·9	13·3	12·3	9·0	9·2	13·5	13·5
Oxfordshire	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	2·4	2·4	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	3·3	3·3
Shropshire	6·5	6·0	6·0	6·£	6·4	6·4	12·0	11·1	10·8	10·9	9·4	9·4
Somerset	4·7	4·4	4·9	5·0	5·7	5·7	9·3	8·6	7·5	7·6	8·0	8·0
Staffordshire	21·2	19·5	11·0	11·2	11·0	11·0	31·9	29·4	10·0	10·1	9·5	9·5
Suffolk	5·4	5·0	3·4	3·4	5·9	5·9	9·1	8·4	8·8	8·9	9·3	9·3
Surrey	5·4	5·0	4·2	4·3	4·2	4·2	9·4	8·7	7·4	7·5	8·3	8·3
Warwickshire	6·2	5·7	5·0	5·1	6·8	6·8	11·5	10·7	9·3	9·4	10·2	10·2
West Sussex	4·9	4·5	6·6	6·7	8·0	8·0	9·3	8·6	7·9	8·0	10·6	10·6
Wiltshire	5·4	5·0	9·1	9·3	8·7	8·7	8·6	8·0	9·1	9·3	9·6	9·6

Note:

For 1978-79 and 1980-81 the unit costs in cost and real terms have been calculated using respectively the GDP deflator and the Average Price of School Books Index of the Publishers' Association, on the basis of expenditure information provided by individual authorities.

N/A=not available or not available for books alone.

WALES

International Youth Year

Mr. Alton asked the Secretary of State for Wales what financial or other support his Department has given to the Wales International Youth Year secretariat.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: The Department has given £22,316·95 to the national co-ordinating committee in Wales since April 1983.

AIDS

Sir Raymond Gower asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many cases of acquired immune deficiency syndrome are known to have occurred in Wales; what specialist medical advice he has so far received; what consultation he has had with the blood transfusion centre at Rhydlafar, near Cardiff, regarding steps to be taken to ensure that blood donors are free of this disease; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Three cases of AIDS have been diagnosed in Wales to date. Specialist medical advice is provided on AIDS by the chief medical officer at the Welsh Office and his professional staff who consult experts on this disease within the United Kingdom. Officials at the Welsh Office are in constant contact with the consultant regional epidemiologist of the public health laboratory service, the director of the Welsh regional blood transfusion centre at Rhydlafar, and the department of haematology at the University of Wales college of medicine, and action has already been taken to ensure that all possible precautions are being observed.

Dairy Industry Workers

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many dairymen and other workers in the dairy industry in Wales have registered as unemployed since the implementation of the European Community milk quota scheme.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: This information is not available.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Aerial Crop Spraying

80. **Mr. Dormand** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he proposes to institute additional controls on aerial crop spraying; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Fenner: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Pontypridd (Mr. John) on Monday 19 November 1984 at column 77.

Farm Animals Welfare Council (Code of Conduct)

Mr. Cartwright asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he plans to introduce statutory regulations based on the Farm Animal Welfare Council's codes of practice.

Mrs. Fenner: I understand that the Farm Animal Welfare Council is currently reviewing the welfare codes which Parliament has approved and will then advise Ministers on whether in their view any of the codes' recommendations might more appropriately be made statutory. We must await the council's report.

Milk

Mr. Warren asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will issue a statement showing the progress made by each of the member states of the EEC in implementing the requirements of the dairy products quota system and the reasons for the delays in the required implementation by some of the member states.

Mr. MacGregor: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton) on Monday 26 November 1984 at column *402*.

Mr. Spence asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food by what percentage amount the national milk price has altered in each European Economic Community country including the United Kingdom for each of the years 1982-83 and 1983-84; what change is proposed in each country for 1984-85; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: At each price fixing the Community sets the target price for milk to which the various dairy support prices under the common agricultural policy are related. The following table shows the target price converted into national currencies at the green rates. The Commission has not yet made proposals in respect of the 1985-86 marketing year. It should be noted that the target prices cannot be equated with actual market prices, which will vary according to market circumstances, or with returns to producers (which will be affected by factors such as the actual level of returns from the market, production costs, and national inflation rates).

Annual percentage changes in the European Community target price for milk in national currencies by member state 1982-83 to 1984-85

	Percentage changes over previous marketing year		
	1982-83	*1983-84*	**1984-85*
Germany	+7·1	+1·0	−3·2
France	+14·2	+8·2	+5·9
Italy	+16·1	+6·4	+6·8
Netherlands	+8·3	+1·5	−0·6
Belgium/Luxembourg	+16·4	+5·6	+4·6
United Kingdom	+10·5	+2·3	0
Ireland	+10·5	+7·1	+4·6
Denmark	+14·2	+2·9	+2·2
Greece	+16·7	+21·9	+17·2

* The green rates used are those applying at the start of each marketing year except in the case of Germany and The Netherlands in 1984-85 where account has been taken of the revaluations taking place on 1 January 1985.

Mr. Harris asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he is yet in a position to invite more milk producers to join the outgoers' scheme.

Mr. MacGregor: It is our intention to invite further groups of producers to join the scheme as soon as this is warranted by the number not taking up earlier invitations. This week we shall be inviting a further 150 producers to join. These are producers who are offering up between 250,001 and 275,000 litres of quota, amounting to 39·3 million litres. As before, a small number have been excluded because milk production is a relatively small part of their overall farming enterprise.

PRIME MINISTER

Regional Development Grants

Mr. Bowen Wells asked the Prime Minister whether she has any plans to alter departmental responsibility for the administration of regional development grants.

The Prime Minister: Yes. With effect from the date of the introduction shortly of the new regional development grant scheme, the Scottish and Welsh Offices will administer all regional development grants in their respective territories.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Nuclear Shelters

81. **Mr. Hayes** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what help he can offer in providing information on suitable accommodation for public shelters in the event of nuclear attack.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The 1983 regulations require local authorities to plan for the utilisation of buildings and other structures suitable for use as public shelters. Guidance on how to conduct a survey to identify suitable buildings will be issued with the consolidated circular early next year.

Metropolitan Police

Mr. Dubs asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many cautions were administered by the Metropolitan police from April 1984 to date compared with the same period in 1983; and what were the figures for each police district;

(2) how many prosecutions were brought by the Metropolitan police from April 1984 to date compared with the same period in 1983; and what were the figures for each police district.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Information for 1984 is not yet available. The available information for 1983 is published in "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales 1983", supplementary tables vol. 3, in table S3.2A, for persons found guilty, and table S3.7A, for persons cautioned.

Burglaries (Statistics)

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department, for each of the past five years what was *(a)* the number of reported burglaries and *(b)* the clear-up detection rate, in the police area covering Leyton and Leytonstone.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that the information for J district, which includes Leyton and Leytonstone, is as given in the following table:

Offences of burglary recorded by the police in J district of the Metropolitan police district*

	Offences recorded	*Percentage clear-up*
1979	6,065	10
1980	7,081	14
1981	7,976	10
1982	8,263	9
1983	7,841	8

* Waltham Forest, Redbridge, etc.

Coroners

Mr. Terlezki asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will introduce legislation to allow coroners the power to refer issues of public concern to a futher judicial inquiry.

Mr. Mellor: No. The existing law already provides for various forms of inquiry into a death additional to the inquest in a coroner's court.

Mr. Terlezki asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will introduce legislation providing further rights of appeal from decisions of coroners' courts.

Mr. Mellor: The report of the Brodrick committee on death certification and coroners (Cmnd. 4810) made recommendations for extending existing provisions of the right of appeal against the decision of a coroner's court. We have no immediate plans for legislation on these proposals; but my right hon. and learned Friend will keep them in mind in the course of his further consideration of the future of the coroners' system.

Mr. Terlezki asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he plans to give effect to those parts of the Brodrick report on coroners which have not so far been implemented, with regard to the role of juries.

Mr. Mellor: The recommendations of the Brodrick committee on death certification and coroners (Cmnd. 4810) concerning juries have been partially implemented by section 56 of the Criminal Law Act 1977 and the Coroners Juries Act 1983. The outstanding recommendation, giving coroners complete discretion in deciding when to sit with a jury, will be considered in the context of any future proposals for reorganising the coroners' system.

Coal Industry Dispute

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department why, when polariod photographs of persons arrested in connection with the current mining dispute are taken in police stations, two photographs are taken; to what precise use each is put; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I understand that the practice of taking a polaroid photograph of an arrested person—usually with the arresting officer—is intended to ensure that there is no confusion as to the identity of the arrested person or the officer who made the arrest. This photograph would normally be kept with the case papers or charge sheet and would be destroyed after any court proceedings. I am not aware that it is general police practice to take two polaroid photographs. The police may, however, take a second photograph with a conventional camera of an arrested person for the purpose of local records. Such a photograph would be destroyed if the person was not proceeded against or was acquitted. When photographs are destroyed, it is normal police practice for this to be done in the presence of the person if he requests.

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for reports from the relevant chief constables as to whether information on the number of people taken to police stations during the current coal mining strike who have been detained overnight is stored in any police computer; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw: No. Information about persons detained overnight is kept in records compiled manually. I am not aware of any instance in which it is stored on a computer.

City of London (Franchise)

Mr. Murphy asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consideration the Government have given to the extension of the franchise within the city of London; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: We have no plans for legislation to alter or extend the franchise in the city of London. Any such proposals would need to be considered on their merits.

Car Registration Numbers (Police Computers)

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the number of car registration numbers currently on *(a)* the police national computer and *(b)* other police computers in relation to vehicles which have been, or are suspected of being, involved in riot; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I am making inquiries and will write to the hon. Member.

Prison Capacity

Mr. Lofthouse asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the changes to manpower levels which may be required in probation and after-care services resulting from the planned increases in prison capacity.

Mr. Mellor: To meet the planned increase in prison places it is estimated that 45 additional probation staff will be required by 1988.

Members of Parliament (Salaries and Allowances)

Mr. Forth asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will set out in the *Official Report* the salaries and allowances payable to, and expenses which may be claimed by, United Kingdom Members of Parliament and British Members of the European Parliament.

Mr. Mellor: Members of Parliament are statutorily entitled to receive an additional salary of £5,369 p.a.—that is, one third of their salary as Members of Parliament—if they are also Members of the European Parliament.

The allowances payable to, and expenses which may be claimed by, Members of the European Parliament are matters for the Parliament itself. Full details can be obtained from the Secretary-General in Luxemburg.

Police National Computer

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about the experimental use of the system known as crime pattern analysis at the police national computer.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I refer the hon. Member to paragraphs 4.26 to 4.28 of the report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary for 1983 (HC528) and to the reply I gave to a question from the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) on 13 November, at column 9. The effectiveness of this application, which is in use on a trial basis, is being kept under review.

Crime Statistics

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many crimes of violence were reported in the area of each police authority in England in each quarter of 1983-84 and in each of the first two quarters of 1984-85.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The available information is given in the following table:

Notifiable Offences of Violence against the Person Recorded by the Police

England *Number of offences*

Police force area	*1983*				*1984*	
	1 QTR	*2 Qtr*	*3 Qtr*	*4Qtr*	*1 Qtr*	*2 Qtr*
Avon and Somerset	500	600	720	590	550	620
Bedfordshire	380	380	470	430	400	460
Cambridgeshire	280	290	290	280	260	280
Cheshire	360	420	490	470	380	430
Cleveland	370	400	480	370	370	420
Cumbria	220	230	250	240	210	210
Derbyshire	450	540	570	580	480	540
Devon and Cornwall	440	590	730	600	470	610
Dorset	200	260	230	190	160	210
Durham	320	410	390	370	350	330
Essex	550	640	700	600	540	650
Gloucestershire	160	240	240	210	170	210
Greater Manchester	1,440	1,550	1,610	1,450	1,320	1,590
Hampshire	630	670	790	700	650	660
Hertfordshire	230	310	380	420	270	270
Humberside	640	780	870	720	700	770
Kent	510	550	610	560	450	580
Lancashire	380	540	550	730	400	490
Leicestershire	430	510	490	500	450	470
Lincolnshire	240	260	280	310	230	290
London City of	30	30	40	60	60	40
Merseyside	900	1,120	1,140	1,080	1,010	1,020
Metropolitan Police	3,720	4,590	4,870	4,640	4,170	4,570
Norfolk	220	260	310	270	200	230
Northamptonshire	290	340	320	280	280	330
Northumbria	800	870	990	990	900	1,010
North Yorkshire	180	290	280	340	230	280
Nottinghamshire	910	1,170	1,260	1,170	840	1,110
South Yorkshire	870	890	1,040	950	830	890
Staffordshire	630	820	870	1,120	790	880
Suffolk	200	310	260	290	220	250
Surrey	240	300	340	320	280	280
Sussex	410	520	640	500	420	480
Thames Valley	580	760	870	740	680	810
Warwickshire	160	170	190	160	110	180
West Mercia	410	510	570	500	470	480
West Midlands	1,520	1,840	2,000	1,880	1,650	2,000
West Yorkshire	1,210	1,480	1,530	1,450	1,320	1,560
Wiltshire	240	310	350	290	280	310
ENGLAND	22,250	26,770	29,000	27,370	23,540	26,800

Police (Expenditure)

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how spending per police officer in the Metropolitan police compares with the targets set by his Department for other police forces.

Mr. Giles Shaw: My right hon. and learned Friend does not set targets for other police forces.

Drug Trafficking (National Reporting Centre)

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the national reporting centre has been used in the efforts to combat drug trafficking in 1983 or 1984.

Mr. Giles Shaw: No.

Crime (Clear-up Rates)

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what steps the Metropolitan police have taken to study the training methods of other police forces with higher clear-up rates for crime;

(2) whether, as police authority for the metropolis, he has sought advice from *(a)* police authorities and *(b)* chief constables in the rest of England on how best to carry out his responsibilities with regard to the clear-up rate of crime in the Metropolitan police area;

(3) when he expects the clear-up rate for crime in the Metropolitan police area to match that of the West Midlands police force.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Clear-up rates alone are not considered a sufficient measure of any police force's response to crime. Although the clear-up rate in the Metropolitan police district is lower than in some provincial forces, except in respect of serious crime, the total number of arrests in the Metropolitan Police District is proportionately similar to the number elsewhere. I understand from the Commission of Police of the Metropolis that his officers have regular exchanges with other forces about training methods and that his management services department has examined investigative practice in a number of provincial police forces to try and determine the reasons for differences in clear-up rates. None of the conclusions of that research has pointed to variations in training as a contributory factor. It has suggested that clear-up rates can be affected significantly by the extent to which offences are taken into consideration or otherwise disposed of without formal proceedings. The commissioner accordingly set up in April 1984 an experiment for one year to test the effects of a scheme which has proved successful elsewhere of interviewing prisoners about otherwise unsolved crimes.

Burglar Alarms (False Alerts)

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps the Metropolitan police have taken and what advice they have sought from other police forces to reduce the incidence of attendance at false alerts from burglar alarms; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that, in common with other police forces in England and Wales, he operates a policy of withdrawal of direct police response to alarms which generate an unacceptable number of false calls. Police response is reinstated only after a specified period and after inspection by the Metropolitan police burglar alarm inspectorate. Guidelines on intruder alarm policies were issued to forces by the Association of Chief Police Officers last April and the Metropolitan police were involved in the preparation of these.

SCOTLAND

Forestry Commission

Mr. Canavan asked the Secretary of State for Scotland whether consideration has been completed of the recent recommendation made by the Committee of Public Accounts in its 18th report that the Forestry Commission should publish details, including prices obtained, for properties sold; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John MacKay: The Government are still considering their response to this recommendation. When a decision is reached it will be made known to the House.

Lawyers (Competition)

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received in the last three months from the legal profession concerning his proposals to increase competition among lawyers.

Mr. Ancram: I am in close touch with the Law Society of Scotland whose representatives I met recently to discuss conveyancing by employed solicitors, fee quotation and advertising. My right hon. Friend has also received a number of representations on these matters from individual solicitors or firms.

AIDS

Sir Raymond Gower asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many cases of acquired immune deficiency syndrome are known to have occured in Scotland; what specialist medical advice he has so far received; what consultation he has had with blood transfusion centres in Scotland regarding steps to be taken to ensure that blood donors are free of this disease; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John MacKay: By 26 November three confirmed cases of AIDS had been registered with the communicable diseases (Scotland) unit. Specialist medical advice is received from the unit, the Scottish national blood transfusion service and specialists in other relevant disciplines. The SNBTS has, in consultation with my Department, issued a revised leaflet on AIDS and how it concerns blood donors. Steps are being taken to ensure that this leaflet is seen by all potential donors in Scotland before they give blood. It reinforces my Department's previous advice that persons at high risk of contracting AIDS should not donate blood.

Dairy Industry

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many dairymen and other workers in the dairy industry in Scotland have registered as unemployed since the implementation of the European Community milk quota scheme.

Mr. John MacKay: I regret that this information is not available.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

International Youth Year

Mr. Lawler asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what contribution his Department intends to make towards International Youth Year.

Mr. Luce: Most other countries share our view that the main thrust of activities during International Youth Year should be at the local and national levels. However, the British Council's exchanges department will be giving priority in 1985 to projects with IYY themes, and the Overseas Development Administration will maintain its funding of the Commonwealth Youth Programme, which is holding a Pan-Commonwealth youth conference in 1985. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office is also considering an application from the British Youth Council for a grant in 1985 for its international work.

United States Senators (Dublin Visit)

Mr. Michie asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether any representatives of the British Government met United States senators visiting Dublin on 10 November to discuss issues of Irish neutrality or the European Economic Community.

Mr. Luce: No.

Arms Control

Mr. Cabora asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans his Department has to encourage further bilateral and multilateral nuclear arms control agreement talks.

Mr. Luce: We have continued to support the United States in its willingness to negotiate balanced and verifiable arms control agreements without preconditions. We have urged the Soviet Union to match the American commitment. We welcome the announcement of a meeting in January between Mr. Shultz and Mr. Gromyko. We hope this will lead to agreement on how to carry forward negotiations on the whole range of nuclear and outer space arms control questions.

Nuclear Disarmament

Mr. Cabora asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether Her Majesty's Government plan to propose or implement measures to carry out the recommendations of the final document of the 10th special session of the United Nations General Assembly, resolution S-10/Z, about nuclear disarmament.

Mr. Luce: The final document of the 10th special session of the United Nations states that the process of nuclear disarmament should be carried out in such a way, and requires measures to ensure, that the security of all states is guaranteed at progressively lower levels of nuclear armaments. The document also states that the achievement of nuclear disarmament will require urgent negotiation of agreements at appropriate stages and with adequate measures of verification satisfactory to the states concerned.

We endorse this approach.

Mr. Cabora asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans Her Majesty's Government have to comply with United Nations General Assembly resolution 38/183 J which calls for nuclear arms limitation and disarmament through independent initiative.

Mr. Luce: United Nations General Assembly resolution 38/183 J requested the Secretary General to prepare, with qualified governmental experts, a study on unilateral disarmament measures. I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Mr. Michie) on 27 November at column *449*.

World Disarmament Campaign

Mr. Strang asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he intends to give any funds to the United Nations world disarmament campaign.

Mr. Luce: Our contribution to the United Nations and its specialised agencies this financial year is some £140 million, part of which is used to fund United Nations services in support of the world disarmament campaign. We also devote substantial sums of money to our own disarmament information activities, which are consistent with the aims of the world disarmament campaign.

United Nations Peace Year

Mr. Strang asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he intends to take to promote the United Nations Peace Year, which begins in October 1985.

Mr. Luce: Members of the United Nations have a continuing responsibility to work for international peace. We shall do this in 1986, as in other years, through complementary policies on defence, arms control, and the peaceful settlement of disputes. We plan also to mark the year with a conference on conflict management.

Political Torture

Mr. Murphy asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representation he has received regarding the use of political torture overseas; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Luce: We regularly receive representations from human rights organisations and individuals about torture. We believe that the use of torture for political or any other purpose is totally abhorrent. We are anxious to do all we can to help put a stop to it.

EMPLOYMENT

International Youth Year

Mr. Lawler asked the Secretary of State for Employment what contribution his Department intends to make to international youth year.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The Government are directly supporting International Youth Year by grant aiding the co-ordinating committees in the United Kingdom. Activities for which the Department of Employment has responsibility and which have particular relevance to the

objectives of the year include the youth training scheme, the community industry scheme and the community programme.

Young Workers Scheme (Tameside and Stockport)

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for employment if he will list for the Stockport and Tameside districts the name and number and employers making use of the young workers scheme in 1984-85.

Mr. Alan Clark: The number of employees currently receiving support under the scheme could only be obtained at disproportionate cost. It is estimated that 390 employers in Stockport and 180 employers in Tameside have submitted approved applications so far in the current financial year. For reasons of commercial confidentiality, the names of individual employers receiving support under any of the employment measures cannot be released.

Enterprise Allowance Scheme (Tameside and Stockport)

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list in the Tameside and Stockport districts the number of firms and individuals taking part in the enterprise allowance scheme and the schemes being supported in each district.

Mr. Alan Clark: The figures are not available in the form requested. However, in the Manchester East area, which includes Tameside and Stockport there were 645 people receiving the enterprise allowance on 20 November 1984.

Job-Splitting Scheme (Tameside and Stockport)

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many job splits have been achieved under the job-splitting scheme in the Stockport and Tameside districts, respectively; and how these figures compare with his Department's original expectations.

Mr. Alan Clark: Eight full-time jobs have been split since the scheme began, five in Stokport and three in Tameside, providing 16 part-time jobs. No specific targets for take-up have been set for the scheme in particular areas. However take-up on the scheme nationally has been disappointing. As my right hon. Friend announced on 12 November at column *444*, changes are to be made to improve its attractiveness and thus the help it can give to reducing unemployment.

Technical and Vocational Education Initiative

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for Employment what is the total projected cost of the technical and vocational education initiative by the central Government and local authorities.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The cost of mounting the first 62 projects under the technical and vocational education initiative will be approximately £150 million over seven financial years to 1989-90.

In addition the Government have recently announced a further extension of the initiative to enable those authorities not yet included to mount projects if they wish to do so. Each project will be within a ceiling of £2 million over five academic years beginning in 1985 or 1986.

Over the five-year existence of each project, central Government, through the Manpower Services Commission will meet, within the above financial limits, the additional costs incurred by local authorities as a result of their participation in the initiative.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Rooker asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many parliamentary constituencies have numbers of unemployed persons claiming benefit where the number who have claimed for over 52 weeks is more than half the total.

Mr. Alan Clark: Broad estimates of the numbers of unemployed persons claiming benefit for over 52 weeks in each parliamentary constituency are available in the House of Commons Library.

Dairy Industry Workers

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many dairymen and other workers in the dairy industry in England have registered as unemployed since the implementation of the European Community milk quota scheme.

Mr. Alan Clark: The information is not available.

Work Permits

Mr. Couchman asked the Secretary of State for Employment whether a decision has yet been made to continue after 1984 the special annual quota of work permits for workers from the Dependent Territories whose level of skill is below that required by the general work permit scheme.

Mr. Alan Clark: Yes. It has been decided that the quota for 1985 will be 200—the same as this year. Within the figure of 200 no more than 150 permits will be allowed for any one territory.

Youth Training Scheme

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for Employment whether he will make a statement on the future of mode B schemes within the youth training scheme.

Mr. Peter Morrison [*pursuant to his reply*, 27 November 1984, c. *440*]: The needs of most youngsters on the youth training scheme are generally best met through employer-led mode A schemes. However, mode B schemes have a continuing and important role to play, especially where the particular needs of some youngsters are best provided for in this way or where there is a limited range of opportunities available under mode A.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Ethiopia (Ministerial Visit)

Sir David Price asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will make a statement on the visit of the Minister for Overseas Development to Ethiopia between 25 and 27 November.

Mr. Raison: I went in the RAF Hercules to relief camps at Korem and Mekele and to the port at Assab. I saw representatives of the Ethiopian Government,

voluntary agencies and international organisations and had a long talk with Chairman Mengistu. The camps are tragic, but much hard work is being done and the number of children recovering from starvation and disease is encouraging. I was impressed by the splendid work of in the voluntry agencies and the superb operation of the RAF which has won it an enviable reputation in Ethiopia. Co-operation with the Ethiopian authorities is generally good.

I have decided to send a substantial quantity of blankets as well as extra conveyors to help unloading at the port. The need for food is paramount (and I was concerned at the lack of food aid expected in the next two weeks). I shall encourage other donors to work with the World Food Programme and the United Nations coordinator, Mr. Jansson, whom I met in Addis Ababa, to seek a sufficient and well-timed supply of food through 1985. I shall now be considering what further steps to take.

Sub-Saharan Africa Programme

Mr. Murphy asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received regarding Government support for the World bank's sub-Saharan Africa programme.

Mr. Raison: I have received representations from Members of Parliament and members of the public. Contrary to the impression they may have received, the recent World Bank report on sub-Saharan Africa contained no specific proposals for a US$2 billion World Bank special fund. Her Majesty's Government will look carefully at any proposals by the World Bank on what action should be taken on the report.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Industrial Disputes

Mrs. Peacock asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will assess the effect on the prospects for investment in Britain of the recent industrial disputes.

Mr. Butcher: Although an upsurge in industrial disputes inevitably harms the climate for investment, their effect has been confined largely to the coal industry. The Department's last investment intentions survey indicated a rise of over 9 per cent. in 1984 in the volume of investment by manufacturing, construction, distribution and selected service industries and a further increase in 1985. This view was confirmed for manufacturing industry, by the CBI's quarterly industrial trends survey published on 30 October.

British Telecom

Mr. Williams asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he is monitoring the purchase of British Telecom shares by overseas bidders operating within the British tranche; and what steps have been taken to ensure that an overseas applicant does not receive an allocation from the British and overseas tranches.

Mr. Butcher: The prospectus makes clear that 49,500,000 shares—a little under 2 per cent. of the United Kingdom portion—have been placed with Swiss Bank Corporation International Limited which has also applied for further shares. The allocation of shares is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to decide after applications have closed on 28 November.

Clothing (Safety Regulations)

Mr. Ashdown asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he plans to reintroduce the Nightdress (Safety) Regulations 1967, (S.I., 1967, No. 839) during the current parliamentary Session.

Mr. Fletcher: It is my intention to revise and update the current Nightdress (Safety) Regulations. My Department is consulting interested parties on the scope of the new regulations. I hope they will be presented for parliamentary approval in the spring of next year. Copies of the latest consultation documents have been placed in the Library.

Domestic Accidents (Statistics)

Mr. Thurnham asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many people were *(a)* injured and *(b)* killed in domestic premises as a result of faulty electrical plugs, sockets and switches during 1982, 1983 and 1984 to date; which were caused by fires; and which from other causes.

Mr. Fletcher: The information is not available in the form requested. In the following data on accidents involving electrical plugs, sockets and switches, it is not known whether these items were actually at fault. Electrocutions reported by the electricity boards:

1982 — 3
1983 — 5
1984 — 2 (to date)

A sample of 20 hospitals in England and Wales provided the following numbers of non-fatal accidents in the home involving electrical plugs, sockets and switches:

1982 — 31
1983 — 31
1984 — 18 (to date)

Fire brigade statistics for 1982—the latest available—give the following figures for fires in dwellings where the source of ignition is thought to be electrical wiring, but fires involving plugs, sockets and switches are not recorded separately:

	Number
Fire	3,298
Non-fatal casualties	202
Fatal casualties	15

British Shipbuilders (Ferry Building)

Sir David Price asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will encourage British Shipbuilders to develop an extensive and competitive ferry building capacity.

Mr. Butcher: British Shipbuilders' product strategy is a matter for the management of the corporation.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry endorsed on 25 July the corporation's primary aims of concentrating its resources on a stable, cost-effective mainstream merchant shipbuilding business. We, of course, encourage the corporation to concentrate on areas in which it can be competitive.

Spirits (Sales)

Mr. McCrindle asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will ask the Office of Fair Trading to

investigate the discontinuation of sales of certain spirits to supermarket chains, manufacturers or distributors; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fletcher: Under the Resale Prices Act 1976 it is generally unlawful for a supplier to withhold supplies from a dealer solely because the dealer has resold goods below the recommended price. But where the dealer has used similar goods as loss leaders within the previous 12 months, supplies may lawfully be withheld. Complaints about possible breaches of the Act should be directed to the Office of Fair Trading. The Director General of Fair Trading has said that he is prepared to investigate specific allegations of misuse of market power.

Extended Guarantee Insurance

Mr. McGuire asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if he will introduce legislation to protect the interests of those people who on purchasing certain types of electrical consumer goods, took out extended guarantee insurance policies with companies which subsequently went into liquidation;

(2) if, in the light of the case of Cavalier Insurance Company, he has made any changes in the arrangements within his Department relating to authorising insurance companies and checking that they take business only within their authorised categories; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fletcher: My officials have written to retail trade associations drawing their attention to the Cavalier case, urging them to do all they can to ensure that their members check with the Department that any insurance company offering to provide extended warranty insurance is authorised under the Insurance Companies Act 1982 to carry out that type of business. A number of inquiries have been dealt with as a result. At present I do not see a need for further legislation in this area. Existing legislation will be vigorously enforced by my Department, which continues to make inquiries into any scheme coming to notice where the nature of any insurance arrangement is not clear.

Nationalised Industries

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will report progress on the rolling programme of references of nationalised industries to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission under section 11 of the Competition Act 1980.

Mr. Fletcher: During 1984, reports were published on London Transport bus maintenance, the South Wales Electricity Board and the Post Office letter post service. I have received the commission's report on the Yorkshire water authority and the revenue collection systems of four area electricity boards. These will both be published in due course.

The commission is currently investigating British Rail property management.

I have concluded that, in the light of the Government's proposals for radical reform of the bus industry and the introduction of competition that will result, it would not be appropriate to make the reference of an aspect of public sector bus services in Scotland that was announced as part of this year's programme.

I have also decided, in view of the increase in the Post Office's work load caused by the current industrial dispute at the Department of Health and Social Security, to defer into 1985 the reference of Post Office counter services that was planned for this year.

Our policy of subjecting the public sector to independent external scrutiny will be carried forward by a full programme of investigations in 1985. An aspect of the British Airports Authority will be referred early in 1985. This will be followed in the course of 1985 by references of aspects of the North of Scotland Hydro-Electric Board, the South of Scotland Electricity Board, the British Steel Corporation and the water industry as well as the postponed reference of Post Office counter services. Details of each reference will be announced as it is made.

EC (Industry/Steel Council)

Mr. Neil Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the European Community Industry/Steel Council held on 22 November.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The Council, at which I represented the United Kingdom, agreed on a mandate for the Commission to negotiate a voluntary restraint arrangement with the United States on exports of pipe and tube. The proposed arrangement, aimed at forestalling possible unilateral United States action, is intended to provide EC exporters with a guaranteed share of at least 7·6 per cent. of the United States market. The Commission reported to the Foreign Affairs Council on 27 November on the results of its discussions with the United States. My hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Pentlands (Mr. Rifkind), the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, will be making a statement shortly to the House on the outcome of the Foreign Affairs Council.

The Council also considered a Commission proposal to make certain amendments to the ECSC rules on steel aids, intended to help achieve the central objective of terminating state aids to steelmakers by the end of 1985. This issue, together with questions concerning the steel quota arrangements and ferrous scrap will be further discussed at a Council planned for 17 December.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Extradition

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the number of warrants for extradition, in connection with terrorist offences, which have been issued to the authorities in the Republic of Ireland by the Royal Ulster Constabulary for which the person named therein has not yet been extradited.

Mr. Scott: Since 1971, 123 arrest warrants in connection with terrorist offences have been sent by the Royal Ulster Constabulary to the Garda Siochana in respect of 88 persons who have not been extradited. A number of these warrants have been refused by the courts and some are no longer extant, but 37 warrants are currently with the Irish authorities for execution in relation to three individuals in custody.

Dairy Industry

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many dairymen and other workers

in the dairy industry in Northern Ireland have registered as unemployed since the implementation of the European Community milk quota scheme.

Dr. Boyson: The information requested is not available. Unemployment figures for the milk and milk products sector of manufacturing industry are not separately available. However, I am pleased to inform my hon. Friend that the number of unemployed agricultural workers has dropped from 2,806 in October 1983 to 2,711 in October 1984.

ENVIRONMENT

Water Supplies (Nitrate Pollution)

18. **Mr. Teddy Taylor** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he is satisfied with the progress made in reducing the level of nitrate pollution of public water supplies.

Mr. Waldegrave: I am advised that there is no danger to public health from nitrate in public water supplies. I will be looking carefully at applications submitted to the Department for derogations from the nitrate level of 50 mg/litre set in the EC directive relating to the quality of water intended for human consumption.

Local and Public Authorities (Land)

19. **Mr. Benyon** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will seek to introduce a scheme of incentives and penalties to restrain local and public authorities from hoarding land.

Mr. Gow: Public bodies are encouraged already to dispose of surplus land in order to augment their receipts, and local authorities which do so are able to supplement their capital expenditure allocations.

Part of the purpose of registers of unused or underused land of one acre or more is to expose the wastefulness of land hoarding. Public bodies may be directed to dispose of registered land. On 19 November the first directions were made in respect of four sites in Darlington, Sunderland, Oldham and Nottingham.

My right hon. Friend will make further directions whenever he considers that to be appropriate.

West Midlands Police Force

20. **Mr. Roger King** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received from the West Midlands metropolitan authorities about the reorganisation of the West Midlands police force after the abolition of the county council.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Of the west midland districts who commented on the point, four favoured three separate police forces and one favoured all purpose authorities.

Local Authority Houses

21. **Dr. Mawhinney** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he has taken to encourage local authorities to ensure that all their council houses are habitable and in use.

Mr. Gow: We take the condition of local authority housing and numbers of empty dwellings into account in making housing investment programme allocations. On 31 March 1984 25,300 local authority owned houses and flats had been empty for more than a year this is the highest figure ever recorded. It is a disgraceful figure. Responsibility rests with the local authorities concerned. The Department has just completed a study of empty housing. A copy of the report was placed in the Library last week. I will be writing to all local authorities about this.

Planning Zones

22. **Mr. Chapman** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will report progress on the setting up of simplified planning zones.

Mr. Macfarlane: The responses to the consultation paper on simplified planning zones are now being considered.

Local Authorities (Finance)

23. **Mr. Sean Hughes** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the terms of reference of his internal inquiries into local government finance and related matters.

Mr. Waldegrave: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Cartwright) on 26 October at column *747*.

40. **Mr. Ron Davies** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what proportion of local government current expenditure for 1984-85 will be accounted for by central Government funding according to latest estimates; and how this compares with the last financial year.

Mr. Waldegrave: Based on returns from local authorities, aggregate Exchequer grant (rate support grant and relevant specific and supplementary grants, paid in respect of their relevant expenditure) represents 48·3 per cent. of total relevant expenditure in England in 1984-85, and 49·8 per cent. in 1983-84.

51. **Mr. Rooker** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the level of unspent capital receipts of local authorities.

Mr. Waldegrave: This information is not available from the returns which we obtain from local authorities.

Nuclear Electromagnetic Pulse (Departmental Transport)

24. **Mr. Merchant** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will estimate what proportion of Government transport provided by his Department would be immobilised by a nuclear electromagnetic pulse.

Sir George Young: The Department's vehicle fleet is widely spread throughout the United Kingdom. The proportion which would be immobilised by nuclear electromagnetic pulse would depend upon the nature, weight and distribution of any attack.

Houses (Improvement)

25. **Mrs. Clwyd** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how much money has been spent on improving the housing stock in the United Kingdom for each of the past five years.

Mr. Gow: Reliable information in the form requested is not available. However, the "English House Condition Survey" in 1981 indicated that £5·9 billion was spent by households in England on their homes in that year.

Merseyside County Council

26. **Mr. Wareing** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many representations he has received from people in Merseyside respecting his proposal to abolish the Merseyside county council; how many were favourable to his proposal and how many unfavourable; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: An analysis of the responses we have received on "Streamlining the Cities" has been published.

Insulation Grants

27. **Mr. Andrew Bowden** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what action his Department is taking to ensure that pensioners are made aware of the availability to them of insulation grants.

Sir George Young: My Department has supplied local authorities with leaflets and booklets for free distribution, and posters for display. These lay particular emphasis on the availability under the homes insulation scheme of 90 per cent. grants to the elderly, and severely disabled, on low incomes, for loft insulation.

Home Improvement and Repair Grants

28. **Mr. Foulkes** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will issue guidance to local authorities to clarify the conditions under which they can make home improvement or repair grants available for rewiring as a separate category of works.

Sir George Young: No. My Department has already given general guidance on the home improvement grant legislation as it affects England. I do not believe that further guidance is necessary.

37. **Mr. Nicholas Brown** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement regarding home improvement grants and their administration following the Housing Act 1980.

Sir George Young: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to him on 18 May.

46. **Mr. Tom Cox** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many repair and improvement grants he expects to be made in 1985-86.

Sir George Young: This will depend on decisions by individual local authorities.

49. **Mr. Latham** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will make a statement on the availability of improvement and repair grants.

Sir George Young: Local authorities administer the home improvement grant system and it is for them to decide how much of their resources to make available for grants, in the light of changing circumstances.

63. **Mr. Madden** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of the number of people currently on waiting lists for housing improvement grants.

Sir George Young: Local authorities administer the home improvement grant system and are not required to submit such information to the Department.

Domestic Rate Revaluation

29. **Mr. Cartwright** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will issue the consultation document on domestic rate revaluation referred to in Cmnd. 9008.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: We shall be making an announcement on this in due course.

Northumbrian Water Authority

30. **Mr. Beith** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what he expects to be the impact of his proposals for targets for water authorities on the water rates levied in the Northumbrian water authority's area.

Mr. Macfarlane: I expect the increase to be above the general rate of inflation but I cannot be more precise because I have yet to reach agreement on financial targets with individual water authorities and the effect on charges will only become clear when the authority fixes its budget early next year.

House Condition Survey

31. **Mr. Cohen** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when the next English house condition survey will be carried out.

Sir George Young: Final decisions about the timing of the next survey have not yet been taken. We remain committed to monitoring the condition of the housing stock.

Green Belt Land (Greater London)

32. **Mr. Greenway** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will estimate the amount of green belt in the Greater London area in 1979 and the latest date for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Calculations made in early 1975 indicated that almost 85,000 acres of land in Greater London was designated as green belt. The Greater London development plan, approved in 1976, confirmed this area in broad terms. More detailed figures are not available for recent years.

Milton Keynes (Hotel Development)

33. **Mr. Cockeram** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will revise his policy concerning developments in Milton Keynes to permit hotel development.

Mr. Macfarlane: My right hon. Friend has no policy which restricts hotel development in Milton Keynes.

Water and Sewerage Pipes (Renewal)

34. **Mr. Skinner** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what further steps he is taking to ensure that water authorities and local authorities can engage in large scale renewal programmes for water and sewerage pipes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gow: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Cornwall, South-East (Mr. Hicks).

Acid Rain

35. **Mr. Frank Cook** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will take steps to investigate possible links between locations of acid rain blight and the sites of nuclear establishments.

Mr. Waldegrave: I am advised that recent research in the Federal Republic of Germany indicates that the contribution of nuclear establishments to acid deposition is negligible and that preliminary examination suggests that this result also applies in United Kingdom conditions. I will write to the hon. Member when this examination is complete.

Water Mains and Communication Pipes

36. **Mr. Brandon-Bravo** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he takes, and what powers are available to him, to require water authorities to take responsibility for maintaining water mains and communication pipes up to the boundary of the property occupied by the user; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Macfarlane: Under the Water Act 1945 water authorities are responsible for maintaining water mains and communication pipes. The link from those pipes to individual properties is the responsibility of the owners or occupiers of the premises served. My right hon. Friend is aware that this sometimes causes difficulties, but he has no power to transfer the responsibility to water authorities.

Local Government Reform

38. **Mr. Loyden** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his latest estimate of savings resulting from the proposals to abolish the metropolitan county councils and the Greater London council.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: My right hon. Friend's latest estimate can be found in the explanatory and financial memorandum to the Local Government Bill.

Mr. Heddle asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy, after the abolition of the Greater London council, to publish details of all parcels of land transferred by order under the Green Belt (London and Home Counties) Act 1938.

Mr. Macfarlane: The 1938 Act does not contain powers for the transfer of land by order. The GLC interest in land held under the 1938 Act is to be transferred at abolition by order under the proposed transitional and consequential powers in the Local Government Bill. Individual plots will only be specified where this is necessary.

Dr. Twinn asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what consultation he has had with the trade unions about the implications for staff affected by his proposals to abolish the Greater London council and the metropolitan county councils.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I have today written to the chairman of the local government committee of the TUC, renewing my right hon. Friend's earlier invitations to the unions to discuss these matters, and enclosing a detailed paper which sets out the staffing aspects of our proposals. Copies have been placed in the Library of the House.

75. **Mr. Boyes** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he intends publishing the Bill dealing with the proposed abolition of the metropolitan county councils and the Greater London council.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The Local Government Bill was published on 22 November.

Unfit Houses

39. **Mr. John Fraser** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many homes in England are unfit for human habitation.

Sir George Young: The most recent estimate available appears in table A of part 1 of the "English House Condition Survey, 1981", a copy of which is in the Library.

Homeless Persons

41. **Mr. Clay** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many people have been accepted as being homeless so far in the current calendar year; and how this figure compares with 1978.

Sir George Young: The number of households accepted by local authorities as homeless in the first half of 1984 was 41,400 compared with 26,500 in the first half of 1978. It is estimated that about a quarter of this increase was associated with changes in statistical procedures.

Housing Subsidy

42. **Mr. O'Brien** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many housing authorities in England will be receiving general housing subsidy in 1985-86.

Sir George Young: I am unable to estimate the likely entitlement of individual authorities to housing subsidy in 1985-86.

Consultative Council on Local Government Finance

43. **Mr. Patchett** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when is the next meeting of the Consultative Council on Local Government Finance which will receive details of the 1985-86 rate support grant settlement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: We hope to be able to announce details of the 1985-86 rate support grant settlement as usual in mid-December but I cannot be more precise at this stage. I anticipate that there will be a meeting of the consultative council on local government finance on the day that my right hon. Friend makes his statement to the House; officials are consulting the local authority associations about the arrangements.

Rate Support Grant

44. **Mr. Bermingham** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he proposes announcing the details of the 1985-86 rate support grant settlement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: We hope to be able to make an announcement as usual in mid-December.

Multi-occupation Houses

45. **Mr. Kirkwood** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he plans any legislation to force local authorities to deal with dangerous conditions in houses in multiple occupation.

Mr. Gow: Local authorities have wide powers which enable them to control the condition of houses in multiple occupation. Statutory Instrument 1981/1576 imposes duties in respect of means of escape from fire in specified houses in multiple occupation. The need for further measures will be considered in the light of research which my Department is carrying out into the use and condition of such accommodation.

Housing Mobility

47. **Mr. Eggar** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he intends to introduce further legislation to increase housing mobility.

Mr. Gow: When the Housing and Building Control Act 1984 came into force on 26 August, secure tenants were given a statutory right to exchange their homes. My right hon. Friend has no plans at present for further legislation on this subject.

Nuclear Shelters

48. **Dr. Twinn** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what advice he gives to local authorities in considering planning applications for domestic, industrial and public nuclear shelters.

Mr. Macfarlane: None.

Housing Investment Programme

50. **Mr. Pike** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the total of housing investment programme bids which have been made to him for 1985-86.

Mr. Gow: I refer the hon. Member to the answer which I gave on 20 November to the hon. Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser) at column *151-52*.

Housing Defects Act

52. **Mr. Litherland** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what further action he has taken on the implementation of the Housing Defects Act.

Mr. Gow: I refer the hon. Member to the reply which I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Powley) and to the hon. Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser) on 12 November at columns *133-34*.

62. **Mr. Colin Shepherd** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he last met the Building Societies Association to discuss the Housing Defects Act.

Sir George Young: The Department's discussions with the Building Societies Association and the National House-Building Council about arrangements intended to enable building societies to lend with confidence on the security of repaired prefabricated reinforced concrete houses are continuing as a matter of urgency. My right hon. Friend hopes to make an announcement on the outcome of these discussions in the near future.

Atmospheric Pollution

53. **Mr. Heathcoat-Amory** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to reduce atmospheric pollution.

Mr. Waldegrave: Atmospheric pollution in the United Kingdom has been dramatically reduced over the past 30 years. The Government intend to achieve further reductions in emissions of specific pollutants from both fixed sources and vehicles in the years ahead. To this end my Department supports a growing programme of research and monitoring, is reviewing existing control legislation, and plays a full part in international collaborative work.

House Building

54. **Mr. Lofthouse** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many local authority homes he expects to be started in 1985-86; and how this figure compares with 1978-79.

Sir George Young: My Department has made no estimate for 1985-86. In 1978-79, 62,000 dwellings were started for local authorities in England.

Block Grant

55. **Mr. Cohorn** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he proposes making any changes to the block grant system following the recommendations made in the Audit Commission report on block grant.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: When the report was published, my right hon. Friend said that our immediate reaction was that whilst most of its recommendations seem reasonable, we had doubts about a number of arguments on which they were based. We are examining the report in detail. There are no present plans to change the arrangements for distributing block grant. My right hon. Friend announced on 9 October that Department of the Environment Ministers would be embarking on a series of studies into various aspects of local government finance, including the rate support grant system.

Rates Act 1984

56. **Mr. Andrew F. Bennett** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he proposes visiting each of the local authorities designated under the Rates Act 1984.

Mr. Waldegrave: My right hon. Friend and other Ministers from this Department have visited a number of the areas covered by the authorities selected for rate limitation over the past few months in the course of their normal duties. None of these visits has been arranged specifically as the result of the authority's designation for rate limitation.

Nuclear Shelters

57. **Mr. Sackville** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will introduce legislation to require that all new public buildings be constructed with cellars capable of being adapted as nuclear shelters.

65. **Mr. Gerald Bowden** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he can give any financial inducement to encourage the inclusion of nuclear shelters in the construction of new domestic, public or industrial buildings.

Sir George Young: No. Such measures would not be justified and would increase building costs substantially.

Local Authorities (Competitive Tendering)

58. **Mr. Chope** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what will be the deadline for comments upon the consultation paper on the extension of compulsory competitive tendering for local authorities.

Mr. Waldegrave: An announcement of a final date for comments will be made when the consultation paper is published, but I hope to be able to allow at least two months for responses to our proposals.

Football Hooliganism

59. **Mr. John Carlisle** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he intends to implement the recommendations of his recent working party report on football hooliganism.

69. **Mr. Jim Callaghan** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many representations he has received from interested parties following the publication of "Football Spectator Violence" by his Department.

78. **Mr. Moynihan** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has been made in the round of consultations following the publication of the official working group's report on football spectator violence.

Mr. Macfarlane: I launched the Government's consultation on the report — "Football Spectator Violence: Report of an Official Working Group"—on 16 August. With Ministerial colleagues from the Home Office, Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Department of Transport I am holding a series of meetings with representative organisations who wish to contribute to the debate. At my invitation, the Football Association is represented at these meetings.

By mid-December the Government will have met 17 organisations representing all sectors of the game of football as well as the police, magistrates, press and researchers. I am also asking these organisations to submit detailed written comments within the next few weeks. In addition, my Department has received 32 written responses to the report from other organisations and individuals.

The Government, with the football authorities, will consider all the representations received during this consultation and will then make a further statement on its conclusions.

Land Register

60. **Mr. Steen** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many acres of land are recorded on the local authority land register for July 1984 as being vacant, dormant or derelict land in public ownership.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-West (Sir A. Grant).

Local Authorities (Expenditure Limits)

61. **Mr. Chris Smith** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment on what date he expects to announce expenditure limits for those local authorities designated under the Rates Act 1984.

Mr. Waldegrave: We announced expenditure levels for authorities designated under the Rates Act 1984 at the time of the rate support grant announcement in July 1984. We hope to announce rate limits for these authorities at the time of the RSG settlement in mid-December.

International Garden Festival Site, Liverpool

64. **Mr. Parry** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the future of the International Garden Festival site in Liverpool.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: I refer the hon. Member to the answer which I gave him on 23 October at column 552-53.

Great Crested Newt

66. **Sir William van Straubenzee** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received from the Nature Conservancy Council or other sources as to the declining population of the crested newt.

Mr. Waldegrave: None directly. I am however aware of some cases where the British Herpetological Society is in liaison with the owners of sites over deferring work so as to allow newts to be relocated.

Common Land

67. **Mr. Barron** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on public inquiries set up by him to limit and restrict access on common land.

Mr. MacFarlane: When an application is made for an order to impose limitations and conditions as to the exercise of rights of public access to common land, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has discretion to hold a public inquiry to assist him in determination of the application. A decision whether or not to hold such an inquiry is taken in the light of the representations received in each case.

Grant-related Expenditure Assessments

68. **Mr. Haynes** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will set up an independent inquiry into the effectiveness of grant-related expenditure assessments.

Mr. Waldegrave: There is no case for an inquiry into the effectiveness of the grant-related expenditure assessments. GREs are reviewed annually and a development programme is drawn up in consultation with the local authority associations. As a result of the work this year, I hope to introduce a number of improvements to the way in which we allocate GREs, in the forthcoming RSG Settlement for 1985-86. I am satisfied that the GRE system represents a vast improvement on the pre-1981-82 system of need assessments.

Water Metering

70. **Mr. Freeman** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether any water authority proposes to introduce further trials, or complete introduction, of compulsory universal metering within their areas; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacFarlane: I understand that a number of water authorities are looking at the possibility of metering trials

within their areas. I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Murphy) on 19 November at column *31*.

Council Property Sales

71. **Mr. Maples** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many council properties have been sold under the right to buy legislation; and how many of these have been flats.

Sir George Young: From October 1980 to September 1984 about 426,000 dwellings were sold by local authorities and new towns in England under the right to buy legislation. About 13,000 of these dwellings were flats.

Public Bodies (Land Holdings)

72. **Mr. Andrew MacKay** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on progress towards compiling a full list of developable land owned by public bodies in cities.

Mr. Macfarlane: The registers of unused and underused public land which have been published under the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980 include developable land in cities. Sites of an acre or more are listed, and nearly half the land has been assessed as having potential for development.

Unemployed Construction Workers

73. **Mr. Bagier** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his latest estimate of the number of unemployed construction workers; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: The collection of unemployment statistics classified by individual industries has been discontinued.

Figures for employment in the industry are available. In 1983, 1,084,000 employees were in employment in the construction industry; and there were 413,000 self-employed.

The best prospects for increasing employment in the construction industry depend upon the continuing success of the Government's economic strategy — particularly firm control of the money supply, public expenditure and public borrowing, leading to lower interest rates and greater industrial confidence. These policies were reaffirmed in the Chancellor's autumn statement.

Output in the construction industry is growing. In 1983, measured at 1980 prices, output totalled £21·1 billion, an increase of 4·2 per cent. on 1982. In the first six months of 1984, output totalled £10·87 billion, an increase of 6 per cent. compared with the first 6 months of 1983. In the first 9 months of 1983, new orders for the construction industry totalled £9·62 billion. In the first 9 months of 1984, the equivalent figure was £10·16 billion, an increase of 5·6 per cent. in real terms.

This recovery is being led by the private sector, with new orders for industrial and commercial work in the first nine months of the year no less than 20 per cent. higher than in the comparable period of 1983.

Leicester (Rate Capping)

74. **Mr. Janner** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has sought discussions with Leicester city council about his rate capping proposals for the city and their intended effect on the services provided by that council.

Mr. Waldegrave: I have repeatedly emphasised that it has over the last few months been open to any authority designated for rate limitation to approach me for a redetermination of their expenditure level. However time is running out, since I shall soon have to start the process of fixing rate limits.

I have not received any such approach from Leicester city council. I can only therefore assume that it is content to plan its spending within the expenditure level proposed.

Thamesmead

76. **Mr. Evennett** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has any plans to make an official visit to Thamesmead.

Sir George Young: My hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Construction visited Thamesmead on 22 March and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State did so on 18 May. I intend to visit Thamesmead shortly, and have accepted an invitation to so so.

Islington

77. **Mr. Corbyn** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on future central Government spending plans to meet the social needs of the people of Islington.

Mr. Waldegrave: The Islington inner city partnership has an allocation from my Department of £10·4 million in 1984-85, supported by 75 per cent. urban progamme grant. This is in addition to Islington council's current entitlement to £6·493 million block grant for 1984-85. If the council had met its expenditure target it would have received £24·011 million block grant this year. I am not yet in a position to announce urban programme allocations, or the rate support grant settlement, for 1985-86.

North-East Hampshire Structure Plan

79. **Mr. Hunter** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when the inspector's report on the examination in public into the north-east Hampshire structure plan is likely to be published.

Mr. Macfarlane: The report of the panel who conducted the examination in public into the proposed alteration to the north-east Hampshire structure plan has been received by my right hon. Friend who is now considering it. The report will be published at the time that the proposed modifications to the alteration are advertised, when there will be an opportunity for objections and representations to be made.

London Docklands Development Corporation

Mr. Spearing asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will tabulate in the *Official Report* the distribution of 4,000 jobs created within the area of the London Docklands Development Corporation, as stated by the Minister for Housing and Construction on 20 November, showing the jobs lost, jobs created and jobs transferred into the area of the enterprise zone on the Isle

of Dogs, and the remaining parts of the London boroughs of Tower Hamlets, Southwark and Newham, respectively, together with their respective totals.

Sir George Young: The distribution of new jobs, that is jobs which had not existed in Docklands at the time the LDDC was established in July 1981, is as follows:

	Number
Enterprise Zone	*1,302
Rest of Tower Hamlets	1,629
Newham	1,008
Southwark	131

* All in Tower Hamlets

In addition, 59 jobs have been created as a result of LDDC funding of community project giving a total of 4,129. The corporation estimates that at least another 1,500 people are engaged in construction work in the area.

No comprehensive information is available on which of these jobs have been transferred from elsewhere although, as I told the hon. Member for Bow and Poplar (Mr. Mikardo) in an answer I gave on 26 October at column *747* a survey of the enterprise zone covering the period June 1982—May 1983 found that of 67 incoming firms 37 were new, 10 had come from elsewhere in Greater London and 1 from outside Greater London. The origin of the remaining 19 were unknown.

The number of notified redundancies in Docklands in the period July 1981 to March 1984 was 1,739. A breakdown of this figure on a geographical basis could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he is satisfied that the current length of time involved in issuing stop orders under section 29 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 is sufficiently short to be effective; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: I am generally satisfied with the effectiveness of the current procedures for making nature conservation orders under section 29 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act, which temporarily prohibit certain damaging activities on particular sites and provide extra time for the owner or occupier and the Nature Conservancy Council to negotiate mutally acceptable arrangements for the management of the land. I appreciate the need for speed in such cases, and am keeping the matter under review.

Stansted-Heathrow (Inquiries)

Mr. Haselhurst asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has received the inspector's report on the Stansted and Heathrow fifth terminal inquiries.

Mr. Gow: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport and I have received the report today. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport announced during the debate on Second Reading of the Civil Aviation Bill on Wednesday 21 November at column *304*, we intend to publish the report as soon as it has been printed.

Rate Rebates

Mr. Thornton asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish details of the number and average amount of rate rebates granted in England and Wales in 1982-83, in total and by rating district.

Mr. Waldegrave: I have today placed in the Library the information requested by my hon. Friend for 1982-83, the last year for which figures on this basis will be available. Rate rebates are now subsumed in the housing benefit scheme for which DHSS is responsible. The figures do not include rate rebates paid in respect of supplementary benefit recipients under the housing benefit scheme, following its introduction in November 1982, or rate rebates paid under the Rating (Disabled Persons) Act 1978.

Dog Licensing

Dr. Twinn asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to publish the consultative document on dog licensing.

Mr. Waldegrave: We have today published a paper setting out proposals which would put an end to the situation which exists at present whereby the dog licence costs more to issue than it raises in revenue. This follows criticisms made by the Public Accounts Committee and the Select Committee on the Environment of the absurdity of the existing national dog licensing arrangements. Whilst the paper reflects the Government's preference for giving local authorities power to establish their own licensing and registration schemes, we are anxious to consider the views of all those with an interest before reaching final decisions. Our aim is to promote responsible dog ownership and at the same time to enable local authorities and others to deal more effectively with dog nuisance. Comments on the proposals will be welcome. The paper is being sent to the local authority associations, animal welfare and veterinary organisations and others with an interest. Copies are available in the Library of the House.

ENVIRONMENT

Environmental Health Officers

Mr. Anderson asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many environmental health officers are employed in his Department.

Mr. Waldegrave: None.

Right to Buy

Mr. Heddle asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to amend the Housing Act 1980 and the Housing and Building Control Act 1984 to extend the right-to-buy provisions to enable tenants to purchase lock-up garages which they have previously rented, or presently rent, with the hereditament which has been the subject of right to buy procedures.

Sir George Young: The position under the 1980 and 1984 Acts is that a tenant has the right to buy any land which is "let together with" the dwellinghouse. He can also request the landlord to include in the sale of any land which

"is or has been used for the purposes of the dwelling-house".

The landlord must agree to such a request if it is reasonable in all the circumstances for the land to be included in the sale. Where a tenant has completed the purchase of his home, he has no separate right to buy a garage. We have no present plans for further amendments to extend tenants' rights to buy garages.

Tenants' Exchange Scheme

Mr. Freud asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list, for each completed year of operation since the start of the tenants' exchange scheme on 1 April 1982, *(a)* the vote provision for the scheme, *(b)* the actual cost of the scheme and *(c)* the number of exchanges effected through the scheme (i) as reported by housing authorities in the housing investment programme returns and (ii) as a percentage of the total number of registrations under the scheme, including duplications.

Sir George Young: The figures for my Department are:

	1982-83	1983-84
(a)	£200,000	£300,000
(b)	£174,000	£190,000
(c) (i)	About 4,000	About 4,400
(ii)	6·9 per cent.	17·8 per cent.

Note: Item *(c)*(ii) refers to registrations accepted during each year.

Mr. Freud asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the number of registrations under the tenants' exchange scheme from 29 November 1983 to the most recent date for which figures are available, net of renewals; and if he will give an estimate of the number of renewals.

Sir George Young: There were 33,876 registrations under the scheme between 29 November 1983 and 31 October 1984. Between 1 June 1984 (when they were first recorded separately) and 31 October 1984, there have been 7,909 renewals.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the number of civil servants now working in his Department on *(a)* duties associated with the abolition of the Greater London council and metropolitan county councils and *(b)* rates limitation, listing in each case the numbers and ranks of offices and the estimated cost per year of each group.

Mr. Waldegrave [*pursuant to his reply*, 20 November 1984 c. *153*]: The number of staff working on abolition of the GLC/MCCs in my Department, including those administrating the controls in sections 7 to 9 of the Local Government (Interim Provisions) Act 1984, is as follows:

Grade	*Estimated full-time equivalents*
Grade 2	0·2
Grade 3	2·0
Grade 4	0·5
Grade 5	7·3
Grade 6	1·2
Senior Legal Assistant	2·5
Principal	15·0
Principal Engineer	0·8
Principal Planning Officer	0·4
Principal Research Officer	0·9
Statistician	0·5
Economic Adviser	2·0
PPTO Estates Officer	0·3
Senior Executive Officer	3·1
Senior Planning Officer	0·3
Senior Research Officer	0·9
Research Officer	0·1
Higher Executive Officer	13·5
Executive Officer	8·9
Clerical Officer/Assistant	12·4
Senior Personal Secretary	2·0
Personal Secretary	6·5
Typist	2·0
Total	83·3

The cost, including accommodation, of employing these staff for a whole year would be approximately £1·9 million (1984 prices).

In relation to rate limitation, the position has not changed significantly from that given in the answer to the hon. Member for Newham, North-West on 26 July, at column 810-12. Arrangements have now been made for responsibility for the work that will be involved in the rate limitation procedures covering the 18 selected authorities for 1985-86 to be distributed among officials who will also be responsible for case work arising from the rate support grant. The number of officials playing some part in these procedures has therefore increased, but the commitment of staff resources overall remains unchanged. The cost of this level of input, including accommodation, on an annual basis would be approximately £0·27 million (1984 prices).

DEFENCE

NATO Exercises

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Defence if North Atlantic Treaty Organisation exercises carried out in Europe are made known to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

Mr. Stanley: In accordance with the provisions of the 1975 Helsinki final act, all major military manoeuvres in

Europe exceeding a total of 25,000 troops are notified by the NATO nations involved to all other states who participate in the CSCE process. In addition, NATO nations frequently notify smaller manoeuvres although there is no abolsute requirement to do so.

South Georgia (New Zealand Expedition)

Sir John Biggs-Davison asked the Secretary of State for Defence what assistance was given by Her Majesty's forces to the current New Zealand expedition to South Georgia.

Mr. Stanley: Members of the expedition were allowed to travel to the Falkland Islands on a Royal Air Force airbridge flight and onwards to South Georgia aboard a Royal Fleet Auxiliary. The expedition will be charged the full cost for both journeys.

Follow-on Force Attack

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Defence how the follow-on force attack policy differs from existing NATO strategy for responding to an attack.

Mr. Stanley: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the Adjournment debate of the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) on 31 October, in which I made it clear that follow-on forces attack is concerned with implementation of existing NATO strategy and is not a departure from it.

International Year of Peace

Mr. Alton asked the Secretary of State for Defence what contributions his Department intends to make towards the United Nations International Year of Peace, 1986.

Mr. Stanley: The Government's main contributions to the United Nations International Year of Peace will be in maintaining peace through the complementary policies of defence, balanced and verifiable arms control and the peaceful settlement of disputes. The Government will seek to do this in 1986 as in other years.

Long Range Stand-off Missile

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish in the *Official Report* as full a summary of the provisions of the memorandum of understanding referred to in the answer of 20 November, *Official Report*, column *83*, concerning the conventionally armed long range stand-off missile, as may be provided without prejudicing national security.

Mr. Butler: The memorandum of understanding between the United Kingdom, the United States of America and the Federal Republic of Germany concerning a collaborative feasibility study of a long range stand-off missile system (LRSOM) provides that the objective of the programme will be to produce a joint report containing future programme recommendations for subsequent consideration by the participating Governments. This report will assess:

(a) the operational, technical, financial and general feasibility of developing and producing a LRSOM to meet the NATO staff target;

(b) the technical, financial, and general feasibility of undertaking development and production of a LRSOM on a multi-national collaborative basis; and

(c) whether, if feasible, a multinational collaborative LRSOM would be worth while, compared with other options available to the participating Governments.

The memorandum of understanding also contains the detailed arrangements for management and financing of the feasibility study, contracting, information transfer, security and termination.

Mr. Harry Cohen asked the Secretary of State for Defence, if he will publish in the *Official Report* as full a summary of national studies of a conventionally armed long range stand-off missile referred to in his answer of 20 November, *Official Report*, column *83*, as may be provided without prejudicing national security.

Mr. Butler: A summary of these studies could not be published without prejudice to national security.

RAF Tornado Crash

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will outline the circumstances of the Royal Air Force Tornado crash near Schwienfurt in Germany on 8 November.

Mr. Stanley: I understand that the crash occurred during a routine training sortie following action by the pilot to avoid collision with another aircraft. A summary of the findings of the board of inquiry will be released, in the normal way, once the accidence investigation is completed.

Naval Refits

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the naval refits that have been put out to private contractors during 1984.

Mr. Lee: Contracts were placed during 1984 for the refits of HMS Euryalus and Otter, 12 Royal Fleet Auxiliaries, a floating dock and a tug. Contracts were also let for lesser work (including periodic overhaul) on other vessels, principally harbour craft and pontoons.

Naval Dockyards (In-house services)

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list which in-house services in *(a)* Rosyth and *(b)* Plymouth, Devonport have been contracted out since 1979; and what is his estimate of the numbers of jobs affected.

Mr. Lee: Of the traditional in-house services, only cleaning tasks have been contracted out since 1979. This has produced manpower savings of 63 and 98 at Rosyth and Devonport respectively. Most of the displaced staff have been redeployed and redundancies have been limited to 51, all at Devonport.

Members' Questions

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Defence, what criteria he uses in declining to answer questions on the grounds of disproportionate effort which would be involved.

Mr. Heseltine [*pursuant to his reply*, 27 November 1984, c. *412*]: It has been the practice of all Governments that answers to parliamentary questions need to be prepared with the same regard to economy as applies to

other aspects of Government business. It has been a long-standing convention that a Minister may decline to give a substantive reply to a question if he considers that the cost of providing that reply, mainly in terms of the cost of staff time involved, would be disproportionate to its value to Parliament and the public.

Naval Log Books

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the normal interval between the removal of a signals log from a vessel returning from patrol and its destruction; and where that log is kept in that interval.

Mr. Stanley [*pursuant to his reply*, 22 November 1984, c.*335*]: Signal logs will normally remain on the vessel concerned. If removed during a maintenance or refitting period, the ship's company would be responsible for their safekeeping.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Blood Products

Mr. Nicholas Brown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement regarding progress on the upgrading of the blood products laboratory at Elstree; whether he is satisfied that the amount of money allocated for this programme will enable it to be carried out effectively on schedule; and when he expects the United Kingdom will be self-sufficient in blood products.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The building of the new production unit at blood products laboratory, Elstree is progressing satisfactorily, and is presently due to be completed by the original target date of January 1986.

This new production unit, when completed, will have the capacity to meet the estimated needs of the National Health Service in England and Wales for all blood products. Scotland and Northern Ireland are virtually self-sufficient already.

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what steps he is taking to increase British production of factor 8 and 9 blood products and reduce dependence on United States imports.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The Government decided in 1982 that self-sufficiency in all blood products, including Factors 8 and 9, should be achieved, and that the blood products laboratory at Elstree should be rebuilt to provide the capacity to manufacture the blood product needs of the National Health Service in England and Wales. Work commenced in May 1983 and the project is presently on time for completion in January 1986.

Housing Benefits

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Social Services why information on the take-up of housing benefit supplement is not available.

Mr. Whitney: Information on the take-up of benefits is normally derived from analysis of family expenditure survey data. Housing benefit supplement was introduced in April 1983 and the 1983 family expenditure survey is not yet available.

Cervical Cytology

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the number, and proportion, of health authorities which operate a call and recall system for cervical cytology; and whether he has received any representations advocating the national implementation of such a system.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We do not keep information centrally on call and recall systems. We have asked health authorities to recall at five-yearly intervals women over the age of 35 who have at some time presented for a smear test and women who have had three or more pregnancies. We have had some representations suggesting that local systems which call women for a smear test might be more effective. Health authorities may introduce such a system if they decide that it is a local priority and they have the necessary resources. Our Department is currently funding research into the effectiveness of a local call system.

Dogs (Infection)

Mr. Terlezki asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what assessment he makes of the spread of disease and infection via the dog population of the United Kingdom; and how many cases of disease and infection in humans each year are caused by dogs;

(2) if he will initiate a publicity campaign to foster public understanding of the way in which dogs can spread infection, in particular in relation to the need to observe strict hygiene in contact with dogs.

Mr. John Patten: Figures are not available centrally on the incidence of disease associated with dogs, but there is no evidence to suggest that, if correctly managed and cared for, they constitute a significant risk to human health. Veterinarians advise dog owners on the care and management of dogs, and the Health Education Council and several voluntary and other organisations have produced literature on responsible pet ownership and the necessary hygiene precautions. We do not, therefore, consider a publicity campaign necessary.

NHS Property (Security)

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list in the *Official Report* the measures taken since 1979 to improve security of National Health Service property as shown in the letter of 14 November from the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) to the hon. Member for North Norfolk.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Yes. My letter of 14 November was as follows

Ralph Howell Esq. MP

I attach a list of the main initiatives we have taken to improve the security of NHS property. The list is not exhaustive because security considerations often form part of wider activities and it is not possible to search through all the pieces of action which might have had security aspects. I hope you will find the list useful—I think it does show that great attention has been given and is being given to security by our Department and by the NHS.

KENNETH CLARKE

PS I do appreciate that we now want all this to begin to show some results.

Security: List of DHSS Initiatives

December 1980

Report of Central Management Services Study on Control of linen services.

September 1981
Report of second Central Management Services Study to identify whether losses in system were real.
1981
Departmental Supplies Information Group reported on control of stores by computer based systems followed by issue of Supplies Council Circular (81)3.
1982
A working group of NHS Treasurers reviewed a 1967 report on inventories.
November 1982
Deloittes, Haskins and Sells commissioned to study losses and security of supplies. Reported March 1983.
December 1982
HC(82)19 issued asking health authorities to review their procedures and to develop security strategies.
July 1983
FM(7)83 issued to NHS Treasurers asking them to produce statement to enable identification of unexplained losses.
30 November 1983
Report of Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs issued to health authorities who were asked to comment on improvements in security.
January 1984
Reports received from Regional Health Authorities giving progress on production of security strategies.
May 1984
FM(5)84 to NHS Treasurers asking them to record and report to the Department all discrepancies and unexplained issues of linen and other equipment and property.
1983 and 1984
Department contributed to National Association of Health Authorities Manual on Security.

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if the measures being taken to improve security of National Health Service property are in proportion to the actual losses from fraud and theft incurred in recent years.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We believe that there is scope for improving security in the NHS and that the measures being taken will be cost-effective.

NHS (Theft and Fraud)

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he is satisfied that losses to the National Health Service due to theft and fraud were no greater than 0·007 per cent. of total National Health Service expenditure in 1982-83.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The figure represents only those losses known to be due to theft, fraud and criminal damage and we have no reason to doubt its accuracy. Undetected thefts will naturally not be reflected in the losses statement although, in future, unexplained losses will be accounted for.

National Insurance Fund

Mr. Shersby asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will estimate the cost to the national insurance fund of abolishing the employers' contribution for young employees up to the age of 20 years.

Mr. Whitney: The estimated cost to the national insurance fund of abolishing the employers' contribution for young people up to the age of 20 years is £550 million. The estimate is based on 1984-85 contribution rates and 1981-82 numbers and characteristics of contributors under 20 years of age, which are the latest available.

Invalidity Pensioners

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services at what level the earnings disregard for the wife of an invalidity pensioner would have to be to set to restore its real value at November 1978; and what would be the net cost of restoring it to this level.

Mr. Newton: If the £45 disregard had been maintained in line with prices since 1978 the present level would be £79·50. The net cost in 1983-84 of maintaining the value would have been about £35 million.

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many invalidity pensioners receive a dependency addition *(a)* for a wife and *(b)* for a husband; and what is the highest earnings disregard which could be set if a common earnings disregard were introduced on a nil cost basis.

Mr. Newton: The most recent statistics available show that, at March 1983, there were 323,000 invalidity pensioners with an addition for a wife, and 100 with an addition for a husband. Because of industrial action affecting the computer, these are the latest available figures. The entitlement conditions for dependent husbands were, however, eased from November 1983 and additions for such dependants are now likely to be more numerous.

I shall reply to the latter part of the question as soon as possible.

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what would be the net cost of introducing a common earnings rule for adult dependants of invalidity pensioners at *(a)* £45 a week and *(b)* at the real value of the earnings disregarded at November 1978.

Mr. Newton: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Benefits (Take-up)

Mr. Frank Field asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how much money has been spent by his Department in each of the past five years on take-up of the following benefits *(a)* statutory sick pay, *(b)* family income supplement, *(c)* national insurance benefits, *(d)* supplementary benefits and *(e)* housing benefits.

Mr. Whitney: The amounts spent in each of the past five financial years on promoting take-up of the benefits listed is in the table:

	1979-80 £'000	*1980-81 £'000*	*1981-82 £'000*	*1982-83 £'000*	*1983-84 £'000*
Press and TV advertising					
(a) Statutory sick pay	N/A	N/A	N/A	*474	447
(b) Family income supplement	297	336	482	506	Nil
(c) National insurance benefits	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil

	1979-80 £'000	1980-81 £'000	1981-82 £'000	1982-83 £'000	1983-84 £'000
(d) Supplementary benefits	Nil	Nil	Nil	98	Nil
(e) Housing benefits	†157	†42	†261	300	Nil
All social security leaflets and posters					
means-tested, non-contributory and NI benefits (including those above) and NI contributions	628	736	832	1,376	‡1,500

* Pre-introduction advertising directed at employers.
† Rent and rate rebates advertising by Department of the Environment.
‡ Approximately Estimated figure.
In addition to expenditure on publicity, the Department takes other steps to ensure that those concerned have access to information about benefits to which they may be entitled. These include: information about other benefits at the back of order books, local media activity by our regional information officers, the new freephone information and advice service, and improvements in service to the public in the Department's network of local offices.

Supplementary Benefit

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what would be the level of the supplementary benefit income disregard in November if its real value was equivalent to November 1974.

Mr. Whitney: The retail price index for November 1984 is not yet available; on the basis of the RPI for October 1984 the information is as follows:

	November 1974 £	October 1984 £
Disregard of earnings of person required to register and of other income.	1	3·11
Disregard of earnings of person not required to register and of war and industrial disablement pensions.	2	6·21

Mr. Frank Field asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many single payments have been made to households in receipt of supplementary benefit in each of the last five years for which figures are available for *(a)* draught- proofing materials *(b)* hot water cylinder jackets and *(c)* space heating appliances under regulations 18, 9(s) and 9(d), respectively, of the Social Security Supplementary Benefit (Single Payment) Regulations 1981.

Mr. Whitney: No information is available on the number of single payments of supplementary benefit given for hot water cylinder jackets or space heating appliances, or on the number of payments given for draught-proofing materials before 1981. According to the annual statistical inquiries conducted in December 1981 and December 1982 respectively, fewer than 1,000 payments were made for draught-proofing materials in 1981, and about 2,500 payments were made in 1982. Because these figures relate to single payments made during the 12 months preceding the date of each inquiry to people still in receipt of supplementary benefit at the time of that inquiry, they are under-estimates of the total number of single payments made during the year. Figures are not yet available on the number of payments made for draught-proofing materials in 1983.

Waiting Lists

Mr. Caborn asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if his Department has any plans to include day cases on statistical returns of waiting lists.

Mr. John Patten: The Health Services information steering group has recommended in its first report that each district health authority should submit a regular return on all patients awaiting elective admission including those not intended to say in hospital overnight. Health authorities have been asked to plan on the basis that the first report should be implemented by April 1987.

Office of Chief Scientist

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he established his inquiry into the functions of the office of the chief scientist in his Department; what are its terms of reference; when he expects it to report; and if he will publish the evidence submitted to it.

Mr. Fowler: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

NHS (Changes)

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he expects to announce the proposed increase in National Health Service charges; when they are to take effect; and whether they will include increased dental charges.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Changes in NHS charges will be announced in due course.

Sickle Cell Anaemia

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services which district health authorities provide screening for sickle cell anaemia as part of routine post-natal testing; and which others have plans to provide it.

Mr. John Patten: This information is not collected centrally.

Dentists

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list for each family practitioner committee area for 1979 and each subsequent year the number of patients registered with dentists, the number of dental practices and the ratio between the two.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Patients are not registered with dentists nor are figures available on practices. The tables therefore give for each family practitioner committee area in England the total number of dentists wholly or mainly in practice in each area and the ratio of persons per dentist at 30 September for the years 1979-1983:

Area	1979		1980		1981		1982		1983	
	Dentists* in practice†	Persons per dentist	Dentists* in practice†	Persons per dentist	Dentists* in practice†	Persons per dentist	Dentists* in practice†	Persons per dentist	Dentists* in practice†	Persons per dentist
Northern RHA										
Cleveland FPC	93	6,114	93	6,100	95	5,983	102	5,558	108	5,230
Cumbria FPC	111	4,233	111	4,220	114	4,180	118	4,089	121	3,992
Durham FPC	95	6,348	99	6,093	102	5,945	110	5,528	117	5,186
Northumberland FPC	56	5,163	62	4,679	60	5,008	61	4,913	67	4,481
Gateshead FPC	37	5,738	40	5,260	39	5,490	40	5,290	44	4,777
Newcastle Upon Tyne FPC	84	3,418	87	3,300	86	3,315	88	3,193	86	3,270
North Tyneside FPC	50	3,860	48	4,002	49	4,084	47	4,191	52	3,750
South Tyneside FPC	22	7,391	22	7,313	23	7,065	24	6,692	23	6,935
Sunderland FPC	47	6,400	46	6,559	48	6,231	55	5,444	61	4,908
Yorkshire RHA										
Humberside FPC	132	6,430	137	6,201	146	5,832	155	5,521	166	5,145
North Yorkshire FPC	186	3,505	193	3,381	199	3,332	205	3,308	215	3,185
Bradford FPC	115	4,015	115	4,021	117	3,967	122	3,809	121	3,834
Calderdale FPC	39	4,856	40	4,715	45	4,278	49	3,914	51	3,765
Kirklees FPC	70	5,417	76	5,004	78	4,838	78	4,835	83	4,546
Leeds FPC	213	3,401	218	3,321	224	3,206	225	3,183	239	2,987
Wakefield FPC	59	5,247	59	5,268	61	5,136	64	4,897	70	4,459
Trent RHA										
Derbyshire FPC	164	5,477	176	5,116	175	5,201	178	5,117	188	4,846
Leicester FPC	169	4,940	168	4,982	179	4,775	186	4,627	198	4,362
Lincolnshire FPC	95	5,517	102	5,176	100	5,374	98	5,631	97	5,714
Nottinghamshire FPC	200	4,867	204	4,772	213	4,652	207	4,789	219	4,531
Barnsley FPC	40	5,545	40	5,550	39	5,790	41	5,498	43	5,228
Doncaster FPC	46	6,189	57	5,012	62	4,644	61	4,733	64	4,528
Rotherham FPC	46	5,407	47	5,306	56	4,498	53	4,772	54	4,689
Sheffield FPC	131	4,156	136	3,996	134	4,086	142	3,844	145	3,743
East Anglian RHA										
Cambridgeshire FPC	118	4,825	123	4,678	131	4,415	136	4,401	143	4,206
Norfolk FPC	154	4,431	165	4,177	170	4,096	177	3,982	187	3,804
Suffolk FPC	151	3,863	154	3,818	165	3,574	170	3,595	169	3,624
North West Thames RHA										
Bedfordshire FPC	90	5,510	102	4,910	106	4,761	108	4,740	122	4,204
Hertfordshire FPC	307	3,095	318	3,003	343	2,808	347	2,788	347	2,811
Barnet FPC	143	2,024	138	2,088	140	2,109	146	2,019	152	1,937
Brent and Harrow FPC	178	2,516	178	2,505	183	2,475	184	2,461	198	2,290
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow FPC	254	2,566	252	3,604	260	2,467	256	2,484	253	2,510
Hillingdon FPC	69	3,277	72	3,165	73	3,149	71	3,279	70	3,346
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster FPC	345	1,040	332	1,074	331	1,024	346	932	350	909
North East Thames RHA										
Essex FPC	319	4,521	339	4,283	344	4,288	366	4,055	384	3,885
Barking and Havering FPC	90	4,322	88	4,419	92	4,266	90	4,373	97	4,025
Camden and Islington FPC	185	1,935	203	1,752	209	1,679	212	1,598	205	1,650
City and East London FPC	149	3,823	142	3,998	147	3,765	148	3,684	162	3,373
Enfield and Haringey FPC	150	3,217	147	3,272	150	3,131	159	2,935	158	2,961
Redbridge and Waltham Forest FPC	133	3,338	139	3,188	143	3,126	139	3,191	145	3,050
South East Thames RHA										
East Sussex FPC	219	2,988	228	2,877	239	2,788	261	2,569	262	2,572
Kent FPC	376	3,851	386	3,768	398	3,702	421	3,529	433	3,433
Greenwich and Bexley FPC	110	3,775	111	3,749	120	3,380	120	3,616	126	3,444
Bromley FPC	109	2,664	104	2,788	111	2,694	113	2,636	116	2,579
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham FPC	236	3,066	234	3,076	245	2,922	261	2,666	267	2,593
South West Thames RHA										
Surrey FPC	380	2,599	390	2,532	398	2,535	405	2,503	411	2,462
West Sussex FPC	227	2,833	231	2,813	240	2,774	245	2,745	253	2,683
Croydon FPC	135	2,373	142	2,245	141	2,283	147	2,187	145	2,211

Area	1979		1980		1981		1982		1983	
	Dentists* in practice†	Persons per dentist	Dentists* in practice†	Persons per dentist	Dentists* in practice†	Persons per dentist	Dentists* in practice†	Persons per dentist	Dentists* in practice†	Persons per dentist
Kingston and Richmond FPC	114	2,604	115	2,563	112	2,656	115	2,557	114	2,583
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth FPC	202	2,977	198	3,027	208	2,899	215	2,768	229	2,592
Wessex RHA										
Dorset FPC	183	3,196	184	3,208	190	3,108	194	3,116	199	3,061
Hampshire FPC	398	3,557	403	3,534	419	3,418	425	3,497	447	3,354
Wiltshire FPC	117	4,297	116	4,376	121	4,190	127	4,154	135	3,941
Isle of Wight FPC	30	3,843	28	4,146	31	3,752	32	3,719	35	3,423
Oxford RHA										
Berkshire FPC	184	3,679	185	3,703	201	3,401	208	3,363	225	3,142
Buckinghamshire FPC	146	3,635	153	3,518	171	3,315	179	3,245	189	3,069
Northamptonshire FPC	102	5,122	105	5,016	114	4,688	119	4,513	125	4,308
Oxfordshire FPC	144	3,694	155	3,450	158	3,318	164	3,339	173	3,181
South Western RHA										
Avon FPC	309	2,985	322	2,870	323	2,861	327	2,847	322	2,907
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly FPC	114	3,630	119	3,494	124	3,387	135	3,182	136	3,178
Devon FPC	295	3,174	307	3,064	317	2,967	320	3,019	333	2,922
Gloucestershire FPC	145	3,412	154	3,233	156	3,208	163	3,101	167	3,031
Somerset FPC	123	3,356	124	3,352	132	3,220	139	3,110	137	3,180
West Midlands RHA										
Hereford and Worcester FPC	143	4,309	138	4,496	156	4,061	159	4,016	167	3,835
Salop FPC	96	3,808	97	3,787	102	3,701	110	3,458	115	3,326
Staffordshire FPC	180	5,546	187	5,362	199	5,096	208	4,899	208	4,894
Warwickshire FPC	99	4,716	108	4,334	107	4,416	115	4,150	116	4,119
Birmingham FPC	257	4,022	263	3,914	264	3,872	275	3,699	273	3,710
Coventry FPC	73	4,648	70	4,829	76	4,192	78	4,069	74	4,269
Dudley FPC	55	5,384	56	5,293	60	5,012	67	4,494	69	4,361
Sandwell FPC	63	4,871	66	4,614	70	4,427	68	4,549	74	4,153
Solihull FPC	42	4,719	41	4,832	44	4,511	44	4,530	45	4,442
Walsall FPC	44	5,986	43	6,105	45	5,944	48	5,567	52	5,102
Wolverhampton FPC	50	5,164	50	5,130	52	4,933	54	4,730	58	4,403
Mersey RHA										
Cheshire FPC	241	3,841	230	4,038	242	3,832	248	3,758	251	3,718
Liverpool FPC	123	2,445	129	3,978	120	4,323	127	4,021	131	3,836
St. Helens and Knowsley FPC	75	6,936	74	4,927	80	4,551	75	4,832	73	4,932
Sefton FPC	77	4,784	76	3,937	77	3,905	76	3,930	78	3,844
Wirral FPC	89	3,848	95	3,589	95	3,589	104	3,262	103	3,286
North Western RHA										
Lancashire FPC	284	4,819	290	4,710	294	4,698	315	4,394	331	4,162
Bolton FPC	53	4,908	56	4,645	60	4,383	61	4,300	61	4,292
Bury FPC	43	4,153	46	3,883	47	3,779	56	3,136	58	3,014
Manchester FPC	136	3,522	140	3,385	138	3,364	144	3,185	144	3,177
Oldham FPC	42	5,319	41	5,449	45	4,929	49	4,502	51	4,331
Rochdale FPC	45	4,644	45	4,642	46	4,530	47	4,406	47	4,391
Salford FPC	49	5,155	51	4,900	48	5,154	55	4,465	50	4,900
Stockport FPC	91	3,204	89	3,262	92	3,163	93	3,112	96	3,009
Tameside FPC	46	4,748	50	4,346	51	4,290	54	4,015	57	3,795
Trafford FPC	62	3,613	63	3,530	63	3,527	63	3,489	69	3,170
Wigan FPC	55	5,658	59	5,259	62	5,000	66	4,685	68	4,532

* A dentist practising in more than one FPC area has been included in the area in which the major part of his or her work (in the quarter ended 30 September each year) was carried out.

† Dentists employed by Health Authorities are excluded.

Family Income Supplement

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for Social Services why persons in receipt of family income supplement whose annual awards fall due for renewal from December onwards will not receive the increased level on 27th November, but must wait until their annual revision becomes due; how many persons will be disadvantaged by this new arrangement; and what is the longest time any family must wait until receiving the new award.

Mr. Newton: FIS awards, once made, continue for a year regardless of any changes in the recipient's circumstances, including increases in income. In view of this, we concluded that it was anomalous that awards

should be uprated during their currency, especially because the result of doing so involves increasing benefit for many families whose circumstances would not justify it at the time.

It is estimated that about 210,000 FIS awards were in payment in November. Transitional arrangements were made which covered some 10,000 families, who will be able to take full advantage of the new rates if they so wish. Of the remaining 200,000 it is estimated that some 40,000 would have been entitled to a partial uprating and some 50,000 to a full uprating, if their awards had been reassessed at the time of the uprating.

The longest a family may have to wait before being able to qualify for an award under the new levels is 51 weeks, although the average is 23 weeks.

AIDS (Blood Donors)

Sir Raymond Gower asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many cases of acquired immune deficiency syndrome are known to have occurred in England; what specialist medical advice he has so far received; what consultation he has had with blood transfusion centres regarding steps to be taken to ensure that blood donors are free of this disease; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: By 19 November, 85 subsequently confirmed cases in England had been reported to the communicable disease surveillance centre (CDSC). We receive medical advice from CDSC and specialists in the relevant fields of medicine including blood transfusion, genito-urinary medicine, immunology and oncology. After consulting the Advisory Committee on the National Blood Transfusion Service we have decided to ask all regional blood transfusion centres to issue, on an individual basis to all blood donors, a revised leaflet "AIDS and how it concerns blood donors". This leaflet reinforces our previous advice that persons at high risk of transmitting the AIDS virus should not donate blood.

RHAs (Managers)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list in the *Official Report* the names of the managers so far appointed to the regional health authorities in England and Wales.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The regional general managers appointed so far are:

Mr. B. Edwards—Trent RHA
Mr. G. Greenshields—North Western RHA
Mr. D. Hague—Northern RHA
Miss C. Hawkins—South Western RHA
Mr. J. Hoare—Wessex RHA
Mr. T. Hunt—North East Thames RHA
Mr. A. Kember—South West Thames RHA
Mr. D. I. Kenny—North West Thames RHA
Mr. P. Le Fleming—South East Thames RHA
Mr. D. Nichol—Mersey RHA
Mr. K. Punt—Yorkshire RHA
Dr. R. Rue—Oxford RHA

Appointments in Wales are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what plans he has made to liaise regularly with representatives of the central committee for hospital medical services and of medical executive committees with a view to assessing tasks performed by regional general managers in the course of their appointments.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Our Department already has long-standing arrangements through the Chief Medical Officer for regular liaison with the Central Committee for Hospital Medical Services, which would allow representatives of the committee to raise any particular points of concern on the general management arrangements.

Tuberculosis

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what proportion of tuberculosis diseases which have occurred during the last five years were found to be carried by homeless alcoholics.

Mr. John Patten: Information is not held centrally on the proportion of people with tuberculosis who are homeless alcoholics.

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what steps he is going to take to ensure that the incidence of tuberculosis amongst hospital medical staff is fully documented;

(2) what plans he has for making sure that the hospital staff exposed to risks of contracting tuberculosis receive regular chest radiographs; and what provisions he will make for the purpose of setting up screening programmes for professional foreign visitors attached to National Health Service hospitals.

Mr. John Patten: Guidance was issued to health authorities in 1978. We are looking into the specific points the hon. Member raises and will send her a full reply later.

Consensus Team Management

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how often he will be initiating studies to be conducted by his Department into the effects of the implementation of the Griffith's report on consensus team management.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We have no plans to initiate such studies.

Griffiths Report

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many applications were submitted by doctors for appointment to the regional general management posts created on the basis of the contents of the Griffith's report; and how many doctors have been appointed.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Of 12 regional general managers appointed so far, one is a doctor. All information about individual candidates for general manager appointments is, and should remain, confidential.

Cigarettes and Tobacco (Tar Content)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what proposals he has for modifying further the tar yield of cigarettes resulting from the poor effect of low tar cigarettes on mortality from coronary disease.

Mr. John Patten: In seeking to continue reducing the tar delivery of cigarettes, the Government's main purpose

is further to reduce the risk of lung cancer to smokers. Current declining lung cancer mortality rates among men attest to the value of this policy. The voluntary agreement on tobacco product modification concluded in March of this year provides for a further reduction from 15mg to 13mg in the average tar yield of cigarettes over the next four years.

The link between deaths from coronary heart disease and smoking is more complex, since smoking is only one of the risk factors involved. New work in this field, fostered by the independent scientific committee on smoking and health at the cardiovascular research unit at Dundee, is due to start on 1 December 1984.

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what resources he will make available for the purpose of further investigations or studies into which constituents in tobacco are the greatest contributor to coronary heart disease.

Mr. John Patten: Under the tobacco product modification agreement the tobacco industry has already provided £3 million for independent research proposed by the independent scientific committee on smoking and health into this and other aspects of the effects of modified tobacco products. The industry has recently agreed to make up to a further £1 million a year available over the next four years for this purpose.

NHS (Expenditure)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what sectors will benefit most from the additional £700 million which he has promised to spend on the National Health Service in the next financial year.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: My right hon. Friend has announced that the Government will spend an extra £700 million on the NHS in Great Britain in 1985-86 compared with 1984-85. This total includes additional revenue and capital spending for health authorities and additional spending on family practitioner services and the centrally financed services.

The largest additional amount is for health authorities' revenue, which in England will increase by £500 million compared with 1984-85 and is £80 million higher than the planned expenditure in the last public expenditure White Paper. This is a cash increase of 5½ per cent., 1 per cent. more than forecast inflation. Health authorities will also have available to them the benefits of their cost improvement programmes on which we are looking for further progress. They will be required to meet all their costs including all pay and price increases from within these resources. In future, the Government do not intend to increase cash limits for additional pay or price increases.

With these additional resources, we expect health authorities to continue to improve services and to reduce waiting lists.

Fluoridation

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he expects the investigation being conducted by the Medical Research Council into the findings of the report by Japanese researchers on fluoridation to be completed.

Mr. John Patten: The investigation by the Medical Research Council is part of a programme of research which has been commissioned by the Department. Some of the work has been completed and we anticipate that most of the remaining results will be available early in the new year.

Drugs (Generic Prescribing)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what proposals he has to allow doctors to prescribe drugs on the prescribed list if there is no suitable generic substitute.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The consultations which I am undertaking with the medical profession and other interested parties are designed to ensure that, within the categories of drugs to be included in the limited list prescribers will be able to choose from an adequate range of alternative generic drugs to meet their patients' needs.

Newcastle Computer Dispute

Mr. Gregory asked the Secretary of State for Social Services to what extent the social security uprating has been affected by the dispute at his Department's Newcastle central office; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fowler: I am glad to report that, despite this deplorable strike, Newcastle central office has successfully completed the issue of 7 million new front covers for pension books, and has also issued either order books containing the new rates or new front covers to all recipients of child benefit paid by order book. Arrangements have also been made for the new rates to be paid to beneficiaries paid by automated credit transfer and, where appropriate, to pensioners living overseas. Together with the work carried out by DHSS local offices and North Fylde central office to uprate supplementary pensions and other benefits including war pensions, mobility allowance and attendance allowance, this means that virtually all social security beneficiaries are receiving their uprated increase on time, and will receive as planned any Christmas bonus to which they are entitled.

This performance in delivering the uprating compares well with previous years. To have carried out this uprating in addition to the ongoing work of the Department represents a tremendous achievement by our staff working at Newcastle central office, at North Fylde and in DHSS local offices throughout the country. I should like to pay tribute to them for their efforts and dedication. We are grateful also to the post offices and sub-post offices which have helped us with the emergency arrangements.

So far as the Newcastle dispute itself is concerned, I am pleased to say that the members of two of three unions involved have returned to work today. I would once again urge those members of the CPSA who are still on strike to reconsider their position on the fair and reasonable offer we have made.

NHS (Ancillary Services)

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on the fall in the percentage of contracting out of ancillary services in the National Health Service between 1978-79 and 1983-84.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke [*pursuant to his reply*, 26 November 1984, c. *388*]: Throughout the period 1978-79

to 1983-84 the proportion of ancillary services contracted out was very small and changes during that period have no particular significance. As health authorities set about the programmes of competitive tendering, called for in our circular HC(83)18, we expect savings to be secured in the provision of ancillary services, and resources to be released for the development of patient care services. This is the objective of the policy. We also expect that authorities will make greater use of contractors as a result of tendering since they will be required to do so when a contractor is able to do the work to the standard required at a better price than the in-house service. These developments will take several years to work through and will not begin to show in the accounts until 1984-85.

Spectacles (Retailers)

Mr. Corbett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will seek powers to prohibit advertising by unqualified retailers of spectacles until such time as qualified and registered opticians are legally entitled to advertise.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke [*pursuant to his reply*, 26 November 1984, c. *389*]: No. Restrictions on advertising by registered opticians are imposed in rules made by the General Optical Council, on which registered opticians are strongly represented. However if the GOC agrees to changes recently put to it by the Privy Council, these restrictions could be swiftly removed to the benefit of both the public and the profession.

Competition from alternative suppliers should have a significant impact on the price paid by the public for glasses. It would be absurd to deny the public information about the availability of glasses from new suppliers.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 29 November 1984

ENERGY

Mining Research and Development Establishment, Bretby

Mrs. Currie asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the recent visit by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State to the Mining Research and Development Establishment at Bretby.

Mr. David Hunt: Research and development is an essential part of a healthy technologically based industry and I therefore welcomed the opportunity to visit the Mining Research and Development Establishment to see at first hand the work which it is doing to improve the working conditions of miners and to ensure that the country obtains maximum benefit from its massive investment in advanced mining equipment. I was greatly impressed by the quality of the work that I saw and feel that there are important opportunities for applying the results of the work widely in the industry in the future.

Coal Industry Dispute

Mr. Michael Morris asked the Secretary of State for Energy how many pits were *(a)* working normally, *(b)* producing some coal, *(c)* had men reporting for work and *(d)* had no men reporting for work (i) at the end of March, (ii) at 31 October and (iii) at the latest available date.

Mr. David Hunt: I understand from the National Coal Board that the information requested is as follows:

	Working normally	*Producing some coal*	*Some men working*	*No men working*
30 March	38	4	4	130
31 October	45	10	25	94
29 November	46	18	83	27

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Energy what was the monthly average output of coal during the present dispute; and what was the average output for 1983.

Mr. David Hunt: The average monthly coal production from all United Kingdom sources during 1983 was 9·9 million tonnes. The monthly average in the months April to September 1984 was 3 million tonnes.

South Wales Electricity Board (Report)

Mr. Grist asked the Secretary of State for Energy what response has been made by the South Wales electricity board to the report on the board by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission which was published earlier in the current year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Walker: I have received the initial response of the South Wales electricity board to the report of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission published on 29 February. It gives the board's comments on the commission's findings and describes the actions it is taking to meet the recommendations. Copies of the board's response have been placed in the Library of the House.

I welcome the commission's findings that the board is not pursuing any course of conduct against the public interest, that the board's financial, accounting and budgeting activities are efficiently managed and that the board has taken a vigorous approach to streamlining its management structure in recent years. While the commission questioned SWALEB's record in containing its added costs over the past decade as a whole, it recognised that in recent years the board had made considerable progress in this area and that its added costs declined in 1982-83. This improvement continued in 1983-84 in the results declared after the publication of the commission's report.

The commission noted a number of areas where improvements in the board's performance might be achieved, and the board has responded positively to the suggestions. I particularly welcome the assurance that board members will play an increasingly active role in defining corporate strategy through the formulation of quantified short and medium-term objectives. This is an issue which is relevant throughout the industry and my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State will shortly be offering advice and guidance on their role to part-time area board members.

I am also pleased that in response to other recommendations the board has established an audit committee chaired by one of its part-time members and has responded constructively to the commission's proposal that sufficient investment work should be put out to tender to enable effective comparisons to be made between in-house and private contractors' work. Action on these lines should make an important contribution to maintaining and improving efficiency and competitiveness.

In conclusions 39 and 40 the commission called for separate accounts and the establishment of financial targets for appliance retailing and contracting in order to demonstrate that the board continues to compete fairly with the private sector in these activities and that there is no cross-subsidy from the main electricity account. In agreement with the Electricity Council I announced in July measures applying to all boards which fully meet the commission's concerns and should help boards to demonstrate that they are trading fairly and profitably in these activities. In respect of the commission's conclusions on SWALEB's appliance repair business, I am glad to note that the board has taken firm action aimed at eliminating losses by 1984-85 and that financial information will continue to be provided on the progress of this activity.

The board indicated in its response that it is actively considering and implementing many other detailed recommendations made by the commission. I expect to make a further statement in due course when I have received the board's final response and report on actions taken. The commission's report also raises a number of issues which have a bearing on the efficiency of the electricity supply industry as a whole. The Electricity Council will be pursuing these points with the aim of ensuring that decisions by the area boards take full account of relevant industry-wide considerations.

WALES

Hyperbaric Oxygen

Dr. Roger Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the centres in Welsh hospitals where hyperbaric oxygen for the effective treatment of carbon monoxide intoxication is available.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Singleton hospital, Swansea, is the only hospital in Wales to have a hyperbaric oxygen chamber.

Internal Drainage Districts

Dr. David Clark asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many internal drainage districts there are in Wales; and how many of these are administered by internal drainage boards, and how many are managed by the Welsh water authority, for each year for which data are available since 1974.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The information requested is as follows:

Number of internal drainage districts in Wales

	1979	*1979-84*
Number in Wales	15	14
Administered by boards	4	3
Administered by the Welsh Water Authority	11	11

Two of the districts administered by internal drainage boards straddle the border with England.

Prior to 1978 the Minister of Agriculture was responsible for land drainage matters in Wales.

EMPLOYMENT

Youth Training Scheme

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many monitoring visits have been paid to employers running the youth training scheme since the inception of the scheme in Tameside and Stockport.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The precise information is not available. All 1983-84 schemes in the local authority districts of Tameside and Stockport have been visited and assessed. The programme of visits to 1984-85 schemes is currently under way.

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many parents of young people killed on the youth training scheme since April 1983 have received a payment from the Manpower Services Commission in lieu of industrial death benefit; and what the payment was in each case.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Since April 1983 the parents of four young people killed either on the youth opportunities programme or the youth training scheme have been paid the equivalent of industrial death benefit. In each case a payment of £78 was made.

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for Employment how the sum of £78 paid by the Manpower Services Commission to the parents of George McCormack, killed on a youth training scheme in West Lothian on 27 July, was calculated; whether he has any intention of increasing the amount awarded; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Morrison: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Community Programme

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many people are on the community programme schemes in the Stockport and Tameside districts, respectively; and within these numbers how many are being supervised by local authorities and how many by others.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The information is not available in the form requested. On 31 October 1,848 people were employed on community programme projects funded from the Manchester east area office of the Manpower Services Commission, which includes the Stockport and Tameside districts. Of these, 1,450 were working on projects administered by local authorities and the remaining 398 on projects administered by voluntary organisations and other sponsors.

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for Employment what representations he has received about the effect that recent changes in the community programme regulations are having on Merseyside Improvements Limited: if he intends to discuss the matter with the chairman of the Manpower Services Commission and representatives of the company; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Morrison: We have not received any representation about the effect on Merseyside Improvements Ltd. of the recent changes to the community programme rules, which my right hon. Friend announced on 30 July at columns *121-122*. However, representations have been made both to the chairman of the Manpower Services Commission and to this Department about the basis on which Merseyside Improvements Ltd may continue to receive community programme funding. These representations are currently being considered and we have at present no plans to initiate discussions.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will specify the numbers of male and female unemployed persons, expressed in total and separately, registered for each of the unemployment benefit offices in the Greater London area, at *(a)* May 1979, *(b)* the most recent convenient date; and if he will express the change in the totals between *(a)* and *(b)* as a percentage increase or decrease.

Mr. Alan Clark: The information for jobcentre areas for the dates requested is available in the House of Commons Library. However, the current figures are not directly comparable with those for 1979, mainly because of the change in the basis of the unemployment count in October 1982.

Mr. Winnick asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many males aged 45 years and over were unemployed for 12 months and more in May 1979, how many are currently unemployed; if he will give the figures for the west midlands; and what is the percentage of the work force in each case.

Mr. Alan Clark: The information is available in the House of Commons Library. The current figures are not directly comparable with those for 1979, mainly because of the change in the basis of the unemployment count in October 1982.

Redundancy Payments

Mr. Allen McKay asked the Secretary of State for Employment if it is the intention as from 1 March 1985 to harmonise the minimum redundancy payments in Great Britain with the European Economic Community minimum payments.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: No.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Police (Computers)

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the current Metropolitan police review of its operational requirement for a computerised crime reporting system has considered the matter of private computers being used or replaced; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that he proposes to review the use within the force of privately owned computers.

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what studies he has made of the effect on costs, detection rates and police manpower of the use of computers by police forces; and if he will, in particular, identify the advantages and disadvantages, respectively, in particular categories of work.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The Department has studied various aspects of police computer systems, in collaboration with the forces concerned. The costs and benefits of such systems vary according to the forces' requirements. The potential advantages include easy access to data; the ability of search databases rapidly; greater ease of transfer of data within a force; a reduction in manual records; automatic production of documents, and improved management information. An analysis of the effects of introducing a computerised criminal information system, including consideration of the effect on the detection rate, may be found in the summary report of the evaluation of the Thames Valley computer system, issued under cover of Home Office circular No. 10/1984, a copy of which is in the Library of the House. the effects on police manpower of introducing a computer are frequently difficult to identify because of accompanying organisational changes, but in principle the use of computers offers the opportunity to deploy manpower more effectively, and to save manpower engaged on the compilation and maintenance of paper records.

These potential benefits have to be set against the considerable costs of computer systems and the Department will shortly be issuing further guidance to chief officers of police and police authorities on the considerations to be taken into account in order to ensure that value for money is obtained.

International Youth Year

Mr. Lawler asked the Secretary of State for the Home Office what contribution his Department intends to make towards International Youth Year.

Mr. Waddington: The Department will continue to make grants to organisations which encourage young people to involve themselves in constructive voluntary activities.

Television (Concessionary Licences)

Ms. Harman asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will give any instructions that his Department has issued to the national television licence records office concerning the handling of concessionary television licence applications;

(2) what are the criteria under the national television licensing records office's concessionary television licence scheme for pensioners to qualify for concessionary licences.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The national TV licence records office issues the special accommodation for residential care television licence in respect of residential care accommodation for retirement pensioners, physically disabled people and mentally disordered people in accordance with the conditions of eligibility laid down in the Wireless Telegraphy (Broadcast Licence Charges and Exemption) Regulations 1984. The Home Office does not issue formal general instructions, except that in all cases where entitlement is in doubt the records office must seek advice from the Home Office, on whose behalf these and other television licences are issued.

Ms. Harman asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the extension to the concessionary television licence scheme entitlement over the last 15 years.

Mr. Giles Shaw: A concessionary television licence for old people's homes and certain sheltered housing schemes for pensioners has existed since 1969. Under the original rules of eligibility sheltered housing schemes could qualify only if they comprised groups of dwellings provided specially for retired persons of pensionable age under specified housing legislation and some communal accommodation or facility was also provided within the curtilage of the group of dwellings. The rules were modified in April 1978 so that the communal accommodation or facilities no longer had to be within the curtilage of the dwellings. With effect from 1 September 1984 the conditions of eligibility were extended further to rationalise the way the rules applied to old people's sheltered housing provided by housing associations, and to enable physically disabled and mentally disordered persons in residential homes and sheltered housing schemes to qualify for the concession on the same terms as retirement pensioners.

Ms. Harman asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people in the United Kingdom are now entitled under the concessionary television licence scheme to claim a concessionary licence; and how many people currently receive licences under the scheme.

Mr. Giles Shaw: We have no accurate figures for the number of people in the kinds of residential homes and

sheltered housing schemes which qualify for the accommodation for residential care licence, but we believe that some 568,000 people benefit from the concession.

Ms. Harman asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps the national television licence records office takes to supervise the operation of the concessionary television licence scheme by local authorities; and if he is satisfied that all pensioners are fully aware of any entitlement they might have to a concessionary television licence.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Local authorities and other applicants for the accommodation for residential care licence must provide full details of the accommodation in respect of which they claim the concessionary licence and confirm when the licence is renewed annually that the circumstances are unchanged. The national TV licence records office recently issued a leaflet to all local authorities explaining the conditions of eligibility, and we have no reason to believe that retired or disabled people in qualifying accommodation are not aware of their entitlement.

Ms. Harman asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what were the reasons for the proposal by Sheffield city council for a warden service for pensioners in suitably converted houses not entitling the pensioners covered by the scheme for the 5p concessionary licence; and what is the precise definition of a warden used by his Department.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The conditions of eligibility for the accommodation for residential care licence require that accommodation provided specially for retired or disabled people must have some communal accommodation or facility provided in association with it. A warden service can generally be accepted as a communal facility for qualifying purposes, but each application for the concessionary licence must be dealt with on its merits, taking into account all relevant factors. There is therefore no precise definition of what constitutes a warden service for the purposes of the regulations governing entitlement to the concessionary licence, but to be acceptable a warden would be expected to make regular visits to the people under his or her care and to provide appropriate services in response to their needs. The proposals put forward by Sheffield city council did not fulfil these criteria.

Ms. Harman asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many staff are employed at the national television records office to deal with applications for, and inquiries about, the concessionary television licence scheme; and how many applications they dealt with in each of the years from 1979 to 1983;

(2) how many applications for concessionary television licences by pensioners were rejected in each of the years from 1979 to 1983.

Mr. Giles Shaw: One person is concerned exclusively with accommodation for residential care licences and a further eight deal with the concessionary licence and other television licensing matters. The number of applications dealt with from 1979 to 1983 and the number of applications rejected were as follows:

	Dealt with	*Rejected*
1979	1,510	29
1980	1,277	20
1981	1,180	22
1982	1,109	19
1983	1,578	30

Ms. Harman asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent consideration the Department has given to the abolition of the television licence charge for all pensioners; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to a question from the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, North-East (Mrs. Short) on 13 November at column *204*.

Community Service Orders

Mr. Mark Carlisle asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department in how many probation areas facilities are now available to enable a court to sentence a young person of 16 years to community service; and when it is expected that such facilities will be available in all areas.

Mr. Mellor: Community service orders may be made in respect of 16-year-old offenders in 47 probation areas. Facilities in the remaining nine areas are expected to become available by 1 April 1985.

Coal Industry Dispute

Mr. Marlow asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will call for a report from the appropriate chief constable as to how many people have been interviewed in connection with the vandalism of National Coal Board property at Cadeby;

(2) if he will call for a report from the appropriate chief constable as to how many people have been charged in connection with the vandalism of National Coal Board property at Cadeby.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The chief constable of South Yorkshire tells me that 21 people have been interviewed and eight adults have been charged with offences of burgulary or criminal damage. Additionally, one juvenile has been reported for process by way of summons for burglary.

Mr. Mark Carlisle asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have been committed for trial to the Crown court for offences arising out of the mining dispute: and how many have so far been dealt with.

Mr. Mellor: According to information supplied to my noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor, the Crown court has been notified of the committal of 165 defendants in cases identified as directly arising out of the mining dispute and has dealt with 31 of them.

Mr. Mark Carlisle asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people, to the latest availalble date, have been arrested and charged with offences arising out of the mining dispute; and how many cases have now been dealt with by the courts.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Between 13 March and 27 November inclusive, 8,394 arrests were made in connection with the miners' dispute. For the number of charges and cases dealt with by the courts between 13 March and 20 November inclusive, the latest period for which figures are available

centrally, I refer my right hon. Friend to the reply I gave to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Latham) on 22 November at column *242*.

Leicester

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the electoral registration officer for the city of Leicester as to the turnout for each ward and polling district box for the local elections in May 1983 and 1984 and the general election in June 1983; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: I understand that some of this information has already been given to my hon. Friend by the acting returning officer, who would be happy to give further information if requested. If my hon. Friend has some particular electoral problem in mind, I should be pleased to hear from him.

Metropolitan Police

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what were the crime rates and clear-up rates in the Metropolitan police area in each quarter since March 1979; what is the crime rate and clear-up rate in total and for each standard category of crime in each Metropolitan police district in each quarter in 1983 and to date; and if he will give the establishment and numbers of police actually on duty in each Metropolitan police district in each quarter in 1983 and to date.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I shall reply as soon as possible.

Didcot (Police Accommodation)

Mr. Gould asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the chief constable of Oxfordshire about the arrangements which have been made to provide accommodation for *(a)* police and *(b)* police horses in or near Didcot power station.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The chief constable of Thames valley tells me that no such arrangements have been made.

Mr. Mohammed Siddique

Mr. Terry Davis asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether Mr. Mohammed Siddique was interviewed by the governor of Her Majesty's prison, Winson Green, the deputy governor of the prison or anyone else on the staff at the prison before 4 November in connection with his wish to grow a beard and told that he must shave.

Mr. Mellor: Permission has been given to Mr. Siddique to grow a beard, and I shall write to the hon. Member about how his application was dealt with.

Mr. Terry Davis asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department when Mr. Mohammed Siddique applied to the governor of Her Majesty's prison, Winson Green, for permission to grow a beard.

Mr. David Mellor: On the afternoon of Friday 9 November.

Longmoor

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the chief constable of Hampshire police as to why Mrs. Tessa Babcock and her 13-year-old daughter Zoe were handed over by police guarding Longmoor base to soldiers.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether any of the people detained at Longmoor camp firing range were subsequently charged.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The chief constable of Hampshire tells me that nobody who was detained at Longmoor camp firing range has yet been charged, although the police are considering the possibility of bringing prosecutions, by way of summons, in some cases.

Parking (Fines)

Mr. Eggar asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has any intention of increasing the fixed penalty parking fine of £10 for large vehicles.

Mr. Giles Shaw: We have at present no plans to do so.

Food Hygiene Regulations (Enforcement)

Mr. Eastham asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will introduce legislation to extend to prisons, prison hospitals and remand centres the powers of entry of environmental health officers and their subsequent powers of enforcement in relation to breaches of food hygiene regulations.

Mr. Mellor: No. The primary responsibility for supervising hygiene standards in prison department establishments rests with the medical officers based at each establishment who may call on the advice of environmental health officers as required. We see no need to alter these arrangements.

Prisons (Repatriation)

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what further progress has been made in the discussions by his Department and the Government of Gibraltar on the repatriation of persons from United Kingdom prisons to the Gibraltar prison in order to complete their sentences.

Mr. Mellor: The Government of Gibraltar have indicated that they wish to enter into prisoner transfer arrangements with the United Kingdom. The terms of the Order in Council necessary for this purpose have yet to be settled.

Arab Visitors

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) whether he will list those countries which are members of the League of Arab States, of which any passport holders may enter the United Kingdom without also obtaining a visa;

(2) whether he will outline his powers available to prevent a visit to the United Kingdom by any person purporting to hold a passport issued by a member country of the League of Arab States which would not also require an accompanying visa and whose presence is not considered by him to be conducive to the public good.

Mr. Waddington: The countries whose nationals require visas for the United Kingdom are shown in the

appendix to the Statement of Changes in the Immigration Rules (HC 169). Any person, whether a visa national or not, who is subject to control under the Immigration Act 1971 requires the leave of an immigration officer to enter the United Kingdom. Any passenger subject to control except the wife and child under 18 of a person settled in the United Kingdom may be refused leave to enter on the ground that his exclusion is conducive to the public good.

Yasser Arafat

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has received, either directly or through third parties, any request by or on behalf of Yasser Arafat for a visa to enter the United Kingdom during the month of December; and whether he will ensure that any such request is refused, in the interests of security and public order.

Mr. Waddington: An inquiry has been made about the possibility of Mr. Arafat's coming to the United Kingdom in connection with the publication of a biography of him. But no application has been made for a visa and no decision on Mr. Arafat's admission has therefore been taken.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Citizens' Advice Bureaux

Mr. Craigen asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received from the Scottish Association of Citizens' Advice Bureaux concerning Government grants towards citizens' advice bureaux; and how existing Government funding in Scotland compares with that in England and Wales.

Mr. Fletcher: I have received written representations from the Scottish Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux and I met its chairman and other representatives on 17 July last to discuss the level of its grant-aid.

In 1984-85, the limit of grant-in-aid to the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux in England and Wales is £6·4 million. For Scotland the figure is £700,000.

Properties for Sale (Descriptions)

Mrs. Peacock asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has any plans to introduce new legislation to prevent estate agents giving misleading descriptions of properties for sale.

Mr. Fletcher: I see no need at present for new legislation of this kind. However, I am keeping the position under review in conjunction with the Director General of Fair Trading.

Telecommunications (Advisory Committee)

Mr. Ashdown asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he expects to appoint the English advisory committee on telecommunications; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fletcher: We expect to make appointments to this body shortly.

Manufactures

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what percentage of the United Kingdom market for manufactures was taken by the six original European Economic Community members in 1972 and 1983, respectively.

Mr. Channon: In 1983 the six original members of the European Community supplied approximately 15 per cent. of the United Kingdom market for the products of manufacturing industry. The corresponding figure for 1975—the earliest year for which directly comparable information is available—was 8·5 per cent.

BT Share Issue

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what rates of commission have been agreed by his Department for the British Telecom share issue with the City institutions involved; and if he will detail any rates which are higher than those agreed for previous Government issues, and give reasons for the difference.

Mr. Fletcher: The rates of commissions payable to City institutions are set out in part IV, section 13, of the prospectus. They are as follows:

to the United Kingdom underwriters, 0·375 per cent. on the United Kingdom portion of the offer;
to the Bank of England, 1·25 per cent. on the overseas portion;
to priority applicants, 1·5 per cent. on their placing shares and 1·25 per cent. on their commitment shares;
to certain stockbrokers, 0·125 per cent. on applications from priority applicants introduced by them;
to Swiss Bank Corporation International Limited, 1·25 per cent. on the shares comprised in the application together with a selling concession of 1·25 per cent. on the shares in respect of which its application is accepted.

Commissions paid in past privatisations have varied according to the circumstances. Underwriting and broking commissions taken together have been up to 0·5 per cent. Because the structure of the British Telecom offer is quite different from that of any previous privatisation, it is not possible to make direct comparisons with the rates of commission paid in previous cases.

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what will be the total cost to the Government of the British Telecom share issue; how much of it will be payments to City institutions; and how much of that will be to stockbrokers.

Mr. Butcher: I refer the right hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) on 27 November.

EC (Industrial Aid)

Mr. Proctor asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on state aids to industry within the European Economic Community.

Mr. Channon: I shall reply to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

United States (Exports)

Mr. Proctor asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will set out in the *Official Report* the level of exports to the United States of America from *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* each of the countries of the European Economic Community in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Channon: The figures, in both national currencies and United States dollars, are in the table. They show

substantial increases in exports to the United States both by the United Kingdom and comparable countries in the Community.

European Community Countries' Exports to United States

	United Kingdom (Pound)	Belgium-Luxembourg (Franc)	Denmark (Krone)	France (Franc)	Federal Republic of Germany (Deutschemark)	Greece (Drachma)	Ireland (Irish Pound)	Italy (Lira)	Netherlands (Guilder)
				National Currencies (millions)					
1979	4,003	61,660	3,744	20,378	20,735	8,028	171	3,874,466	3,586
1980	4,554	63,164	4,307	20,797	21,438	12,505	217	3,543,648	3,689
1981	6,249	87,059	6,113	30,373	25,951	20,734	304	5,843,907	5,506
1982	7,475	105,375	7,665	34,332	28,148	25,424	406	6,998,428	5,741
1983	8,486	136,369	10,853	43,835	32,604	24,639	561	8,526,216	7,885
1984†	4,654	*	6,950	30,500	20,887	25,573	405	5,841,116	5,212
				United States Dollars (millions)					
1979	8,626	2,103	712	4,790	11,330	216	350	4,663	1,784
1980	10,900	2,160	764	4,921	11,779	293	446	4,138	1,854
1981	12,731	2,345	858	5,588	11,483	374	492	5,141	2,202
1982	13,099	2,306	920	5,224	11,584	381	578	5,174	2,150
1983	12,702	2,667	1,187	5,752	12,786	280	700	5,614	2,767
1984†	6,628	*	704	3,664	7,727	244	460	3,502	1,711

* Not available.
† January to June.
Sources: OECD Series 'A'.
Overseas Trade Statistics.

Export Intelligence Service

Mr. Proctor asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the cost of the export intelligence service *(a)* to public funds and *(b)* to subscribers in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Channon' The computerised export intelligence service (EIS) is the principal means by which the British Overseas Trade Board conveys to exporters information about export opportunities overseas. An independent consultants' survey estimated that about £1,000 million of United Kingdom firms' annual export sales followed directly from information provided to EIS subscribers.

Firms subscribing to the EIS selective notice service pay 35p for each notice sent to them. The *Daily Gazette*, which contains all the information issued on any one day costs £500 per annum.

Figures of EIS operational costs and earnings in the past five years are as follows:

	Operational Costs £000s	Earnings £000s
1979-80	1,948	523
1980-81	2,088	511
1981-82	2,159	492
1982-83	1,997	442
1983-84	1,859	466

Privatisation

Mr. Gould asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what further plans he has for privatising publicly-owned enterprises; and if he will publish a list of any such proposals and of the proposed dates of implementation.

Mr. Fletcher: My right hon. Friend plans to return to the private sector as many as possible of the publicly-owned enterprises for which he is responsible.

The privatisation of British Telecom will be completed very shortly. British Shipbuilders has embarked on the sale of all its warship building interests, aiming to make substsantial progress by 31 March 1985 and for completion by 31 March 1986. One part of BL Jaguar, has already been successfully returned to the private sector; our objective is that all parts of BL should be so returned. Further privatisation within BL will be one of the subjects covered in the 1985 corporate plan which we expect to receive shortly.

The British Steel Corporation has a continuing programme of disposal of its non-mainstream business and the creation of joint venture companies with the private sector. Our aim is to restore BSC's bulk steel business to profitability with a view to its return to the private sector in due course.

The British Technology Group will continue to dispose of its equity investments as soon as commercially practicable.

We aim to return Rolls-Royce to profitability with a view to its privatisation within the lifetime of this Parliament. We have no immediate plans for the privatisation of the Post Office's activities.

Restrictive Trade Practices Law

Mr. McCrindle asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will conduct a review of British restrictive practices law; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fletcher: The restrictive trade practices legislation was extensively reviewed in the Green Paper "A Review of Restrictive Trade Practices Policy" (Cmnd. 7512) which concluded that the legislation had been generally effective. I continue to keep the legislation under review, and I am willing to consider proposals to amend it.

Companies (Legal Safeguards)

Mr. McCrindle asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received from private companies asking for further legal remedies to be

made available to them to safeguard themselves from predatory pricing and collusive behaviour; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fletcher: I have received no recent representations of this nature. The Restrictive Trade Practices Act gives private companies remedies against collusive agreements that have not duly been furnished to the Office of Fair Trading. Specific instances of predatory pricing may be investigated under the Fair Trading Act 1973 or the Competition Act 1980 and, if found to be contrary to the public interest, may be prohibited.

Post Office Closures

Mr. Golding asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will give a general direction to the Post Office, under section 62 of the British Telecommunications Act 1981, to refrain from its major programme of closing Crown and sub-post offices in view of its obligations under section 59(2)*(b)* of the Act; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Pattie: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Insolvency Law Review

Mr. Richard Page asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether the Government have reached a decision concerning the recommendation of the review committee on insolvency law and practice, chaired by Sir Kenneth Cork, that the public utilities, on the insolvency of a customer, should be restrained from threatening to cut off supplies unless the outstanding debt is paid in full.

Mr. Fletcher: The Government have now considered this recommendation of the review committee and has decided that the major monopoly utilities, which provide services which are essential to the conduct of all businesses, should not be able to secure more favourable treatment than other creditors on the insolvency of a customer by threatening to discontinue supplies. It is intended that the necessary legislative provisions will be introduced into the forthcoming Insolvency Bill in the course of its passage through Parliament.

SCOTLAND

Employment Statistics

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if his Department has information from the 1983 Scottish school leavers survey or other sources on success in obtaining first employment by social class.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The following table shows, for each social class, the percentage of school leavers from session 1982-83 in different categories of post-school activity in October 1983.

Social Class	*Full-Time Employment*	*Unemployed or on YOP*	*Full-Time Further Education*	*Other*
I	22·4	10·8	60·1	6·6
II	27·3	20·3	47·1	5·3
III*	31·2	27·5	35·2	6·1
III†	33·2	42·9	20·3	3·6
IV	33·2	44·9	18·3	3·7
V	33·5	49·8	10·5	6·2

* Non-manual
† Manual
Source: Scottish School Leavers Survey 1983

Rape and Sexual Assault

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what type of sentence has been passed on those persons convicted of rape and sexual assault in Scotland in each of the last three years.

Mr. Ancram: The types of sentence imposed on persons against whom charges of rape, assault with intent to rape and indecent assault—including attempts, and aiding and abetting—were proved in each of the last three years are as follows:

Scotland

Persons

	1981	*1982*	*1983*
Rape			
Prison	25	18	20
Young Offenders Institution	13	12	2
Detention Centre	—	—	1
Detention Child	1	—	3
Hospital Order	—	—	1
Probation	—	—	2
Fine	1	1	1
	40	31	30
Assault with intent to rape			
Prison	10	12	11
Young Offenders Institution	2	5	10
Detention Centre	2	—	1
Detention Child	—	1	1
Hospital Order	—	1	—
Probation	1	—	—
Community Service Order	—	1	1
Fine	2	1	3
Admonished	1	2	1
	18	23	28
Indecent assault			
Prison	8	10	18
Young Offenders Institution	—	1	4
Detention Centre	1	1	1
Borstal Training	2	—	5
Detention Child	—	—	1
Hospital Order	—	1	1
Probation	15	14	8
Community Service Order	3	1	1
Fine	40	38	36
Caution	—	1	1
Caution Parent	—	—	2
Guardianship Order	—	—	1
Remit to Childrens Hearing	—	—	1
Admonished	5	10	12
Absolute Discharge	1	—	—
	75	77	92

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many prosecutions for rape and sexual assault in Scotland have resulted in *(a)* convictions and *(b)* acquittals in each of the last five years.

Mr. Ancram: The outcome of proceedings against persons charged with rape, assault with intent to rape and indecent assault in the last five years was as follows:

Scotland *Persons*

	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983
Not called to trial					
Rape	—	4	—	—	—
Assault with intent to rape	1	—	—	—	1
Indecent assault	6	14	3	1	—
Charge proved					
Rape	34	30	40	31	30
Assault with intent to rape	35	21	18	23	28
Indecent assault	66	82	75	77	92
Acquitted					
Rape	16	18	24	24	22
Assault with intent to rape	7	7	5	10	10
Indecent assault	15	13	17	12	15

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many cases of rape and sexual assault have been reported to the police in Scotland for each of the last five years; and, of these, how many cases reported have led to prosecutions.

Mr. Ancram: Information is not available exactly in the form requested. The numbers of crimes of rape, assault with intent to rape and indecent assault recorded by the police in the years 1979 to 1983 were as follows:

Scotland *Crimes*

	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983
Rape	145	166	170	131	139
Assault with intent to rape	162	140	137	120	126
Indecent assault	947	951	950	885	997

The numbers of persons proceeded against for these crimes in these years were as follows:

Scotland *Persons*

	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983
Rape	50	52	64	55	52
Assault with intent to rape	43	28	23	33	39
Indecent assault	87	109	95	90	107

Timber-framed Houses (Report)

Mr. Kennedy asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement with regard to the progress of the report by the Building Research Establishment into the incidence and effect of cavity wall insulation in timber-framed houses.

Mr. Ancram: The Building Research Establishment expects to publish its report early in the new year. It will take the form of a BRE information paper giving guidance to building surveyors to help them to assess the risk of damp in individual properties.

Building Control

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the outcome of his consultation on the future of building control in Scotland.

Mr. Younger: In October of last year I issued a consultative paper which sought views on a range of proposals to improve the building control system in Scotland. I am grateful for the many thoughtful responses from a broad range of interests. The Government's decision to review this system was widely welcomed and general support was given to the principal objectives of the review. I have given careful consideration to all the views expressed and decided to proceed with the proposals with certain modifications as outlined in a statement which I have today placed in the Library of the House.

Students' Allowances Scheme

Mr. Malone asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what changes he proposes to make to the students' allowances scheme in Scotland in session 1985-86.

Mr. Canavan asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make it his policy not to bring about a reduction in the student grant in real terms nor abolish the minimum grant nor increase parental contribution nor extend the parental contribution to tuition fees for Scottish students.

Mr. Younger: The main rates of grant for Scottish-domiciled students will be increased by around 3 per cent. in session 1985-86 and the parental contribution scale will be adjusted upwards in line with earnings. The parental contribution from those in the middle and upper reaches of the scale will also be increased, subject to a maximum contribution of £4,000 per family. The minimum award will be discontinued and the parental contribution from those best able to pay will be extended to tuition fees.

These changes are in line with changes already announced for England and Wales. Residual incomes of less than £8,100 will attract no parental contribution; residual incomes above that figure will be assessed so that the next £2,200 (£8,100 to £10,300) will attract contributions at the rate of £1 in £7, the next £4,700 (£10,300 to £15,000) at the rate of £1 in £5, and any residual income above £15,000 at the rate of £1 in £4. For those families with more than one award holder there will be a maximum parental contribution of £4,000.

The system of repayment of students' travelling expenses for students who are Scottish residents will remain unchanged.

It is my intention that a substantial proportion of the savings from these changes should be redeployed to strengthen and expand the provision of technological courses, and to allow priority to be given to electrical and electronic engineering and related disciplines.

ENVIRONMENT

Council Houses

Mr. Terlezki asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many council houses are kept vacant for their occupiers while the occupiers are in prison; and whether he will introduce legislation to prevent this happening in the future.

Sir George Young: This information is not available. The management and allocation of council housing is a matter for the local authorities to which it belongs. It is a condition of a secure tenancy under section 28 of the Housing Act 1980 that the tenant occupies the dwelling as his only or principal home. It is for the courts to interpret the meaning of this provision.

Rates

Mr. Lofthouse asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to abolish rates on business premises; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: No.

Structure Plans

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he proposes to publish his decision on proposed alterations to the north-east Hampshire structure plans.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: Proposed modifications to the alteration to the north-east Hampshire structure plan will be published when my right hon. Friend has completed his consideration of the report of the panel which conducted the examination in public. Following that publication there will be a period for objections and representations to be made before the final decision is taken.

Voluntary Organisations

Mr. Pawsey asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list all grants made by his Department to voluntary organisations, giving both the recipient and the amount, together with the date a grant was first made.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: Grants in 1984-85 to voluntary bodies, other than housing associations and excluding grants made by statutory bodies associated with the Department, are as follows:

Grants to voluntary organisations—1984-85

	£	*Year grant first awarded*
1. *Amenity Societies and the Civic Trust*		
Civic Trust	55,000	1975-76
Council for British Archaeology	3,250	1973-74
Ancient Monuments Society	6,500	1973-74
The Georgian Group	6,500	1973-74
The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings	6,500	1973-74
The Victorian Society	6,500	1973-74
2. *Keep Britain Tidy Group*	510,000	1958-59
3. *Special Grants Programme*		
Advisory Committee on the Education of Romany and other Travellers	11,460	1979-80
Advisory Committee on Pollution of the Sea	2,500	1983-84
Association of Community Technical Aid Centres	12,000	1984-85
British Association of Social Settlements and Action Centres: Innovatory Urban Projects Booklet	9,200	1984-85
British Trust for Conservation Volunteers	100,000	1983-84
Byways and Bridleways Trust	4,000	1984-85
Cathedral Camps	10,000	1982-83
Centre for Social Enterprise	15,000	1984-85
Child Accident Prevention Trust: Child Accidents and the Built Environment	4,650	1984-85
Civic Trust: Urban Initiatives Project	10,000	1984-85
Community Links	5,500	1984-85
Community Regeneration	18,118	1984-85
Conservation Foundation	25,000	1984-85
Conservation Trust	8,250	1984-85
Council for Environmental Conservation	27,600	1984-85
Council for National Parks	7,620	1984-85
Directory of Social Change	9,850	1983-84
East Anglian Gypsy Council	936	1978-79
Ecological Parks Trust	14,200	1984-85
European Centre for Urban Regeneration: Urban Regeneration Directory	10,000	1984-85
Federation of Resource Centres	600	1984-85
Friends of the Earth Trust	15,000	1982-83
Gingerbread: Housing Officer	9,270	1984-85
Help the Aged & Shelter: Care & Repair	14,000	1984-85
Horticultural Therapy: Garden Advisory Project	15,475	1984-85
Inter-Action:		
(i) Country Wings	20,810	1982-83
(ii) Neighbourhood Use of Buildings and Space	21,410	1982-83
International Waterfowl Research Bureau	2,000	1982-83
Kennet & Avon Canal Trust	5,000	1984-85
Law Centres Federation: Inner City Development Officer	18,000	1984-85
Macclesfield Groundwork Trust: Voluntary Sector Data Base Project	5,100	1984-85
NACRO: Neighbourhood Remedial Action Project	32,500	1984-85
National Association for Environmental Education	7,500	1984-85
National Association for Community Transport	17,523	1984-85
National Council for Voluntary Organisations:		
(i) Ethnic Minorities: Training Unit	30,782	1984-85
(ii) Neighbourhood Energy Action Urban Initiatives Project	5,150	1984-85
(iii) Secondment to BIC	15,233	1983-84
(iv) Urban Unit	56,280	1984-85
National Federation of City Farms	12,800	1983-84
National Gypsy Council	13,330	1974-75
New World Business Services: Ethnic Minority Training Project	2,500	1984-85
North East Civic Trust	7,000	1984-85
Northern Region TCPA Community Technical Aid Centre	24,573	1982-83
North West Civic Trust	24,500	1984-85
North West Civic Trust—Vacant Buildings Information Service	16,462	1983-84
North West Pollution Control Advisory Service (Campus)	10,000	1984-85
Open Spaces Society	4,500	1984-85
Pennine Heritage	23,000	1984-85
Planning Aid Unit (TCPA)	15,000	1975-76
Policy Studies Institute: Local Authorities Race Relations Information Exchange	10,000	1984-85
RIBA: Architectural Workshops	23,000	1982-83
RIBA: Community Projects	36,000	1982-83
Romany Guild	6,990	1978-79
Royal Society for Nature Conservation	41,135	1984-85
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds: Urban Schools Officers	7,950	1981-82
Rural Preservation Association	11,536	1984-85
Shelter National Housing Aid Trust: Mobile Homes Unit	6,250	1984-85
Somerset Small Industries Group	8,000	1982-83
Sports Aid Trust	4,500	1984-85
Streetwork: Council for Urban Studies Centres	14,185	1984-85
Town & Country Planning Association:		
(i) Conway Project (Birkenhead)	12,033	1984-85
(ii) Lightmoor Project (Telford)	8,500	1984-85
(iii) Management Grant	25,000	1984-85
Tree Council	13,000	1982-83
UK Sports Association for People with Mental Handicap	19,750	1984-85
URBED: Re-use of Industrial Buildings Service	26,250	1982-83

	£	*Year grant first awarded*
Volunteer Centre:		
(i) Inner City Volunteer Bureaux	11,775	1982-83
(ii) Printing of Conference Report	800	1984-85
Wildfowl Trust	2,600	1984-85
Wildlife Link	8,000	1983-84
World Wildlife Fund: Youth Education Work	18,000	1984-85
Young Peoples Trust for Endangered Species	21,900	1984-85
4. *Council for Environmental Education*	42,000	1976-77
5. *Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977*		
SHAC (The London Housing Aid Centre)	124,000	1978
Shelter National Housing Aid Trust	48,800	1978
Housing Advice Switchboard	49,500	1978
CHAR	28,000	1979
NACRO	11,420	1979
Women's Aid Federation (England)	9,700	1981
National Cyrenians	26,000	1982
Empty Property Unit	9,500	1984
Tyneside Housing Aid Centre	*12,300	1984
First Key	*6,000	1984
UJIMA	*2,200	1984
6. *Urban Programme*		
The contribution from central Government to voluntary bodies under the urban programme is estimated at approximately £51 million in 1984-85; this includes contributions from the Department of Health and Social Security and the Department of Education and Science.		

* Provisional.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment which London local authorities would gain and which would lose from his proposals that the collective funding of voluntary bodies should be met by contributions based on population rather than rateable value; and what would be the percentage change in the contribution for each authority.

Mr. Waldegrave: I shall answer this question shortly.

Housing (Approved Warranty Scheme)

Mr. Rooker asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on progress of negotiations for an approved warranty scheme for homes covered by the Housing Defects Act.

Sir George Young: The National House Building Council is doing further detailed work in order to reach a decision on the arrangements referred to by my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Construction in his reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Powley) on 12 November at column *133*.

Water Authorities

Mr. Rooker asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will set out in the *Official Report* the effect on each water authority of the autumn statement's changes in loan repayments.

Mr. MacFarlane: In 1985-86 the water authorities net borrowing and other external finance will be limited to £203 million, of which £20 million is for the Welsh water authority. English water authorities are still being consulted on the allocation of external finance to individual authorities, but only the Thames water authority will be expected to repay outstanding loans.

Local Government Reform

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) how many new appointments he estimates will be created in other public sector bodies as a consequence of his approval to abolish the Merseyside county council; and if he will make a statement.

(2) how many employees of the Merseyside county council can expect to be made redundant as a result of his proposal to abolish the metropolitan counties; what the cost will be in terms of compensation; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: The numbers, in each case, will depend on detailed decisions to be taken by successor bodies. The explanatory memorandum to the Local Government Bill contains an overall estimate of its effects on public service manpower and the cost of redundancy compensation. I cannot, at this stage, make worthwhile estimates at the level of individual metropolitan county councils.

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of the annual savings to the ratepayers of Merseyside of abolition of the Merseyside county council; how much his proposals are likely to save each domestic and each industrial ratepayer within the county; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: We estimate that the overall rationalisation savings arising from abolition of the metropolitan counties will be £50 million annually. On average, this represents about 3 per cent. of MCCs' rate fund current expenditure, which is equivalent to a reduction of about 6 per cent. in the total MCC precepts. Further savings are expected to arise as successor authorities carry out services more economically.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he is proposing to collect information which will enable him to monitor the staff numbers and costs arising from his Department's work arising from the abolition of the Greater London council and the metropolitan county councils.

Sir George Young: I have already arranged for the information given in my hon. Friend's reply of 28 November to the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) to be updated regularly.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he is proposing to make amendments to his Department's MINIS system of management control in order to monitor the costs of abolition of the Greater London council and the metropolitan county councils.

Sir George Young: No.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the 19 Conservative London borough leaders known to him to support the abolition of the Greater London council.

Sir George Young: The Conservative leaders of the following London borough councils have expressed their support for the abolition of the GLC, and their belief that there is no need for an elected upper tier authority for London after the GLC is abolished:

Barnet
Bexley

Brent
Bromley
Croydon
Ealing
Enfield
Hammersmith and Fulham
Harrow
Havering
Hillingdon
Kensington and Chelsea
Kingston upon Thames
Merton
Redbridge
Sutton
Waltham Forest
Wandsworth
Westminster

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment, in the event of the abolition of the Greater London council, what he intends to do with the council's own art collection.

Sir George Young: Property of the Greater London council required by successor bodies in connection with their functions or that belongs with other property transferred under the Bill, will be appropriately transferred at abolition by order under clause 92. Property not so transferred will vest initially in the London residuary body under clause 59.

Yorkshire Water Authority

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for the Environment by what percentage the rate levied by the Yorkshire water authority is to increase in 1985-86; and to what extent any increase is *(a)* in line with departmental policy and *(b)* as a result of departmental guidelines or directions.

Mr. Macfarlane: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Wainwright) on 26 November 1984, at column *395*.

Rate Demands

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many supporting statements of rate demands will be published in an individual inner London borough in 1986-87; and if he will indicate which authorities will be responsible for publishing these statements, assuming the implementation of his current proposals for the abolition of the Greater London council.

Mr. Waldegrave: We have already announced that the new Inner London education authority will be required to provide certain information direct to ratepayers in respect of its expenditure and precept for 1986-87 and future years. We are discussing with the local authority associations the information which rating authorities will be required to provide to ratepayers with rate demands concerning their own and their other precepting bodies' expenditure, in accordance with section 14 of the Rates Act 1984.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the authorities which in their 1984-85 supporting statements of rate demands did not give details of the total rate change which results from grant changes as suggested in the code of practice on publication on rate demands and supporting information by local authorities.

Mr. Waldegrave: This information is not monitored centrally.

Rate Support Grant (London)

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the equalisation arrangements between inner and outer London in the London arrangements element of the rate support grant; and on what assumed levels of spending they are based.

Mr. Waldegrave: I refer the hon. Member to annex L to the "Rate Support Grant Report (England) 1984-85", a copy of which is in the Library.

Rates

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if, in estimating any savings arising from implementation of the Rates Act, he will be taking into account the additional costs of leafleting and advertising by his Department.

Mr. Waldegrave: The cost of the advertisements and leaflet produced to inform the general public about the rate limitation provisions in the Rates Act 1984 was £418,630 and was found from within the Department's existing budget. We estimate that the savings from the level of expenditure which the rate limited authorities would otherwise have been spending in 1985-86 is £400 million compared with the expenditure levels set.

Grant-related Expenditure (Reviews)

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment which service grant-related expenditures are being reviewed for 1986-87, and what are the reasons underlying the reviews for each service.

Mr. Waldegrave: Except in the case of personal social services, where a long-term view is in progress, no decisions have yet been made on which service GREs to review for 1986-87. This will be the subject of consultations with the local authority associations early in the new year.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what maximum percentage increase between provisional and final expenditure targets has occurred for individual local authorities in England between 1981-82 and 1984-85.

Mr. Waldegrave: 67·7 per cent. for East Cambridgeshire district council in 1983-84.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what was the capital expenditure of local authorities in London for each major service for each of the years 1978-79 to 1982-83;

(2) what the reduction, measured in 1984-85 prices, has been in the level of local authority capital expenditure in London and the rest of England, respectively, between the years 1978-79 and 1982-83.

Mr. Waldegrave: I shall answer these questions shortly.

GLC (Net Revenue Expenditure)

Mr. Corbyn asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will provide an analysis of the Greater London council's 1984-85 budgeted net revenue expenditure broken down by service for each service to be transferred from the Greater London council to the London boroughs and the other bodies including the Fire Board, the Thames water authority, the London Planning Commission, the Thamesmead Trust, the Historic Building Commission, the Lee Valley Regional Park Authority, the residuary body, the Sports Council, the Arts Council, the Inner London education authority, the shire counties, and the shire districts.

Mr. Waldegrave: I shall answer this question shortly.

Housing Associations (Grants)

Mr. Heddle asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he intends to increase the grant limits for improvement for sale schemes by housing associations.

Mr. Gow: My right hon. Friend laid the Housing Association Grant (Disposal of Dwellings) Order 1984, under section 130 of the Housing Act 1980, today. This increases the amount of grant which may be paid to a registered housing association under section 29 of the Housing Act 1974 where the association carries out work of repair, improvement or conversion prior to sale to £12,500 in Greater London and Glasgow and to £9,500 elsewhere. The new limits follow the findings of a review of the improvement for sale scheme carried out in conjunction with the Housing Corporation. They will enable schemes to proceed in the worst stress areas, and it is in these areas that housing associations' activities should be concentrated.

PRIME MINISTER

Minister Without Portfolio

Q41. **Mr. Latham** asked the Prime Minister what are the specific duties of the Minister without Portfolio, the right hon. Lord Young of Graffham, relating to unemployment matters.

The Prime Minister: I have asked my noble Friend to give immediate attention to a number of areas in pursuing his remit to promote policies for the growth of enterprise and the creation of jobs. These areas are policy towards small firms, measures to increase competition, the reduction of controls and regulations and the co-ordination of policies to promote the education, training and employment of 14 to 18-year-olds. My hon. Friend will also pursue other matters within his general remit either at my request or on his own initiative.

NCB (Chairman)

Q54. **Mr. Bidwell** asked the Prime Minister if she will dismiss the chairman of the National Coal Board.

The Prime Minister: No.

Basingstoke

Q72. **Mr. Hunter** asked the Prime Minister if she has any plans to pay an official visit to Basingstoke.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

USA (President)

Q111. **Mr. Kilfedder** asked the Prime Minister if she will invite the President of the United States to visit Northern Ireland.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

Engagements

Dr. Mawhinney asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for 29 November.

Mr. Yeo asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for 29 November.

Mr. Parry asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 29 November.

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House I shall be meeting President Mitterrand in Paris this evening and shall attend a dinner to be given by the President at the Elysee.

Overseas Aid

Mr. Winnick asked the Prime Minister how many letters she has received in the last month about overseas aid; and what is the viewpoint expressed in most of the letters.

The Prime Minister: In the last month I have received about 7,000 such letters. The majority referred to the need for emergency aid in sub-Saharan Africa; many also expressed the hope that the level of the aid programme would not be reduced.

Secretary of State for Energy (Speech)

Mr. Winnick asked the Prime Minister if the speech given by the Secretary of State for Energy on 20 November on unemployment represents the policy of Her Majesty's Government; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave him on 27 November 1984 at column 776.

HMS Conqueror

Mr. Dalyell asked the Prime Minister if she will publish in the *Official Report* the text of her letter to the hon. Member for Linlithgow concerning records of signals from HMS Conqueror.

The Prime Minister: Yes.

Dear Mr. Dalyell,

In your Supplementary Question on 20th November, you asked whether "all signals to and from HMS Conqueror had been retained, in any form, other than those which were in the so-called missing log book?" I undertook to give you a specific reply after having checked this point.

During the Falklands conflict, the Flag Officer Submarines, in accordance with the Queen's Regulations for the Royal Navy, kept a "War Diary" recording policy, planning, and events to facilitate subsequent official analysis of the campaign. This diary is classified. It gives details of all important signals sent between Flag Officer Submarines and the submarines involved in the conflict, including the time of despatch and a synopsis of the contents of each.

Yours sincerely,
Margaret Thatcher

TRANSPORT

Road Surfaces (Grip Standards)

Mr. Iain Mills asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will introduce legislation to increase the standards for grip on road surfaces.

Mrs. Chalker: The standards of grip of new road surfaces are specified by highway authorities in their road construction and maintenance contracts, having regard to their assessments of the traffic conditions and situations likely to occur. It would not be appropriate to regulate these specifications by legislation.

Rear Fog Warning Lights

Mr. Greg Knight asked the Secretary of State for Transport what guidance his Department has given to motorists in relation to the correct use of rear fog warning lights on motor vehicles.

Mrs. Chalker: Publicity about the correct use of rear fog lights has been issued in the form of a TV filler film, radio announcements and feature articles. Guidance is now included in the "Highway Code", which advises motorists that rear fog lights should be used only when visibility is seriously reduced, and not simply because it is dark, or raining, or misty. This advice will shortly be amended to explain that for visibility to be seriously reduced it would generally need to be less than 100 metres. A small leaflet setting out the important points about the use of lights, including guidance about rear fog lights, is being prepared for issue to all vehicle owners with their annual tax reminders, starting early next year.

Roads

Mr. Loftbouse asked the Secretary of State for Transport what change in costs has occurred to date from the transfer of the design and supervision of construction of trunk roads and motorways from the local authority-based road construction units to private consultants.

Mrs. Chalker: The costs of transferring RCU work to consultants are as follows:

1. Payment to local authorities in respect of early closure of the sub-units, which will probably amount to about £9 million. Some of these costs would almost certainly have had to be incurred at a later stage as the need for design work reduced in some of the sub-units.
2. Payments to consultants for familiarisation with partly prepared schemes—£1 million.

The changing pattern of work within the road programme means that it is not possible to make a comparison between actual expenditure on consultants' fees and the costs which might have been incurred if it had been possible to continue the RCU organisation for longer, if the need for change in the organisation had been met in some other way.

Engineering Staff (Recruitment)

Mr. Loftbouse asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many additional engineering staff have been and are to be engaged by his Department in the recently publicised recruitment drive; and how many of these are required for the purpose of administering the highways and transportation functions within each metropolitan county area under the proposals contained in Cmnd. 9063.

Mrs. Chalker: The Civil Service Commission regularly recruits junior professional civil engineers for my Department to fill vacancies caused by internal promotions and natural wastage. Nine such engineers have been engaged since autumn 1983.

In addition, the Civil Service Commission is currently holding an open competition to recruit grade I professional civil engineers which, in due course, should result in some 15 engineers joining the Department.

None of these recruits is earmarked for any function relating to proposals in Cmnd. 9063; they are all needed to fill vacancies caused by natural wastage.

Lorry Ban (London)

Mr. Hill asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many representations he has received on the subject of the proposed Greater London council ban on inner city lorries at nights and during weekends.

Mrs. Chalker: I have received copies of over 2,000 of the much larger total of letters sent to the GLC expressing grave concern. In many cases the writers press my right hon. Friend to use his powers, if the GLC should decide to go ahead with its ban, to ensure that a properly constituted public inquiry is first held. I would expect full details and analysis of the representations to form an integral part of any report made by GLC officials to the transport committee as an aid to its deliberations.

Those who have written have included all types and sizes of businesses and shops, and range from major construction firms to a pop group. It is clear that the present GLC proposals and methods of administration envisaged have created widespread alarm among those who provide London's basic services.

Mr. Hill asked the Secretary of State for Transport what information he has as to whether the Greater London council is to hold a public inquiry into its proposed ban on heavy lorries; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: I understand that the GLC transport committee will be meeting on Wednesday 12 December to consider the massive response to consultation and the many hundreds of calls for a public inquiry. I cannot anticipate what decision it will then reach.

However, we have made clear our view that for a major London-wide proposal of this magnitude a properly constituted public inquiry would provide a well established method of assessment.

Aircraft Noise (Gatwick)

Mr. Soames asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he is satisfied with the arrangements for monitoring aircraft noise at Gatwick airport.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Yes, but I will continue to seek improvements.

Mr. Soames asked the Secretary of State for Transport when he will be making public the latest survey on aircraft noise at Gatwick airport.

Mr. Michael Spicer: As soon as it is received by my Department, which I hope will be by early February.

Pesticides (Aerial Spraying)

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list his powers to prohibit aerial spraying of pesticides from named places or areas.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The controls over aerial crop spraying are exercised by the Civil Aviation Authority under article 40 of the Air Navigation Order 1980. In particular, the authority requires that aerial sprayers maintain minimum distances from houses, congested areas, and sensitive areas such as schools, hospitals, children's playgrounds and stables. Operators are also required to consult the Nature Conservancy Council if they intend to spray within three-quarters nautical mile of a national nature reserve or site of special scientific interest, and to give advance warning to others in the area.

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Transport if, when he next meets the chairman of the Civil Aviation Authority, he will discuss the number of aircraft engaged in aerial application of pesticides, since June this year.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The aerial application of pesticides is one of the topics on which I consult the chairman of the Civil Aviation Authority as necessary. The chairman's assurances about the enforcement of the controls on aerial crop spraying to which my hon. Friend and colleague the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport referred in his statement on crop spraying on 31 July, at columns *209-10*, were the result of such consultations.

Merseyside (Visit)

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on his visit to Merseyside on Friday 23 November.

Mr. Ridley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mr. Parry) on Wednesday 28 November at column *478*.

Chemicals (Road Transport)

Mr. Wainwright asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether he is satisfied that current regulations regarding the labelling and transportation of chemicals by road transport are adequate to ensure the safety of those involved in both the collection and delivery process and members of the general public; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: The transport of dangerous chemicals in road tankers is covered by the Dangerous Substances (Conveyance by Road in Road Tankers and Tank Containers) Regulations 1981. I consider that these provisions are adequate, but I am always prepared to consider proposals to improve them.

The Health and Safety Commission is in the final stages of consultation on proposals to extend control to all other methods of carrying dangerous substances by road. I hope to make new regulations next year.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

UNESCO

Mr. Best asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which (i) Commonwealth countries, (ii) European Economic Community countries and (iii) other countries have made representations that the United Kingdom *(a)* should leave and *(b)* should remain a member of United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation.

Mr. Raison: Exchanges between Governments are confidential, but the Government have kept closely in touch about the reform of UNESCO with a large number of Governments, including those in the Commonwealth and the European Community, during 1984. None wished the United Kingdom to leave UNESCO, but all said they shared our desire for reform and recognised the United Kingdom's right to decide what was best for its own interests. We shall reconsider our position towards the end of next year in the light of progress made towards reform.

Chile

Dame Judith Hart asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how the United Kingdom representative voted on 26 November on the proposal for a $125 million loan to Chile from the Inter-American Development Bank.

Mr. Raison: The project was considered by the executive board of the Inter-American Development Bank on 29 November. The Inter-American Development Bank executive director who represents Belgium, Denmark, Finland, the Federal Republic of Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden and the United Kingdom was mandated to vote in favour.

Dame Judith Hart asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how the United Kingdom representative voted on 21 November on the proposals for a $35·7 million loan to Chile from the Inter-American Development Bank.

Mr. Raison: The Inter-American Development Bank executive director who represents Belgium, Denmark, Finland, the Federal Republic of Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden and the United Kingdom, voted in favour.

Dame Judith Hart asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what outstanding proposals for loans or projects for Chile will be considered before the end of 1984 by the Inter-American Development Bank, the World Bank, or the International Development Association.

Mr. Raison: The only project proposals which are likely to be considered before the end of 1984 are as follows:

1. *Inter-American Development Bank*
   Industrial recovery programme: US$130 million; Hydrocarbon exploration, adaptation of refineries and development of gas in Magallunes: US$48 million;
2. *The World Bank (IBRD)*
   Agricultural services and credit: US$56 million; Public sector housing: US$80 million;
3. *International Development Association*
   None.

World Bank

Mr. Terry Davis asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the executive director appointed by the United Kingdom supports the decision by the World Bank to quadruple the funds made available by the World Bank for population projects.

Mr. Raison: The United Kingdom executive director represents Her Majesty's Government's views to the World Bank board. We support the World Bank's intention to increase its funding for population projects.

St. Helena

Dr. Marek asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs why the Prosperous Plain area has not been considered as a possible site on St. Helena for an airfield.

Mr. Raison: This location was apparently ruled out in an examination of potential airfield sites by the Civil Aviation Authority in 1973 because of the presence of a diplomatic wireless service station. Its suitability is now being re-examined.

Dr. Marek asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about present communications to St. Helena as a result of the recent fire on the RMS St. Helena.

Mr. Raison: It is expected that the RMS St. Helena will resume service on a scheduled northbound voyage in mid-December. In the meantime, special arrangements have been made for passengers and for mail booked on the November/December southbound voyage to travel by air to Ascension Island, and onward to St. Helena by an MOD-chartered vessel, the Sir Percivale Another vessel has been chartered to carry necessary supplies, including holiday season requirements.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Armagh Gaol (Strip Searches)

18. **Mr. John Fraser** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement about the searching of woman prisoners in Armagh gaol.

Mr. Scott: Strip searches are a necessary part of maintaining prison security. The procedures used in Northern Ireland are the same as those which have been used for many years in comparable prisons in Great Britain and elsewhere. The need for and frequency of searches are kept under close review. The number conducted each month has fallen substantially over the last two years.

Constitutional Matters (Public Opinion)

19. **Mr. Adley** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what method he uses to assess the state of opinion on constitutional matters amongst the electorate of Northern Ireland; and how often he updates his soundings.

Mr. Hurd: The people of Northern Ireland have regular opportunities at elections to express their views clearly on constitutional matters. The principal means of assessing opinion is to listen to the political parties, with which I keep in close touch, and which according to the strength of their electoral support, best articulate the views of the community.

Kilbrandon Inquiry

20. **Mr. Wareing** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which parts of the report of the Kilbrandon inquiry he finds acceptable and which unacceptable; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hurd: As long as a majority of people in Northern Ireland wish to remain part of the United Kingdom, proposals which affect that constitutional status cannot be acceptable to Her Majesty's Government. For the inquiry's proposals to work, they must be acceptable to both communities in Northern Ireland. I found the analysis in the report interesting and stimulating.

Constitutional Talks

21. **Mr. Andrew MacKay** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a further statement on his talks with political parties in the Province.

Mr. Hurd: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Warwickshire, North (Mr. Maude).

High Technology Development

22. **Mr. Molyneaux** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will outline his plans for the provision of high technology development in Northern Ireland.

Dr. Boyson: The Government have introduced comprehensive programmes for training, technical advice and investment. Of particular importance is the development of a science park near Antrim to cater for high technology industries and research and development.

Comprehensive Education

23. **Mr. Beggs** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he has plans to extend comprehensive education provision in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Scott: No.

Security

24. **Sir John Biggs-Davison** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement about the security of the Province.

28. **Rev. William McCrea** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the security situation in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Hurd: I refer my hon. Friend and the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Latham) earlier today.

25. **Mr. Hunter** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what discussions on cross-border security co-operation he has recently had; and what discussions he is currently conducting with the authorities in the Republic of Ireland.

Mr. Hurd: I had discussions on a wide range of matters when I met the Irish Republic's Minister for Foreign Affairs on 25 October. I was also glad to meet the Irish Minister for Justice on that occasion. I met the Irish Minister for Foreign Affairs again during the meeting between my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach on 18 and 19 November. I look forward to continuing discussions with members of the Irish Government on matters of common concern, including security co-operation.

NHS (Management and Financial Control)

26. **Rev. Martin Smyth** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much money will be released for patient and client care by the implementation of the new proposals for management and financial control in the Health and Social Services.

Mr. Chris Patten: Health and Social Services boards are currently required to realise annually efficiency savings of 0·5 per cent. of revenue budgets, or around £2·4 million from measures designed to improve management and financial control. In addition, the Department of Health and Social Services and boards are pursuing various initiatives designed to improve efficiency and cost-effectiveness, but the expected benefits may not be capable of reliable measurement in money terms.

Milk Quotas

27. **Rev. Ian Paisley** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he is able to give an assurance that sufficient extra allocations under the milk quota system will be available to enable all those dairy farmers in Northern Ireland allocated new or extra quotas by milk quota panels and tribunals finally to receive such allocations.

Dr. Boyson: Total quota needs cannot be assessed until all cases have been finalised and the volume of quota which will be finally bought up is known.

Grammar Schools (North Down)

29. **Mr. Kilfedder** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will increase the number of grammar school places in North Down.

Mr. Scott: It is a matter for the South Eastern education and library board to ensure that there are sufficient secondary school places available to offer all pupils educational opportunities in accordance with their age, aptitude and ability.

Housing Executive (Prefabricated Buildings)

30. **Mr. J. Enoch Powell** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he expects that the Housing Executive will be ready to announce its scheme and timetable for dealing with its Orlit and other similar houses.

Mr. Chris Patten: I am advised by the chairman of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive that proposals will be announced as soon as possible on an estate-by-estate basis, following consultations with tenant groups; the first of a series of proposals will be considered by the board of the executive within the next few weeks. Of the types of prefabricated reinforced concrete house examined by the Building Research Establishment, only Orlits are found in Northern Ireland.

Gas Pipeline

Mr. Stephen Ross asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the current situation with regard to the proposed supply of gas to the Province by pipeline from Kinsale.

Dr. Boyson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Coventry, South East (Mr. Nellist), earlier today.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Under-25s (Benefits)

Mr. Alton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many young claimants are likely to be affected by restrictions on benefits paid to under-25s who leave home while they are unemployed to live elsewhere; and what is his Department's estimate of the financial savings made through this change.

Mr. Newton: At the end of 1983 about 37,000 people aged 25 and under were being paid supplementary benefit as boarders and the number is likely to have increased since then. We expect fewer young people to receive payment as boarders and to be paid for shorter periods as a result of proposals for change in the payment of board and lodging that my right hon. Friend announced earlier today.

Mr. Anderson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether the Supplementary Benefit Policy Inspectorate has investigated board and lodging payments since November 1983.

Mr. Newton: The Social Security Policy Inspectorate is currently studying this subject.

Housing Benefit

Sir Brandon Rhys Williams asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will tabulate figures showing the numbers of people receiving housing benefits, showing the rate rebate recipients separately from those receiving rent and rate rebates, and distinguishing between certificated and standard benefit payments.

Mr. Whitney: Housing benefit statistics do not routinely distinguish rate rebate-only cases from those receiving a rate rebate and a rent rebate or allowance. It is, however, estimated that as at autumn 1983, the latest date for which figures are available, the information requested is broadly as follows:

Recipients	*Standard housing benefit*	*Certificated housing benefit*
Rent rebate and rate rebate	1,720	1,870
Rent allowance and rate rebate	330	540
Rate rebate only	1,600	600

School Leavers (Benefits)

Mr. Terry Lewis asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will amend Department of Health and Social Security regulations so as to allow school leavers, who are signing on for supplementary benefit for the first time, to receive benefit payment from the same starting day, regardless of their surname initial letter.

Mr. Whitney: No. The payment arrangements for school leavers are similar to those for other supplementary benefit claimants and changes in these arrangements would not be justified at a time when a review of the supplementary benefit scheme is in progress.

Family Practitioner Services

Mrs. Peacock asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on the recent decision to allow increases in spending on family practitioner services to fall below the level of inflation.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Full allowance has been made for the forecast rate of inflation in the amount we plan to spend next year on the family practitioner services. We have been able to restrict the growth in spending by the action we announced recently to reduce expenditure on drugs through tighter controls on drug company profits and limitations on the use of some of the less important drugs. The ending next year of the general supply of NHS glasses, except to those at present exempt from charges, will also reduce expenditure. Even with these reductions, we still expect to spend £100 million more than was planned in the last expenditure White Paper.

Old People's Homes

Mr. Randall asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many private old people's homes there are in the United Kingdom which accommodate people financed by his Department; what is the average cost per person; and whether he is getting value for money in using such homes.

Mr. Newton: The most recent provisional figures for Great Britain indicate that at December 1983 there were 23,000 supplementary pensioners in private and voluntary residential care and nursing homes who were claiming supplementary benefit as boarders to help them meet the home's charge. The average supplementary benefit payment was £75·25. Information on the number of homes concerned is not available.

I also refer the hon. Member to proposals published for consultation by my right hon. Friend today designed to improve the arrangements under which such payments are made.

Funeral Expenses

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many families were given payments by local authorities towards funeral expenses during 1983; and at what average level and what overall cost.

Mr. Newton: Local authorities have no specific powers to make payments to families towards the cost of funerals but they have a duty to arrange for the burial or cremation of a body where no suitable arrangements have been made. Information is not held centrally on the number and cost of such burials.

Personal and Occupational Pensions

Mr. Sayeed asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the Government's policy regarding the role of personal and occupational pensions schemes in augmenting the state retirement pension provision; and if he has any estimates on savings to public funds resulting from the existence of private sector pension schemes.

Mr. Newton: Our consultative proposals for a new system of personal pensions emphasise the need to ensure that occupational pension schemes continue to play a vital role in retirement provision. Personal pensions will expand the scope of private provision and give employees more choice in the way they save for their old age.

Private pensions save public expenditure to the extent that they reduce reliance on means-tested benefits. No estimates of such savings are available. However, published estimates produced for my right hon. Friend's inquiry into provision for retirement show that occupational pensions are currently estimated to account for 22 per cent. of pensioners' total gross income compared with 15 per cent. in 1951. The share of pensioners' income derived from all State benefits has risen from 42 per cent. to 60 per cent. over the same period.

Constant Attendance Allowance

Dr. Roger Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will introduce measures to reduce from six to three months the gap between being able to claim for constant attendance allowance and the onset of the illness or condition requiring that degree of care and attention.

Mr. Newton: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) on 14 February at column *162*.

National Insurance Contributions

Dr. McDonald asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what would be the saving in the 1985-86 financial year of abolishing the ceiling on national insurance contributions for *(a)* the employed, *(b)* the self-employed and *(c)* employers.

Mr. Whitney: If the upper earnings limit for class 1 contributions and the upper profits limit for class 4 contributions were to be abolished in 1985-86—but the ceiling retained for the contracted-out rebate — the additional contribution revenue would be:

(a) £620 million from employees.
(b) £75 million from self-employed.
(c) £720 million from employers.

These figures are on the same assumption as Cmnd. 9386.

Pesticides

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if the Government have any plans to carry out or fund any research into the incidence of cancer among farmers, farm workers and residents in areas of high pesticide use;

(2) if he will seek to assess the incidence of ear, nose, throat and other cancers in areas with high rates of agrochemical use.

Mr. John Patten: The research needs of the Department in this field are met by the Medical Research Council, which is the main Government-funded body supporting medical research from its grant-in-aid under the Science Vote of the Department of Education and Science.

The MRC environmental epidemiology unit at Southampton is investigating the possibilities of research in this field and is keeping the Department informed.

Our medical advisers are aware of a survey of Swedish agricultural workers in which it was found that the risk for most types of cancer of contracting the disease was lower

than the respective national average. In some cases, the diminution of risk was statistically significant. For less than a quarter of the cancers, the risk was slightly greater than the national average.

In view of the work being carried out by the Medical Research Council and the reassuring results of the Swedish survey, further studies at present would seem unnecessary.

Family Practitioner Committees

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on the procedures he will follow in appointing members of family practitioner committees; and whether he will publish lists of nominations received and the biographical details of both those appointed and those rejected.

Mr. John Patten: We shall normally appoint a chairman and 30 members to each family practitioner committee. Those committees relating to more than four district health authorities may have more members. Fifteen appointments are being made from nominations submitted by local representative committees of the family practitioner professions in the area. Four appointments each will be made from district health and local authority nominations. The remaining seven places will be filled from nominations provided by a wide range of organisations and from individuals. We shall appoint the people we consider best suited for the job. A measure of continuity is desirable. Prospective members must have an interest in primary health care and financial, legal, management and personnel experience is also being sought.

Chairmen and members will be asked to provide some biographical details for each family practitioner committee to publish locally. Approximately 7,000 nominations have been received; the details in them were supplied in confidence and it would be discourteous to publish them without the permission of the people concerned. Such permission could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Family Income Supplement

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what will be the estimated savings from the changes made regarding the payment of family income supplement; how many families will be affected; what will be the effect on their real incomes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: I assume the hon. Member is referring to the family income supplement uprating change made this November. The change was made because FIS awards, once made, continue for a year regardless of any change in the recipient's circumstances, including increases in income. In view of this, we concluded that it was anomalous that awards should be uprated during their currency, especially because the result of doing so involves increasing benefit for many families whose circumstances would not justify it at the time.

The FIS savings from the change are estimated at about £10 million. Some 210,000 families were receiving FIS in November and we expect that about 10,000 will be able, under transitional arrangements, to take full advantage of the new levels if they so wish. The difference between the FIS received by the remainder and that which would have been received if awards had been increased in line with previous practice depends upon a number of factors, including the length of time an award has to run after the uprating date (27 November), the number of children in a family and the amount of family income. The estimated average amount involved is £2·40 weekly or £55 in total over the remaining period of the award. Previous estimates indicate that about one half of FIS recipients receive rent and rates rebates and in these cases the average total amount involved would be £37 because of the knock-on effect of those benefits on FIS. Some families will also be receiving supplementary benefit and, because the amount of FIS is taken into account in assessing that benefit, they will suffer no loss during the period they are receiving it.

Medical Consultants (Unemployment)

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the number of consultant medical practitioners in each of the regional health authorities in England and Wales who have been registered as unemployed for each of the last five years.

Mr. John Patten: This information is not available.

Clatterbridge Hospital

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he is satisfied that the funding of the Mersey regional health authority is sufficient to meet the needs of the centre for radiotherapy at Clatterbridge hospital; what representations he has received about this centre; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: It is for regional health authorities to assess priorities within their regions and to allocate resources accordingly. Mersey region envisages a major expansion of services at Clatterbridge with additional equipment and capital investment. A thorough review of all aspects of the centre is under way including staffing levels, prospective accommodation needs and the management of the treatment of patients.

We have received a number of letters from hon. Members.

RHAs (General Managers)

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what criteria he applies when considering a recommended appointment to the position of general manager in regional health authorities.

Mr. John Patten: Our guidance to health authorities specifies that we shall wish to satisfy ourselves that each regional general manager has the capacity to undertake the general management function.

Health Authorities (Members)

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when, further to the answer of 20 November, *Official Report*, column *116*, he will write to the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras about biographical details of members of health authorities.

Mr. John Patten: I wrote to the hon. Member on 28 November.

Federation Dentaire Internationale

Sir Dudley Smith asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if Britain is a member of the Federation Dentaire Internationale.

Mr. John Patten: The Federation Dentaire Internationale is a federation of national dental associations of which the British Dental Association, as distinct from the British Government, is an active member.

Social Security Reviews

Mr. Tony Lloyd asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) how much time he expects to allow for public discussion between the publication of the results and conclusions of the social security review and any necessary legislation being brought before the House;

(2) if he will ensure that no steps are taken to implement the recommendations of the social security review where legislation is not required until they have been debated in the House.

Mr. Newton: These are matters for consideration in formulating the Government's conclusions and proposals. Any recommendations which affected the nature, scope or levels of benefits, the conditions of eligibility and the rules of entitlement would require amending legislation before they could be implemented, and this would be subject to the normal parliamentary scrutiny.

Blindness Allowance

Mr. Maclennan asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when his Department last had consultations with organisations acting for blind people about a blindness allowance; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: I last met a delegation representing the Royal National Institute for the Blind, the National Federation of the Blind and the National League of the Blind and Disabled on 13 November. My right hon. Friend and I previously met these organisations in January, and there was a subsequent meeting with officials of the Department in May. On the question of the introduction of a blindness allowance, I refer the hon. Member to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) on 22 October at column *514*.

Essential Drugs Policies

Mr. Tony Lloyd asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what encouragement the British Government give to countries implementing essential drugs policies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: As mentioned in my right hon. and learned Friend's speech to the World Health Assembly on 9 May 1984, the British Government assist less developed countries by offering practical training in the National Health Service and the United Kingdom pharmaceutical industry to medicines control inspectors. This leads to the improvement of the systems of ordering, stocking and distributing drugs down to hospitals, regions and outstation dispensaries. We also provide quality assurance for exports through the World Health Organisation certification scheme.

The Overseas Development Administration is always willing to consider requests from developing countries in receipt of aid for help with the implementation of the World Health Organisation's action programme for essential drugs.

NHS (Food Hygiene)

Mr. Eastham asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will introduce legislation to amend the Food Act 1984 so as to extend to hospitals and other National Health Service establishments the powers of entry of environmental health officers and their subsequent powers of enforcement in relation to breaches of food hygiene regulations.

Mr. John Patten: We have no plans to make an order under section 133 of the Food Act 1984 to provide that the Food Hygiene (General) Regulations 1970 should apply to National Health Service premises.

It is the Department's policy that the standards of food hygiene in hospitals should comply with those laid down in the regulations and that health authorities should provide open access to local authority environmental health officers to visit, inspect and report on catering departments and food handling areas. Departmental guidance to these authorities provides that the recommendations of the EHOs should immediately be considered for appropriate action. We are not aware of any evidence to suggest that these arrangements are not working well.

NHS (Ancillary Services)

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he is satisfied with the standard of provision of ancillary services in the National Health Service; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

Census (Ethnic Question)

Dr. Twinn asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what response the Government propose to make to the Home Affairs Committee report on an ethnic question in the census.

Mr. Fowler: The Government's reply to the second report from the Home Affairs Committee is published today — Cmnd. 9238. The Government welcome this report and accept that the Committee has made a good case in principle for the inclusion of an ethnic question, but it will necessarily be several years before final decisions can be taken about what questions are to be included in the next census. As I announced in the House on 14 July 1983 at column *450* census planning will proceed on the assumption that the next census will be held in 1991. In the meantime, valuable information about the numbers and circumstances of the ethnic minorities will continue to be available from other sources. A decision on whether to supplement information derived from these sources with national data from an ethnic question in the census will depend on practical issues and in particular, as the Committee recognises, on the public acceptability of such a question. This will need to be tested well in advance. Accordingly, the Government have decided to invite the registrars general to carry out whatever tests are necessary

to see if a reliable and publicly acceptable census question on ethnic origin can be developed for inclusion in the 1991 census if that is the wish of the Government of the day.

NATIONAL FINANCE

RIBA (Correspondence)

31. **Mrs. Renée Short** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what reply he sent to the Royal Institute of British Architects about resources for building construction in answer to its letter of 31 October.

Mr. Peter Rees: I have written to the Royal Institute of British Architects explaining that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment is prepared to meet the Group of Eight to discuss their particular concerns about the local authority capital controls system. If a meeting is arranged, I shall hope to attend it.

Scientific Research Capital Allowance

Mr. Freeman asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer, for the last fiscal year, what is the cost to the Exchequer of the scientific research capital allowance.

Mr. Moore: The cost is tentatively estimated to be £350 million.

Capital Outflow

Mr. Skinner asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the approximate outflow of capital from the United Kingdom since May 1979.

Mr. Peter Rees: The net outflow of investment and other capital transactions between the second quarters of 1979 and 1984 was £17 billion.

Pound Sterling

Mr. Skinner asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the real value of the pound sterling compared with its value in May 1979.

Mr. Peter Rees: There is no unique measure of real exchange rates. The one used in the following table is calculated from the sterling exchange rate index and GDP deflators in domestic and competitors' economies, which have a relatively broad coverage of price movements.

	£ real exchange rate (1980 = 100)*
1979 Second Quarter	82
1984 Second Quarter (latest)	84
Percentage change	+2·4

* Competitors' price movements are a weighted average of prices in other major OECD countries; the weights are as in the IMF's multilateral exchange rate model.

Local Authority Expenditure

Dr. Cunningham asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what deflator has been used in paragraph 2.27 of the Autumn Statement 1984 to produce the real terms reduction of about 3 per cent.

Mr. Peter Rees: The cost terms reduction is calculated by reference to the GDP deflator assumption in paragraph 1.60 of the Autumn Statement.

Dr. Cunningham asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish the totals of local authority relevant current expenditure in 1984-85, plans and budgets, referred to in paragraph 2.27 of the Autumn Statement 1984, showing the figures *(a)* in 1984-85 definitions, comparable with table 2.18.1 of Cmnd. 9143-II, and *(b)* in 1985-86 definitions, comparable with the figure of £25·5 billion in paragraph 2.27.

Mr. Peter Rees: The 1984-85 figures are as follows:

	Plans (Cmnd. 9143)	*Budgets*
England	20,389	21,451
Scotland	2,737	2,869
Wales	1,253	1,274
Great Britain	24,379	25,592

The 1985-86 figures have been adjusted to take account of the transfer of certain functions away from local authority responsibility. So, to put 1984-85 figures on to the same definition, adjustments need to be made for these transfers.

First, a deduction has to be made from plans and budgets to reflect the creation of London Regional Transport; secondly, a deduction has to be made to reflect the transfer to the Manpower Services Commission of funding for some aspects of non-advanced further education in England and Wales; and, thirdly, a deduction has to be made from Scottish provision to reflect the transfer of financial responsibility for two further education colleges from local authorities to the Secretary of State.

After making the estimated adjustments necessary to put the 1984-85 figures on to this definition, the figures are as follows:

	Plans	*Budgets*
England	20,204	21,195
Scotland	2,727	2,859
Wales	1,250	1,271
Great Britain	24,181	25,323

Local authorities are paying the national insurance surcharge at 1 per cent. in 1984-85: they will not pay it in 1985-86. After further adjustment for NIS abolition, the Great Britain figures for 1984-85 become £24·0 billion (plans) and £25·15 billion (budgets). These compare with the Autumn Statement figure of £25·5 billion for 1985-86.

£1 Coin and Note

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many representations he has received *(a)* in favour of keeping the £1 note and *(b)* in favour of keeping the £1 coin since his Autumn Statement; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lawson: About 750 letters have been received in the Treasury since the Autumn Statement. Most of them criticise the size and design of the coin, but are not necessarily against the withdrawal of the note. Some 30 letters so far received favour the Government's action.

Personal Taxation

Dr. McDonald asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what would be the saving if *(a)* all tax reliefs and *(b)* personal tax allowances were set against the standard rate of tax only;

(2) if he will construct an index, with 1978-79 equalling 100, of the changes in the level of income tax and national insurance contributions for each subsequent year for a taxpayer on *(a)* two thirds, *(b)* three quarters, *(c)* average, *(d)* twice, *(e)* five times and *(f)* 10 times average earnings for households where the taxpayer is (i) married and (ii) married with two children, assuming in all cases that the wife is in paid employment and earning the average part-time wage received by women;

(3) if he will publish for 1983-84 and 1984-85 the following information for (i) a single person, (ii) a married man without children, (iii) a married man with two children aged under 11 years, (iv) a married man with four children *(a)* the tax threshold at current prices, *(b)* the tax threshold at 1949-50 prices (index 1949-50 equals 100), *(c)* the tax threshold as a percentage of average manual earnings, *(d)* tax-free income at current prices, *(e)* tax-free income at 1949-50 prices (index 1949-50 equals 100), *(f)* tax-free income as a percentage of average income, *(g)* break-even point at current prices, *(h)* break-even point at 1949-50 prices (index 1949-50 equals 100) and *(i)* break-even point as a percentage of average manual earnings, in the light of the latest information on earnings levels;

(4) if he will publish a table in the *Official Report* giving his latest estimates for 1984-85 of the following information for a single man, a married man and a married man with two children in each case, a man on two thirds average earnings, 75 per cent. average earnings, 100 per cent. average earnings, 200 per cent. average earnings and 500 per cent. average earnings *(a)* gross earnings, *(b)* income tax payable, *(c)* *(b)* as a percentage of *(a)*, *(d)* national insurance contributions, *(e)* *(d)* as a percentage of *(a)*, *(f)* child benefit, *(g)* *(f)* as a percentage of *(a)*, *(h)* net earnings, *(i)* *(h)* as a percentage of *(a)*, *(j)* indirect taxes, and *(k)* *(j)* as a percentage of *(a)* at 1978-79 prices.

Mr. Moore: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Chile

Dame Judith Hart asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proposals for financial assistance to Chile will be considered by the International Monetary Fund before the end of 1984.

Mr. Lawson: I understand that the executive board of the International Monetary Fund is to consider a waiver of the performance criteria for Chile's current standby arrangement on 7 December.

Manufacturing Industry

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the percentage share of *(a)* employment, *(b)* exports and *(c)* gross domestic product coming from manufacturing industry in (i) the United Kingdom, (ii) the United States of America and (iii) West Germany in 1960, 1970, 1975, 1979, 1980, 1982 and 1983.

Mr. Channon: I have been asked to reply.

Data on consistent and comparable definitions are not readily obtainable. The available information is as follows.

Shares accounted for by manufacturing industry in:

*(a) Civilian Employment**

Per cent.

	United Kingdom†‡		*United States of America*	*Federal Republic of Germany*
	(a)	*(b)*		
1960	37·5		..	‖38·7
1970	36·6		26·4	39·4
1975	30·9		22·7	35·6
1979	29·5		22·7	34·5
1980	28·4	30·3	22·1	34·3
1982	..	27·6	20·4	¶33½
1983	..	26·7	..	..

* Manufacturing includes manufactures of food, beverages and tobacco
† column *(a)* United Kingdom
column *(b)* Great Britain excluding self-employed
‡ Data for 1960 and 1970 on 1968 Standard Industrial Classification (SIC); other years on 1980 SIC
‖ 1962
¶ estimate
.. not readily available
Source: Department of Employment
International Labour Organisation
Eurostat Employment and Unemployment
OECD Labour Force Statistics

*(b) Exports**

Per cent.

	United Kingdom	*United States of America*	*Federal Republic of Germany*
1960	82·4	64·0	88·7
1970	84·3	69·0	89·7
1975	81·8	66·9	88·4
1979	76·0	67·2	87·8
1980	73·5	67·7	87·1
1982	67·2	67·9	87·0
1983	66·1	68·1	86·8

* Visible exports, Standard International Trade Classification (Sections 0 to 9 of which Sections 5 to 8 taken as manufactures)
Source: United Kingdom — Monthly Review of External Trade Statistics;
United States of America and Federal Republic of Germany —OECD

*(c) Gross Domestic Product**

Per cent.

	United Kingdom†	*United States of America*‡		*Federal Republic of Germany*‖
1960	32·1	28·6		40·2
1970	28·1	25·7		38·4
1975	26·0	23·5		34·5
1979	24·6	23·9		34·1
1980	22·8	22·6	28·0	33·1
1982	21·0	..	26·3	31·7
1983	20·7	..	25·8	31·8

* Manufacturing includes manufactures of food, beverages and tobacco
† Data for 1960 and 1970 on 1968 Standard Industrial Classifications (SIC); other years on 1980 SIC. The figure for 1975 on 1980 SIC basis is 25·5 per cent.
‡ including mining, gas, electricity and water
‖ including quarrying and steel construction
.. not available

Source: CSO National Accounts
OECD National Accounts
Monthly Report of the Deutsche Bundesbank.

Milk

Mr. Kennedy asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much he expects to accrue to the Consolidated Fund as a result of the introduction and operation of the milk supplementary levy (outgoers) scheme from capital gains tax payments.

Mr. Moore [*pursuant to his reply*, 23 November 1984, c. *294*]: I regret that information upon which to base an estimate of the capital gains tax yield from payments under the scheme is not available. To the extent to which capital gains tax eventually applies, the yield will depend upon the reliefs available; for example, the annual exempt amount, retirement relief and so on.

Mortgages (Tax Relief)

Mr. McTaggart asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the annual cost of tax relief on mortgage interest in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* the United Kingdom in each of the last five years for which figures are available.

Mr. Moore [*pursuant to his reply*, 22 November 1984, c. *270*]: The latest estimates are as follows. Figures for 1982-83 and later years are provisional.

Mortgage interest tax relief

	Total cost £ million	
	Scotland	*United Kingdom*
1980-81	120	1,960
1981-82	120	2,050
1982-83	130	2,150
*1983-84	165	2,750
*1984-85	210	3,500

* Includes the cost of relief in respect of mortgages previously under the option mortgage scheme.

Mr. McTaggart asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the average subsidy per owner-occupier through tax relief on mortgage interest in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* the United Kingdom, in the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Moore [*pursuant to his reply*, 22 November 1984, c. *270*]: The average cost of mortgage interest tax relief per owner-occupier in 1984-85 is estimated to be about £270 both in Scotland and in the United Kingdom as a whole.

Personal Incomes

Mr. Fisher asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will update the statistics given in tables 5 and 6 and chart 1 of the "Survey of Personal Incomes 1979-80" for all the subsequent financial years for which statistics are available.

Mr. Moore [*pursuant to his reply*, 22 November 1984, c. *271*]: The tables are as follows. Figures for 1982-83 are based on provisional results from the survey of that year. The information required for chart 1 is included in table 5.

Distribution of total incomes before and after tax. 1980-81 (Table 5)

Numbers, thousands, Amounts: £ million

	Before tax. By range of total income before tax				*After tax. By range of total income after tax*			
Range of total income (lower limit) £	*Number of incomes*	*Total income before tax*	*Tax*	*Total income after tax*	*Number of incomes*	*Total income before tax*	*Tax*	*Total income after tax*
1,350	1,590	2,670	94	2,580	2,050	3,650	190	3,460
2,000	1,300	2,920	218	2,700	1,810	4,580	478	4,100
2,500	1,550	4,260	424	3,830	2,060	6,550	865	5,680
3,000	1,500	4,870	612	4,260	1,960	7,490	1,140	6,350
3,500	1,530	5,710	825	4,880	1,800	8.030	1,290	6,740
4,000	1,420	6,020	938	5,090	1,580	8,080	1,360	6,710
4,500	1,290	6,100	994	5,110	1,620	9,310	1,630	7,680
5,000	1,300	6,790	1,140	5,650	1,340	8,500	1,480	7,020
5,500	1,230	7,090	1,240	5,850	1,310	9,170	1,630	7,540
6,000	2,150	13,900	2,450	11,400	2,140	16,900	3,050	13,800
7,000	1,930	14,400	2,630	11,800	1,460	13,500	2,500	11,000
8,000	2,440	21,700	4,040	17,600	1,630	18,000	3,560	14,400
10,000	1,300	14,200	2,840	11,400	735	10,200	2,230	8,000
12,000	874	11,600	2,460	9,160	453	7,990	1,980	6,010
15,000	530	9,010	2,190	6,820	198	4,780	1,420	3,360
20,000	222	5,240	1,560	3,680	77	2,900	1,100	1,800
30,000	74	2,730	1,020	1,710	14	884	387	497
50,000	19	1,190	578	612	3	406	217	189
100,000*	4	621	320	301	0·6	174	70	104
All ranges	22,200	141,000	26,600	114,000	22,200	141,000	26,600	114,000

Distribution of total incomes before and after tax. 1981-82 (Table 5)

Numbers: thousands; Amounts: £ million

	Before tax. By range of total income before tax				*After tax. By range of total income after tax*			
Range of total income (lower limit) £	*Number of incomes*	*Total income before tax*	*Tax*	*Total income after tax*	*Number of incomes*	*Total income before tax*	*Tax*	*Total income after tax*
1,350	1,320	2,230	67	2,160	1,640	2,910	133	2,780
2,000	1,130	2,540	190	2,350	1,590	4,000	413	3,580
2,500	1,290	3,550	363	3,190	1,790	5,680	754	4,930
3,000	1,350	4,380	546	3,840	1,840	7,060	1,080	5,990
3,500	1,380	5,170	731	4,440	1,770	7,990	1,340	6,650
4,000	1,280	5,450	861	4,580	1,740	8,950	1,580	7,370
4,500	1,370	6,490	1,090	5,400	1,470	8,540	1,540	7,000
5,000	1,320	6,910	1,220	5,690	1,310	8,390	1,540	6,850
5,500	1,140	6,580	1,190	5,390	1,180	8,340	1,570	6,770
6,000	2,010	13,000	2,430	10,600	1,980	15,900	2,990	12,900
7,000	1,800	13,500	2,540	11,000	1,540	14,200	2,710	11,500
8,000	2,540	22,700	4,370	18,300	1,950	21,600	4,340	17,300
10,000	1,560	17,000	3,410	13,600	971	13,600	2,970	10,600
12,000	1,170	15,600	3,350	12,300	613	10,800	2,640	8,120
15,000	714	12,100	2,920	9,220	309	7,370	2,150	5,220
20,000	340	8,010	2,340	5,670	108	4,020	1,480	2,540
30,000	103	3,770	1,410	2,360	24	1,550	675	876
50,000	29	1,860	856	999	4	575	293	281
100,000*	5	793	440	353	0·5	189	109	81
All ranges	21,900	152,000	30,300	121,000	21,800	152,000	30,300	121,000

Distribution of total incomes before and after tax. 1980-81 (Table 6)

Numbers; thousands, Amounts: £ million

	Before tax. By range of total income before tax				*After tax. By range of total income after tax*			
Range of total income (lower limit) £	*Number of incomes*	*Total income before tax*	*Tax*	*Total income after tax*	*Number of incomes*	*Total income before tax*	*Tax*	*Total income after tax*
1,350	1,640	2,760	97	2,660	2,120	3,780	197	3,580
2,000	1,340	3,000	228	2,770	1,880	4,760	503	4,250
2,500	1,620	4,450	451	4,000	2,180	6,930	927	6,010
3,000	1,560	5,060	652	4,400	2,070	7,920	1,230	6,690
3,500	1,590	5,960	886	5,070	1,980	8,890	1,470	7,420
4,000	1,520	6,470	1,040	5,430	1,820	9,370	1,660	7,710
4,500	1,400	6,660	1,120	5,530	1,700	9,910	1,820	8,090
5,000	1,380	7,220	1,300	5,930	1,390	8,950	1,670	7,280
5,500	1,320	7,590	1,390	6,200	1,320	9,380	1,790	7,590
6,000	2,190	14,200	2,670	11,500	1,980	15,900	3,080	12,800
7,000	1,860	13,900	2,710	11,200	1,270	11,900	2,430	9,470
8,000	2,190	19,400	3,940	15,500	1,380	15,500	3,390	12,100
10,000	1,170	12,700	2,750	9,920	561	8,090	1,990	6,100
12,000	711	9,460	2,210	7,250	328	6,060	1,730	4,330
15,000	422	7,150	1,940	5,210	136	3,510	1,220	2,290
20,000	183	4,340	1,440	2,900	50	2,070	904	1,170
30,000	58	2,130	884	1,250	9	650	330	320
50,000	17	1,060	548	508	2	319	185	134
*100,000	3	549	303	246	0·5	107	44	63
All ranges	22,200	134,000	26,600	107,000	22,200	134,000	26,600	107,000

Distribution of total net incomes before and after tax; 1981-82 (Table 6)

Numbers: thousands, Amounts: £ million

	Before tax. By range of total net income before tax				*After tax. By range of total net income after tax*			
Range of total income (lower limit) £	*Number of incomes*	*Total net income before tax*	*Tax*	*Total net income after tax*	*Number of incomes*	*Total net income before tax*	*Tax*	*Total net income after tax*
1,350	1,340	2,260	70	2,190	1,670	2,970	138	2,830
2,000	1,190	2,680	200	2,480	1,670	4,170	430	3,740
2,500	1,330	3,660	376	3,280	1,890	6,000	801	5,190
3,000	1,410	4,570	578	3,990	1,960	7,510	1,160	6,350

Range of total income (lower limit) £	Before tax. By range of total net income before tax: Number of incomes	Total net income before tax	Tax	Total net income after tax	After tax. By range of total net income after tax: Number of incomes	Total net income before tax	Tax	Total net income after tax
3,500	1,450	5,420	796	4,630	1,910	8,660	1,500	7,160
4,000	1,340	5,700	932	4,770	1,880	9,770	1,770	7,990
4,500	1,450	6,900	1,200	5,700	1,590	9,280	1,740	7,530
5,000	1,390	7,300	1,340	5,960	1,390	9,070	1,770	7,310
5,500	1,190	6,830	1,300	5,530	1,230	8,840	1,760	7,080
6,000	2,150	13,900	2,720	11,200	1,960	15,900	3,210	12,700
7,000	1,770	13,300	2,670	10,600	1,420	13,400	2,760	10,600
8,000	2,440	21,800	4,510	17,300	1,670	19,000	4,210	14,800
10,000	1,350	14,700	3,210	11,500	787	11,300	2,760	8,540
12,000	1,030	13,600	3,190	10,500	458	8,440	2,390	6,050
15,000	585	9,960	2,680	7,270	211	5,450	1,880	3,570
20,000	268	6,340	2,080	4,260	65	2,690	1,150	1,540
30,000	83	3,050	1,280	1,770	15	1,080	537	548
50,000	25	1,570	781	785	3	443	250	192
*100,000	4	695	409	286	0·3	141	88	54
All ranges	21,800	144,000	30,300	114,000	21,800	144,000	30,300	114,000

Distribution of total incomes before and after tax 1982-83: Provisional (Table 5)

Range of income (lower limit) £	Before Tax. By range of total income before tax: Number of incomes thousands	Total income before tax £ million	Tax £ million	Total income after tax £ million	After tax. By range of total income after tax: Number of incomes thousands	Total income before tax £ million	Tax £ million	Total income after tax £ million
1,550	844	1,500	29	1,480	1,090	2,010	67	1,950
2,000	1,170	2,610	131	2,480	1,520	3,690	275	3,420
2,500	1,120	3,070	271	2,800	1,550	4,830	575	4,260
3,000	1,240	4,020	418	3,610	1,690	6,360	851	5,510
3,500	1,310	4,900	614	4,290	1,670	7,360	1,120	6,250
4,000	1,230	5,190	720	4,470	1,480	7,480	1,200	6,270
4,500	1,240	5,890	916	4,970	1,510	8,650	1,490	7,170
5,000	1,090	5,740	923	4,820	1,350	8,550	1,490	7,060
5,500	1,170	6,710	1,140	5,580	1,320	9,260	1,670	7,590
6,000	2,020	13,100	2,310	10,800	2,150	17,000	3,110	13,900
7,000	1,930	14,400	2,650	11,700	1,780	16,400	3,050	13,300
8,000	2,870	25,600	4,810	20,800	2,200	24,400	4,710	19,600
10,000	1,740	19,000	3,690	15,300	1,250	17,200	3,550	13,600
12,000	1,490	19,800	4,070	15,700	781	13,500	3,120	10,400
15,000	888	15,200	3,460	11,700	433	10,000	2,700	7,310
20,000	451	10,600	2,900	7,700	167	5,930	2,020	3,910
30,000	143	5,260	1,830	3,430	37	2,320	976	1,340
50,000	37	2,350	1,050	1,300	6	804	404	400
100,000	7	1,170	657	509	0·8	359	213	146
Total	22,000	166,000	32,600	133,000	22,000	166,000	32,600	133,000

Distribution of total net incomes before and after tax 1982-83: Provisional (Table 6)

Range of income (lower limit) £	Before Tax. By range of total net income before tax: Number of incomes thousands	Total net income before tax £ million	Tax £ million	Total net income after tax £ million	After tax. By range of total net income after tax: Number of incomes thousands	Total net income before tax £ million	Tax £ million	Total net income after tax £ million
1,550	885	1,580	30	1,550	1,140	2,110	71	2,040
2,000	1,180	2,640	135	2,510	1,540	3,760	285	3,480
2,500	1,150	3,170	284	2,880	1,610	5,030	600	4,420
3,000	1,300	4,210	442	3,770	1,800	6,790	921	5,870
3,500	1,370	5,140	655	4,490	1,800	7,990	1,240	6,750
4,000	1,290	5,480	786	4,690	1,670	8,510	1,410	7,100
4,500	1,330	6,310	1,010	5,300	1,620	9,380	1,670	7,710
5,000	1,220	6,380	1,070	5,310	1,480	9,540	1,780	7,750
5,500	1,170	6,760	1,210	5,550	1,330	9,460	1,800	7,660
6,000	2,190	14,200	2,650	11,500	2,200	17,700	3,480	14,200
7,000	1,920	14,400	2,810	11,600	1,650	15,400	3,070	12,400
8,000	2,770	24,700	4,960	19,700	2,040	23,000	4,840	18,100

	Before Tax. By range of total net income before tax				After tax. By range of total net income after tax			
Range of income (lower limit)	Number of incomes	Total net income before tax	Tax	Total net income after tax	Number of incomes	Total net income before tax	Tax	Total net income after tax
£	thousands	£ million	£ million	£ million	thousands	£ million	£ million	£ million
10,000	1,630	17,700	3,740	14,000	928	13,100	3,030	10,100
12,000	1,220	16,200	3,650	12,500	660	11,800	3,040	8,770
15,000	770	13,100	3,280	9,830	298	7,350	2,310	5,040
20,000	366	8,630	2,630	6,010	117	4,510	1,770	2,740
30,000	115	4,260	1,650	2,610	22	1,550	751	801
50,000	32	2,010	977	1,040	4	580	324	256
100,000	6	1,030	617	417	0·6	298	190	108
Total	21,900	158,000	32,600	125,000	21,900	158,000	32,600	125,000

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Soil Survey

Mr. Hunter asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) how the work of the soil survey of England and Wales has been financed;

(2) when he will announce his decision about the future of the soil survey of England and Wales.

Mrs. Fenner: The soil survey is the responsibility of the Agricultural and Food Research Council. My Ministry currently pays for the work—£1·9 million in 1983-84—and it is this funding which is being reviewed. We will announce our decision about future funding as soon as possible after we have considered the views of the AFRC and the Priorities Board for Research and Development in Agriculture and Food.

Butter

Mr. Wareing asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to permit the special sale of butter from surplus stocks, available in the United Kingdom, in the new year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jopling: The Community has made provision for the sale of 39,200 tonnes of butter from United Kingdom intervention stocks for direct consumption. This butter is being made available to the trade during the period 16 November to 31 January. The implementation of this scheme was announced in the reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) on 13 November 1984, at column *166*, and the detailed provisions for application in the United Kingdom are contained in the Butter (EEC Special Sale) Regulations which were laid before Parliament on the same day.

Environmental Health Officers

Mr. Anderson asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many environmental health officers are employed in his Department.

Mr. Jopling: None, but my Department maintains close working contacts with environmental health officers employed by the Department of Health and Social Security.

Pesticides

Mr. Dalyell asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to screen all pesticides for efficacy; and if he will arrange for the screening of all pesticides already cleared but not approved.

Mrs. Fenner: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Pontypridd (Mr. John) on Monday 19 November 1984 at column 77. The screening of pesticides cleared for safety but not approved for efficacy will be undertaken over a period of time taking account of the importance of the case and available resources.

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will study the mechanisms under the United States Federal Insecticide, Fungicide and Rodenticide Act for disclosure to the public of data resulting from environmental health and safety tests submitted by manufacturers to gain registration of a pesticide, with a view to introducing an equivalent system into the United Kingdom.

Mrs. Fenner: We are aware of the provisions of this legislation. The treatment of data submitted by manufacturers seeking approval of pesticides under future United Kingdom arrangements will be the subject of consultation as regulations to implement part III of the Food and Environment Protection Bill are prepared.

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he will take, under the Food and Environment Protection Bill *[Lords]*, to inform the public when approval of a pesticide is withdrawn on environmental, health or safety grounds.

Mrs. Fenner: Ministers intend to announce the withdrawal of pesticides in the same manner as they will announce their approval—by entry in the London and Regional *Gazettes*, and, as in the recent case of DDT, by press notice, where appropriate.

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to require hazard warning information to be included in pesticide advertisements and on manufacturers' labels.

Mrs. Fenner: Hazard warnings are required as an integral part of existing pesticide labelling requirements. These requirements will become statutory when the proposed legislation is implemented.

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he has any proposals to seek to make it illegal to sell, offer for sale or distribute for sale or harvest food or food crops contaminated with a pesticide which has not been cleared or approved under the pesticides safety precautions scheme, or its replacement, for use on that crop.

Mrs. Fenner: The Food and Environment Protection Bill will give powers to make regulations to *(a)* control the import, sale, supply and use of pesticides and *(b)* seize or dispose of anything treated with any pesticide which contravenes these conditions. Ministers intend to make use of these powers by means of implementing regulations, which will be the subject of wide-ranging public consultation during 1985.

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the proposals in the Food and Environment Protection Bill *[Lords]* to control advertising of pesticides.

Mrs. Fenner: The powers afforded by clause 15(1)*(c)* would be sufficiently wide to permit Ministers to control the advertising of pesticides if at any time they considered it necessary.

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list those pesticides registered for use in the United States of America, and cleared under the pesticides safety precaution scheme in the United Kingdom, for which manufacturers' test data are available from the United States but not from the Government or industry in the United Kingdom.

Mrs. Fenner: No. This information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when the Government intend to set legal limits to residues in specified fruit and vegetables in compliance with EEC directive 76/895.

Mrs. Fenner: Directive 76/895, as amended, fixing maximum limits for pesticide residues on fruit and vegetables, has been implemented in the United Kingdom by administrative means. Powers to set legal limits will be provided by the Food and Environment Protection Bill, and the timing and extent ot their implementation will be the subject of a full public consultation.

Internal Drainage Districts

Dr. David Clark asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many internal drainage districts there are in England; and how many of these are administered by internal drainage boards, and how many are managed by water authorities, for each year for which data are available since 1974.

Mrs. Fenner: This information is given in the table below:

Year	*Total Number of IDDs*	*Managed by a water authority*	*Administered by IDBs*
1974	321	44	277
1975	314	44	270
1976	314	44	257
1977	292	35	249
1978	284	35	242
1979	265	35	238
1980	261	23	234
1981	252	23	233
1982	251	18	231
1983	249	18	228
1984	246	18	227
November 1984	244	17	227

Notes:

(1) The Lower Wye IDD and Powysland IDD, which are included in these figures, are situated partly in England and partly in Wales.

(2) Prior to the Transfer of Functions (Wales) (No. 1) Order 1978 the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food had responsibility for internal drainage districts (IDDs) in Wales; therefore, figures for 1974 to 1977 include IDDs in Wales.

Land Drainage Schemes (Severn-Trent)

Dr. David Clark asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether his Department part-funded a study commissioned by Severn-Trent water authority and carried out by Silsoe college on the rate of uptake of land drainage schemes carried out by the Severn-Trent water authority; what where its findings; and if he will arrange for a copy of the study report to be placed in the Library.

Mrs. Fenner: My Department contributed towards the cost of the Severn/Trent water authority's study to obtain access to its findings. A paper on the report was presented by the Severn/Trent water authority and Silsoe college at the annual conference of river engineers in July 1984. A copy of that paper is being placed in the Library. The full report is the property of the Severn-Trent water authority.

Aspartame

Mr. Dykes asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if, in view of the observations made by the Food Additives and Contaminants Committee in its report on the review of sweeteners in food and the current level of use of aspartame in aqueous solutions, he will arrange for a review of its use to be undertaken as soon as possible.

Mrs. Fenner: Between the publication of the report and the making of the Sweeteners in Food Regulations 1983 the Food Additives and Contaminants Committee, together with the Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment, examined representations for the use of aspartame in soft drinks and recommended that it was safe and suitable for this purpose.

A review of the use of all sweeteners will be undertaken in accordance with the recommendations in the report.

Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowance

Mr. Maclean asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will announce the rates of hill livestock compensatory allowance for 1985.

Mr. Jopling: The annual review of economic conditions in the less favoured areas has now been completed.

As far as the severely disadvantaged areas are concerned—that is, those which have had less favoured areas status in the past—I am glad to announce that, despite the pressure on public expenditure, we are proposing to maintain the allowances at their present levels.

This year, for the first time, we have also had to consider the rates to be paid in the disadvantaged areas —that is, those marginal land areas which were given LFA status for the first time in February of this year. So far as these are concerned, my colleagues and I are proposing that the rates for 1985 should be £22·25 per eligible cow and £2·12 per eligible ewe. Payments in these areas will also be subject to certain overall maxima—of £45 per hectare and nine ewes per hectare — which recognise that the land concerned is less handicapped than

in the existing LFA but also the need to discourage overstocking, in the interests of conservation and good husbandry. We estimate that these payments will bring an extra £4·5 million to the marginal areas, and this additional new expenditure is provided for in the Estimates laid before the House.

Draft regulations embodying these proposals are being laid before the House today and they have also been notified to the European Commission, as required by the appropriate EC directive.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Law of the Sea

Mr. Best asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what benefits will be lost to the United Kingdom if the United Kingdom fails to register under the preparatory investment protection resolution of the United Nations convention on the law of the sea.

Mr. Rifkind: I am not aware of any United Kingdom entity with deep seabed mining interests which wishes to take advantage of the deep seabed regime presently proposed under the United Nations law of the sea convention.

Mr. Best asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which (i) Commonwealth countries, (ii) European Economic Community countries, and (iii) other European countries apart from the United Kingdom do not support the United Nations convention on the law of the sea.

Mr. Rifkind: Seven other Commonwealth countries have not signed the United Nations law of the sea convention: Botswana, Brunei, Kiribati, Malawi, St. Kitts and Nevis, Tonga and Western Samoa. In the European Community, the Federal Republic of Germany has announced that it will not sign. Italy has not signed. Both Belgium and Luxembourg have announced that they intend signature. Elsewhere in Europe, Albania, the Holy See, Liechtenstein, San Marino, Spain and Turkey have not signed the convention.

Mr. Best asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he will recommend that Her Majesty's Government should accede to the United Nations convention on the law of the sea before the deadline of 9 December;

(2) which aspects of the United Nations convention on the law of the sea are still unacceptable to Her Majesty's Government; what progress has been made in the last 12 months to resolve such difficulties; and what progress he expects to make in the future;

(3) if he will make a statement on the United Nations convention on the law of the sea.

Mr. Rifkind: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave on 9 November, at column *41*, to my hon. Friend the Member for Bedfordshire, North (Mr. Skeet).

Warsaw Pact (Talks)

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to hold talks with his counterparts in Warsaw pact countries; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Rifkind: Within the next year my right hon. and learned Friend plans to hold talks with several of his Warsaw pact counterparts either in their capitals or in London. My right hon. and learned Friend looks forward to receiving Mr. Gromyko in London next year. We believe that such meetings are an important contribution to the development of better relations between East and West.

Mr. John Sprange

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State or Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the Berlin legal authorities consulted him before proceeding with the prosecution of Mr. John Sprange in connection with the flying of a hot air balloon.

Mr. Luce: No. As is required by the law applicable in Berlin and as indicated in my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affair's reply to the hon. Member of 26 November, at column *384*, the Berlin prosecutor applied to the Allied Kommandatura Berlin for authorisation for the German courts to exercise jurisdiction in this case.

Tristan da Cunha

Dr. Marek asked the Secretary of State or Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what exports there are from Tristan da Cunha; and where are their markets.

Mr. Luce: The main exports are crawfish and stamps. Crawfish are exported by Tristan Investments Ltd. Marketing is the company's responsibility, but I understand its main markets are at present the United States, France and Japan. The stamp market is worldwide.

Dr. Marek asked the Secretary of State or Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs who designed the wind-powered electricity generator that was blown down on Tristan da Cunha.

Mr. Luce: Windmatic a/s of Denmark.

Wirebird

Dr. Marek asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 26 November, *Official Report*, column *384*, if the evidence of expert visitors that the wirebird, endemic to St. Helena, is not a threatened species, has been published.

Mr. Luce: Yes, in a variety of articles in ornithological journals.

Mr. Yasser Arafat

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State or Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether, during Her Majesty's ambassador to Tunisia's meeting with Yasser Arafat in September, any discussion took place regarding a possible visit by Mr. Arafat to the United Kingdom; and whether, in the course of that meeting, Mr. Adams reminded Mr. Arafat of Her Majesty's Government's policy regarding the recognition of Israel and the abandonment of terrorism by Al-Fatah.

Mr. Luce: Her Majesty's ambassador at Tunis saw Mr. Arafat in mid-September, in accordance with previous practice, for a general introductory talk. We do not disclose details of matters discussed on such occasions.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 30 November 1984

DEFENCE

HMS Conqueror

Sir Raymond Gower asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he has yet received the report of the board of inquiry into the loss of the control room log of HMS Conqueror; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Heseltine: In my answer to the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) on 13 November, I undertook to consider making a statement to the House when the report of the board of inquiry, convened by the Commander-in-Chief Fleet on 25 October, to inquire into the apparent disappearance of HMS Conqueror's control room logs for the period April to September 1982, was available and had been considered by the commander-in-chief and the Ministry of Defence.

I have already made it clear that it is not our normal practice to publish reports of boards of inquiry which are not courts of law. Nevertheless, I believe that the House would wish to have as much information on this matter as is possible.

I regret to announce that our inquiries so far have failed to locate the missing logs or to identify a proven explanation for their disappearance. It is clear that the logs were compiled and probably remained on board the submarine until October or November 1982. The submarine returned to Devonport on 5 November 1982 to prepare for a refit, which started on 17 January 1983. It has not been possible to establish with certainty that the logs were not transferred to the submarine refit complex at Devonport when the submarine started her refit. However, this is considered unlikely.

There are several possible causes for the loss. Loss in transit between the submarine and the Ministry of Defence records office at Hayes, mishandling at Hayes and dispatch to an incorrect address are all considered to be unlikely. Indeed, there is no proof that the logs ever left HMS Conqueror. Before the ship's company moved out of the submarine for the refit, a considerable amount of material, which was no longer required, was placed in bags and incinerated in Devonport dockyard. The possibility that the logs were inadvertently destroyed at this time cannot be ruled out. They could also have been mishandled and put in an unmarked or incorrectly addressed envelope or left in a locker which has since been disposed of; deliberately and unlawfully destroyed, although there is no evidence to suggest this; or removed as souvenirs or for their assumed political or financial value.

I have referred the matter to the Director of Public Prosecutions and I understand that he has asked the Metropolitan police to conduct an investigation.

A specially constituted team will be carrying out further searches for the logs; and in the future the records office at Hayes will maintain a record of all control room logs received. It is clear from the board of inquiry's report that the proper procedures for the custody and disposal of confidential control room logs had not been followed in HMS Conqueror for many months, including the period between March and October 1982 covered by the missing logs. Although the logs for the immediately preceding and following periods have been located, this failure no doubt contributed to the loss of the documents for the intervening six months, as well as to the failure to discover the loss earlier. Disciplinary action against those responsible for breaches of the regulations will be considered when the further investigations to which I have referred have been completed. Meanwhile, action is being taken to clarify the regulations.

In view of the investigations which are still proceeding I cannot give any more information at this stage. A further statement will be made to the House when the investigations have been concluded.

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the occasions since April 1982 on which disciplinary action was taken against an officer or crew member of HMS Conqueror; and for what reason.

Mr. Stanley: On the information readily available, since April 1982 no offences have occurred which warranted detention or other serious punishment. A number of minor offences attracted lesser disciplinary action.

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Defence why he has referred the diary of an officer of HMS Conqueror to the Director of Public Prosecutions.

Mr. Heseltine: A copy of a diary which apparently was kept by a member of the crew of HMS Conqueror is in the possession of my Department. The diary contains classified information and it appears that its contents have been communicated to persons not authorised to receive such information. This constitutes a prima facie breach of the Official Secrets Acts. In the circumstances of this case my Department considered that it was a matter for reference to the Director of Public Prosecutions.

Marine Engineering Equipment (Technical Publications)

Mr. Nicholls asked the Secretary of State for Defence if a final decision has now been made to contract out to the private sector the responsibility for the procurement of technical publications for marine engineering equipment and systems; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lee: Since the reply given to my hon. Friend on 1 August, at column 279, invitations to tender for this task have been issued to a wide range of firms. A detailed examination of the tenders is planned to begin in the new year. It will, therefore, be some months yet before a final decision can be taken.

Tornado Aircraft

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with the West German Government about the lessons for the United Kingdom of the West German Tornado lost flying in the vicinity of Radio Free Europe in Bavaria.

Mr. Lee: As I told the hon. Gentleman on 1 August, at columns 282-82, and 9 November, at column 44, there is a continual exchange of flight safety information among the three nations which operate the aircraft.

Porton Down (Animal Experiments)

Mr. Greg Knight asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether non-human primates are currently being bred at, or specifically for use at, the chemical research establishment at Porton Down, or have been so bred during the last five years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lee: Yes, non-human primates are bred at the Chemical Defence Establishment, Porton Down, for use in experiments at the establishment. On rare occasions primates have also been purchased from reputable suppliers. All experiments with living animals conducted at the Chemical Defence Establishment comply fully with the requirements of the Cruelty to Animals Act 1876, including the requirement to obtain the special permission of the Home Secretary for the use of primates in such experiments.

Departmental Land (Access)

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Defence what arrangements have been agreed with local police governing their access to land owned by his Department.

Mr. Stanley: The access of civil police to defence land is not governed by general administrative arrangements. Civil police officers may enter defence land if this is agreed by my Department, or otherwise under authority given by common or statute law.

Land and Air Concept

Mrs. Clwyd asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether exchange visits have taken place between British officers developing the land and air concept and the officers of the American Army's training and doctrine command.

Mr. Stanley: The concept of operations in question is under development by NORTHAG, which is a NATO headquarters. I cannot say what contacts its international staff have.

Mrs. Clwyd asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether the development of the land and air concept will necessitate a revision of the British Army's tactical manual.

Mr. Stanley: No. Our tactical doctrine is continually being evolved. Naturally this is reflected in the manual which supports it.

Mrs. Clwyd asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether the development of the operational concept for land and air operations in the central region is part of the follow-on force attack plan.

Mr. Stanley: No.

Mrs. Clwyd asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) whether the concept being developed by General Sir Nigel Bagnall, Commander Northern Army Group, under the title land and air battle is similar to the airland battle concept of the United States Army;

(2) if he will precisely define the differences between the land air concept and the airland concept of the United States Army.

Mr. Stanley: Airland battle is the United States Army's, not NATO's, agreed tactical doctrine designed to meet any contingency worldwide. The concept of operations which General Bagnall is developing in his NATO capacity as commander, northern army group is concerned with the defence of his command within the agreed strategy of forward defence and flexible response.

Mrs. Clwyd asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether concepts parallel to the land and air concept under development with Northern Army Group and 2nd Allied Tactical Air Force are being developed for other sections of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation's command structure.

Mr. Stanley: NATO commanders keep their concepts of operation, which are their plans for accomplishing their missions, under review in the light of developments in the warsaw pact threat and in NATO capabilities. These concepts vary according to the differing natures of their commands.

Mrs. Clwyd asked the Secretary of State for Defence what was the month and year the development of the land and air concept of operations for Northern Army Group and 2nd Allied Tactical Air Force was authorised.

Mr. Stanley: The NORTHAG concept of operations was introduced following the adoption by NATO of its strategy of forward defence and flexible response in 1967. It is the responsibility of NATO commanders to be continually developing their concept of operations to meet their operational responsibilities.

Mrs. Clwyd asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will define the relationship between the follow-on force attack concept and the land and air concept being developed by Northern Army Group and 2nd Allied Tactical Air Force;

(2) whether he will make a statement on the land and air concept being developed by the British Army and the Royal Air Force.

Mr. Stanley: In his NATO capacity, the commander of the Northern Army Group is developing a revised concept of operations which should ensure a more effective defence of his command within the principles of NATO's agreed strategy of forward defence and flexible response. It does not relate to follow on forces attack which is a long-term planning guideline.

Mrs. Clwyd asked the Secretary of State for Defence what procurement decisions are associated with the development of the land and air concept under development by the Northern Army Group and 2nd Allied Tactical Air Force.

Mr. Butler: No such decisions arise at this stage.

Mrs. Clwyd asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) whether the land and air concept being developed by British forces includes any contingency for the use of nuclear artillery and surface to surface missiles;

(2) whether any nuclear option is included in the land and air concept being developed by Northern Army Group and 2nd Allied Tactical Air Force.

Mr. Stanley: The revised concept of operations being developed by NATO's Northern Army Group will not alter the role of nuclear weapons within NATO's strategy of forward defence and flexible response.

Policy Changes

Mrs. Clwyd asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish, as a matter of urgency, a White Paper detailing the changes currently under development in British defence policy.

Mr. Stanley: No. My right hon. Friend will be publishing his "Statement on the Defence Estimates" next year in the normal way.

Army Tactical Manual

Mrs. Clwyd asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether a revision of the British Army's tactical manual is in progress.

Mr. Stanley: Yes. A complete revision has been under way for over two years.

Mrs. Clwyd asked the Secretary of State for Defence when the most recently revised version of the British Army's basic tactical manual was issued.

Mr. Stanley: The latest complete revision of the British Army's basic tactical manual was issued between 1968 and 1979.

WINTEX '85

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) whether WINTEX '85 is a NATO exercise;

(2) whether WINTEX '85 will have a nuclear phase;

(3) whether WINTEX '85 will have a chemical phase;

(4) what is the purpose of the WINTEX '85 exercise;

(5) whether WINTEX '85 will involve the exercise of the National Command authority in the United Kingdom;

(6) what will be the date and duration of the WINTEX '85 exercise;

(7) whether any novel features will be included in the WINTEX '85 exercise;

(8) whether WINTEX '85 will involve local authorities in civil defence planning at *(a)* county level and *(b)* district level;

(9) whether WINTEX '85 will simulate the closure of essential service routes to the general public;

(10) whether WINTEX '85 will simulate the internment of subversives;

(11) whether WINTEX '85 will involve the simulated use of nuclear weapons.

Mr. Stanley: Exercise WINTEX-CIMEX 85 is the eighth of a series of NATO-wide command post exercises conducted by Alliance members. It will take place from 26 February to 13 March 1985. Its objective will be to test military command and control procedures and to exercise Alliance authorities in procedures intended for use in times of international tension and war. To ensure that procedures across the whole spectrum of a crisis are practised a nuclear consultation phase is always included. In the United Kingdom, Government Departments will be participating, but not local authorities. Details of the scenario for the exercise and the play itself are classified, but are based upon NATO's deterrence strategy. As in previous exercises, the full spectrum of NATO's procedures and plans for crisis management will be tested.

General Belgrano

Mr. Tam Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how long it was before HMS Conqueror's sighting of the General Belgrano was relayed to the task force from Northwood;

(2) at what time the request from Admiral Woodward that the General Belgrano be sunk was received by Northwood;

(3) how long the elapse of time was between the drafting of the sighting report by HMS Conqueror on 1 May 1982 and its receipt by Northwood; and whether there were any communications difficulties between HMS Conqueror and Northwood.

Mr. Stanley: I shall answer shortly.

Royal Navy (Boards of Inquiry)

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many boards of inquiry have been authorised by the Commander in Chief Fleet in 1982, 1983 and 1984, respectively; and if he will list them.

Mr. Stanley: I shall write to the hon. Member.

Naval Log Books

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if *(a)* the control room log for April-May 1982 and *(b)* the signals log for April-May 1982 of HMS Splendid are available to him;

(2) if *(a)* the control room log, *(b)* the signals log and *(c)* the captain's account of HMS Splendid have been seen by (i) Ministers and (ii) any officials of his Department since the end of the Falklands conflict.

Mr. Stanley [*pursuant to his reply*, 22 November 1984, c. *335*]: HMS Splendid's control room log for April-May 1982 and her commanding officer's narrative account for that period are available and have been seen by officials but not by Ministers. On the signals log, I shall write to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Defence what Royal Navy logs, other than signal logs, are routinely destroyed.

Mr. Stanley [*pursuant to his reply*, 22 November 1984, c. *335*]: Such information that is readily available will be included in the letter which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said he would send to the hon. Member in his reply on 22 November 1984, at column 227.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Criminal Proceedings

Mr. Cohen asked the Attorney-General what is the policy of the Director of Public Prosecutions regarding the continuation of criminal proceedings within his oversight in cases where a material prosecution witness has died.

The Attorney-General: In the event that, during the course of proceedings conducted by the Director of Public

Prosecutions, a prosecution witness dies, it is the practice of the director to review the case and assess whether the remaining evidence remains sufficient. In cases where the director considers that the evidence is now insufficient to sustain the charge, the proceedings are abandoned.

Mr. Cohen asked the Attorney-General whether he was consulted by the Director of Public Prosecutions before the Director decided to withdraw proceedings in Cardiff magistrates' court on 5 November against a man for rape following the death of the alleged victim of the attack.

The Attorney-General: No. In the case to which the hon. Member refers, the effect of the death of the complainant was to render the prosecution evidence insufficient to establish certain essential elements of the alleged offence. There was no other course open to the Director of Public Prosecutions save to withdraw the charge. There was no reason for him to consult me.

Mr. Cohen asked the Attorney-General what is the policy of the Director of Public Prosecutions regarding the continuation of proceedings within his oversight in cases of rape where the alleged victim *(a)* dies before the case comes to trial or *(b)* otherwise becomes unfit, unable or unwilling to give evidence.

The Attorney-General: The handling of a case of rape in which the complainant dies while proceedings are pending does not differ from that of any other case in which a material prosecution witness had died. I therefore refer the hon. Member to my answer to question No. 113.

In cases where the complainant is temporarily unfit or unable to give evidence an adjournment will usually be sought. Where the unfitness or disability is likely to be permanent or of such duration that a postponement cannot be obtained, the director will review the evidence in the same manner as if the witness were dead.

In circumstances where a complainant is simply unwilling to give evidence, her attendance may be compelled provided she is within the jurisdiction. But only in exceptional circumstances would the director seek to compel the complainant to testify against her will.

Fraud Trials (Reforms)

Mrs. Peacock asked the Attorney-General if he will make a statement on the Law Society's proposed reforms for fraud trials.

The Attorney-General: I assume that the hon. Member's question refers to the evidence given by the Law Society to the committee chaired by the Lord Roskill to consider what improvements can be made in the procedures which govern fraud trials. I myself have submitted evidence to that committee. Consideration of that evidence is a matter for members of the committee and it would not be appropriate for me to pass comment on the evidence of another individual or organisation.

Coroners' Courts (Legal Aid)

Mr. Telezki asked the Attorney-General whether he will make legal aid available in coroners' courts to representatives of the deceased.

The Solicitor-General: Subject to financial eligibility, legal advice and assistance is already available to representatives of the deceased, on any question of English law which may arise in relation to a case in a coroner's court. There are no plans to provide representation by way of legal aid.

WALES

School Leaving Rate

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give the school leaving rate at 16 years of age among Welsh pupils and the number, expressed as a percentage, entering colleges of further and higher education, at the latest available date.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: Sixty-five per cent. of the pupils in maintained and independent schools in Wales aged 15 at the beginning of the academic year 1982-83, had left by the end of that academic year. The number of 16-year-old students enrolling at maintained colleges of further and higher education in Wales at the beginning of the academic year 1983-84, expressed as a percentage of the 28,990 pupils of that age leaving Welsh schools during the previous academic year, was 50 per cent. This includes full-time, sandwich and part-time day students.

Home Improvement Grants

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will provide the estimates for spending on home improvement grants by each district council in Wales for 1984-85 indicating, in each case, the potential under or overspend on original estimates *(a)* in cash terms and *(b)* in percentage terms.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The following table compares district council's original estimates of expenditure on improvement grants in 1984-85, as submitted in April 1984, with their most recent forecast:

Local authorities estimates for spending on improvement grants in 1984/85—April's forecast compared with October's

£(thousands)

Local Authority	*April Forecast (Budget)*	*October Forecast*	*Difference*	
			Value	*Percentage*
Alyn and Deeside	1,011	943	−68	−6·7
Colwyn	900	743	−157	−17·4
Delyn	400	450	+50	+12·5
Glyndwr	1,330	1,400	+70	+5·3
Rhuddlan	136	136	0	0·0
Wrexham Maelor	860	415	−445	−51·7
Carmarthen	2,751	2,779	+28	+1·0
Ceredigion	3,000	2,800	−200	−6·7

Local Authority	April Forecast (Budget)	October Forecast	Difference Value	Difference Percentage
Dinefwr	1,370	800	−570	−41·6
Llanelli	1,580	1,563	−17	−1·1
Preseli	2,500	2,500	0	0·0
South Pembrokeshire	2,600	3,030	+430	+16·5
Blaenau Gwent	2,500	3,000	+500	+20·0
Islwyn	2,300	2,500	+200	+8·7
Monmouth	1,439	1,351	−88	−6·1
Newport	4,000	3,530	−470	−11·8
Torfaen	1,500	2,081	+581	+38·7
Aberconwy	640	640	0	0·0
Arfon	2,357	2,257	−100	−4·2
Dwyfor	1,230	1,230	0	0·0
Meirionnydd	2,900	3,100	+200	+6·9
Ynys Mon	1,640	1,410	−230	−14·0
Cynon Valley	1,570	1,910	+340	+21·7
Merthyr Tydfil	1,765	1,765	0	0·0
Ogwr	3,500	3,700	+200	+5·7
Rhondda	7,500	7,500	0	0·0
Rhymney Valley	2,300	2,900	+600	+26·1
Taff-Ely	3,000	3,800	+800	+26·7
Brecknock	900	1,295	+395	+43·9
Montgomery	1,399	1,400	+1	+0·1
Radnor	750	750	0	0·0
Cardiff	7,000	7,000	0	0·0
Vale of Glamargon	2,000	2,500	+500	+25·0
Afan	550	550	0	0·0
Lliw Valley	1,081	1,081	0	0·0
Neath	1,600	1,750	+150	+9·4
Swansea	5,040	5,160	+120	+2·4
Total	78,899	81,719	+2,820	+3·6

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Wales what information he has as to how many applications for home improvement grants are currently waiting to be processed by district councils in Wales; and how many of these cases involve disabled persons.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: At 30 September 1984, there were about 69,000 renovation grants awaiting processing. Local authorities do not separately identify grant applications for the disabled on the returns they make to the Department.

Housing (Disabled Persons)

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Wales what amount, in cash and percentage terms, of capital spending by local authorities in Wales, is put aside annually for spending in respect of housing and alterations and adaptations for the disabled; what is the estimate for 1984-85; and what is the average amount set aside for this purpose by local authorities in Wales.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The information requested is not collected centrally.

District Councils (Capital Spending)

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Wales what is the average amount, in cash and percentage terms, by which district councils in Wales will under or over-spend their capital spending estimates for 1984-85 at present rates of spending.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: District council's most recent forecast of gross capital expenditure counting against the national cash limit is £16·3 million (6·0 per cent.) below the budget figures submitted in April 1984. This represents an average of £440,000 per district. It is likely that the final expenditure figure for 1984-85 will be lower because of the slippage normally associated with capital programmes.

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Wales what is the estimated capital spending budget for Rhymney Valley district council for 1984-85; by what amounts in cash and percentage terms, respectively, the budget is under or over spending limits; and how Rhymney Valley's under or over-spend compares with equivalent figures for the national cash limits for capital spending in Wales for 1984-85.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: Rhymney Valley's budgeted prescribed capital expenditure for 1984-85, as reported in April 1984, was £5·5 million. The authority's legal spending limit is broadly equal to the sum of its capital allocation and the prescribed proportion of capital receipts accruing in 1984-85 or available receipts accumulated in earlier years. This is estimated to be £8·2 million. The budget was, therefore, £2·7 million, or 33 per cent., below the spending limit.

The comparison of expenditure with the national cash limit for Wales is not the same as that for individual authorities. The national cash limit is based on gross expenditure for the year less receipts accruing in the year and takes no account of receipts accumulated in earlier years. In 1984-85 the local authority cash limit for Wales is £237 million. Local authorities budgeted net capital expenditure was £325 million, which is £88 million, or 37 per cent. above the national cash limit.

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Wales what is the total estimated spending on housing improvement grants by district councils in Wales for 1984-85; and how this compares with the total for 1983-84 in real and cost terms.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The latest local authority forecast of expenditure on housing improvement grants in Wales in 1984-85 is £81·7 million. This compares with £109·3 million in 1983-84 (£114·5 million in 1984-85 prices).

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Leeward Islands Air Transport

Mr. Bowen Wells asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will support Leeward Islands Air Transport in its desire to order British Aerospace Super 748 aircraft instead of the French aircraft insisted upon by the European Economic Community.

Mr. Raison: I have made it clear to the development comissioner, Mr. Pisani, that the Government of the Caribbean, who own Leeward Islands Air Transport, would prefer the Super 748 and that the United Kingdom expects the procurement rules of the Lomé convention to be fully and fairly applied in this case. I understand that the Caribbean authorities have not yet formally responded to the European Commission's latest communication on the choice of aircraft. There can be no question of United Kingdom aid while negotiations with the European Community are continuing.

Voluntary Organisations

Mr. Pawsey asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list all grants made by his Department to voluntary organisations, giving both the recipient and the amount, together with the date a grant was first made.

Mr. Raison: I would refer my hon. Friend to the face of the Main and Revised Estimates for Overseas Aid 1984-85, Class II, 8, copies of which are available in the House of Commons Library.

Ethiopia

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the work of the Royal Air Force Hercules on famine relief in Ethiopia; and how long he now expects that work to continue.

Mr. Raison: These aircraft and their crews are doing a magnificent job and I expect them to continue at least until the end of January.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Flooding (Wakefield)

Mr. Harrison asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department why he has not yet replied to the letters of 24 August and 15 October from the city of Wakefield metropolitan district council concerning the report by his Department on the general question of flooding in the city of Wakefield.

Mr. Mellor: A reply was sent on 14 November.

Sentencing Policy

Mr. Mark Carlisle asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he is now taking to consult those involved in the criminal justice system on the proposal to provide a power to suspend a sentence of youth custody.

Mr. Mellor: In September the Department wrote to a number of interested bodies seeking their views on the suggestion that the sentence of youth custody should be capable of being suspended in whole or in part. My right hon. and learned Friend is currently considering the comments that have been received.

Intermittent Custody

Mr. Mark Carlisle asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many written responses he has received to the Green Paper on intermittent custody; and when he expects to be able to publish an evaluation of such responses.

Mr. Mellor: We have received or noted over 40 written responses to the Green Paper, including a number of letters to the press and articles commenting publicly upon it. We have no plans to publish an evaluation of the responses as such, but are giving them careful consideration.

Equal Opportunities Commission

Mr. Maclennan asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has anything to add to the answer of 22 November to the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland, *Official Report*, column 392, about proposals made by the Equal Opportunities Commission for legislative changes.

Mr. Waddington: I understand that proposals for amending the law on sex equality, originally submitted in 1981 and revised in 1982, no longer represent the commission's current thinking and that they will be replaced by new proposals, which we expect to receive next year.

THE ARTS

Repertory Theatres

Mrs. Renée Short asked the parliamentary Under-Secretary of State answering in respect of the Arts what level of funding has been allocated to repertory theatres of similar size to the Royal Exchange Theatre in Manchester during the last three years.

Mr. Waldegrave: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

NATIONAL FINANCE

West German Farmers (VAT Rebate)

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a note explaining how the rebate of value added tax to West German farmers is expected to operate; and whether, and to what extent, the rebate discriminates against imports.

Mr. Hayhoe: In the context of the common agricultural policy, Agriculture Ministers agreed in March to the dismantling of monetary compensatory amounts and

the payment of special aid, in compensation, to farmers in the Federal Republic of Germany, through the harmonised VAT system. To give it effect the Commission has made a proposal for a 20th VAT directive enabling the Federal Republic to pay this special aid in derogation from the provisions of the sixth VAT directive. The special aid is not a VAT rebate and the draft directive would require farmers to show it separately from any VAT, both on their invoices and in their accounts. The special aid would be charged by farmers to their taxable customers who may treat it as deductible input tax. The payment of this special aid should not therefore be reflected in prices to final consumers and thus should not discriminate against imports.

Newspapers, Periodicals and Books (VAT)

Mr. Gregory asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what information he has had as to the rates of value added tax on *(a)* newspapers, *(b)* periodicals and *(c)* books in each European Community state.

Mr. Hayhoe: Following is the latest available information:

	Newspapers per cent.	*Periodicals per cent.*	*Books per cent.*
Belgium	0, 6*	0, 6	6
Denmark	0†	0, 22	22
France	2·1‡	2·1, 4, 7‖	7
West Germany	7	7	7
Greece	VAT not yet introduced		
Ireland	23¶	23	0
Italy	0	0, 2, 18•	2
Luxembourg	6	6	6
Netherlands	5	5	5
United Kingdom	0	0	0

* 0 per cent. for newspapers and magazines appearing at least 50 times a year.

† 0 per cent. for newspapers and similar publications published at least once a month.

‡ Daily newspapers and similar publications.

‖ 2·1 per cent. for national political weeklies. 7 per cent. for trade and technical magazines. 4 per cent. for most non-technical and non-trade magazines of general interest to the public — a concession that is due to expire on 31 December 1984, after which the rate will be 7 per cent.

¶ The rate for daily and weekly newspapers will be 18 per cent. from 1 March 1985.

• 0 per cent. for periodicals and other publications registered as such if the price does not exceed 8,000 lire—about £3·50; 2 per cent. for periodicals with a primarily political, trade union, cultural, religious or sporting nature; 18 per cent. for others.

National Health Service

Mr. Pawsey asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of gross domestic product is spent on the National Health Service; and how this compares with 1979.

Mr. Peter Rees: The United Kingdom spent 5·6 per cent. of the gross domestic product on the National Health Service in 1983. The corresponding figure for 1979 was 4·8 per cent.

Married Women

Mr. Dobson asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the estimated loss to the economy of the death of a married woman with two children, her age at death being in the ranges 20 to 30 years, 31 to 40 years, 41 to 50 years and 51 to 60 years, respectively.

Mr. Moore: The losses to the economy arising from the death of a married woman with children depend upon what her future net earnings would have been, and upon the costs of replacing the services which she would have provided to her family. These would both depend upon the circumstances of the particular family.

Pensions

Mr. Wareing asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has any plans to seek powers to tax lump sum superannuation benefits; what representations he has received on the subject; how many have been favourable and how many unfavourable; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moore: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Personal Taxation

Dr. McDonald asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table in the *Official Report* giving his latest estimates for 1984-85 of the following information for a single man, a married man and a married man with two children in each case, a man on two-thirds average earnings, 75 per cent. average earnings, 100 per cent. average earnings, 200 per cent. average earnings and 500 per cent. average earnings *(a)* gross earnings, *(b)* income tax payable, *(c)* *(b)* as a percentage of *(a)*, *(d)* national insurance contributions, *(e)* *(d)* as a percentage of *(a)*, *(f)* child benefit, *(g)* *(f)* as a percentage of *(a)*, *(h)* net earnings, *(i)* *(h)* as a percentage of *(a)*, *(j)* indirect taxes, and *(k)* *(j)* as a percentage of *(a)* at 1978-79 prices.

Mr. Moore [*pursuant to his reply*, 29 November 1984, c. *579*]: The information is in the table. Indirect tax payments cannot be reliably estimated below 75 per cent. or above 150, per cent. of average earnings and are not shown for households outside this range. The average gross earnings figure is for all full time males on adult rates with pay unaffected by absence and assumes an increase over 1983-84 of 7½ per cent. in line with the underlying rate of increase assumed by the Government Actuary in his recent report.

1984-85

Multiples of Average Earnings

	2/3		*75 per cent.*		*100 per cent.*		*200 per cent.*		*500 per cent.*	
	£ per week at 1978-79 prices	*percentage of gross earnings*	*£ per week at 1978-79 prices*	*percentage of gross earnings*	*£ per week at 1978-79 prices*	*percentage of gross earnings*	*£ per week at 1978-79 prices*	*percentage of gross earnings*	*£ per week at 1978-79 prices*	*percentage of gross earnings*
Single Person										
Gross earnings	69·39		78·07		104·09		208·17		520·43	
Income tax	14·26	20·6	16·87	21·6	24·67	23·7	57·76	27·7	222·49	42·8

	2/3		75 per cent.		100 per cent.		200 per cent.		500 per cent.	
	£ per week at 1978-79 prices	percentage of gross earnings	£ per week at 1978-79 prices	percentage of gross earnings	£ per week at 1978-79 prices	percentage of gross earnings	£ per week at 1978-79 prices	percentage of gross earnings	£ per week at 1978-79 prices	percentage of gross earnings
National Insurance Contributions	6·25	9·0	7·03	9·0	9·37	9·0	12·74	6·1	12·74	2·4
Net earnings	48·88	70·4	54·17	69·4	70·05	67·3	137·67	66·1	285·20	54·8
Indirect taxes, excluding LA rates			9·34	12·0	12·36	11·9				
Married Couple										
Gross earnings	69·39		78·07		104·09		208·17		520·43	
Income tax	10·51	15·1	13·11	16·8	20·92	20·1	52·76	25·3	214·97	41·3
National Insurance Contributions	6·25	9·0	7·03	9·0	9·37	9·0	12·74	6·1	12·74	2·4
Net earnings	52·63	75·8	57·93	74·2	73·80	70·9	142·67	68·5	292·72	56·2
Indirect taxes, excluding LA rates			10·73	13·7	13·40	12·9				
Married Couple + Two Children										
Gross earnings	69·39		78·07		104·09		208·17		520·43	
Income tax	10·51	15·1	13·11	16·8	20·92	20·1	52·76	25·3	214·97	41·3
National Insurance Contributions	6·25	9·0	7·03	9·0	9·37	9·0	12·74	6·1	12·74	2·4
Child Benefit	7·51	10·8	7·51	9·6	7·51	7·2	7·51	3·6	7·51	1·4
Net Earnings	60·14	86·7	65·44	83·8	81·31	78·1	150·18	72·1	300·23	57·7
Indirect taxes, excluding LA rates			10·42	13·3	12·72	12·2				

PRIME MINISTER

Mr. Ian MacGregor

Mr. Leighton asked the Prime Minister what remuneration has been paid to Mr. Ian MacGregor at both British Steel and the National Coal Board; and what productivity-linked bonuses have been paid to Lazard Fréres.

The Prime Minister: The British Steel Corporation's annual report and accounts for 1980-81 to 1983-84 record the following total emoluments of Mr. MacGregor as chairman of the BSC:

	£
1980-81 (nine months)	37,864
1981-82	51,750
1982-83	51,960
1983-84 (five months)	22,187

Mr. MacGregor currently recives £5,500 per annum as a part-time member of the BSC Board and £59,325 per annum as the remununeration due to him as chairman of the National Coal Board.

A fixed sum of £675,000 was paid to Lazard Fréres of New York in 1980 for the release of Mr. MacGregor to serve as chairman of BSC. Two performance related payments are due to be made next year, after BSC's results to end March 1985 are known. A payment of £1,500,000 was also made to Lazard Fréres in 1983 at the time of Mr. MacGregor's appointment to the NCB but this agreement does not include any productivity-related bonuses.

TRANSPORT

Bus Services (Exhibition)

Mr. Stephen Ross asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will arrange for an exhibition relating to bus services from the Bus and Coach Council to be displayed in the Upper Waiting Hall.

Mr. Ridley: I understand that arrangements have been made with the authorities of the House for the exhibition to be held in the Upper Waiting Hall from 3 to 7 December.

Ticking Train Alert (Stratford)

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement about the ticking train alert at Stratford, East London, on 15 November concerning nuclear fuel flask transportation.

Mr. David Mitchell: CEGB experts attended Temple Mills goods yard on 15 November after ticking was reported coming from a nuclear flask wagon. The noise was found to be due to a monitoring instrument which had been inadvertently left under the wagon cover and was responding normally to background radiation. After removal of the instrument the flask, which was being returned empty from Sellafield, continued on its journey. There was no danger at any time to workers or members of the public.

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for Transport by what method and how long it took, for the Central Electricity Generating Board physicist to arrive at the scene of the ticking train alert at Stratford, East London, on 15 November.

Mr. David Mitchell: Questions about the detailed operation of the emergency procedures should be addressed to the CEGB. However I understand that in this case it was swiftly recognised that the circumstances did not constitute an emergency and it was then about an hour before the experts arrived on the scene.

M11 Link Road

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for Transport when a decision is to be announced on the proposed M11 link road.

Mrs. Chalker: I hope it will be possible to announce a decision in the spring.

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish the recommendations of the inspector on the inquiry into the proposed M11 link road.

Mrs. Chalker: The inspector's report will be made available in accordance with the Highways (Inquiries Procedure) Rules 1976 at the time the decision is announced.

Stepping Hill Link, Stockport

Mr. Arnold asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement about progress in planning Stepping Hill link, Stockport; and what is the planned date for the commencement of construction.

Mrs. Chalker: A single carriageway all-purpose link to the A6 at Stepping Hill will form part of our proposals for the A6(M) Stockport north-south bypass. Plans of these new roads, and of related measures to restrain traffic on the present A6 through the centre of Hazel Grove, will be displayed locally on 12, 13 and 15 December. I am writing to my hon. Friend about the details.

It seems unlikely that construction could start before the end of 1987.

Road Construction (Environmental Damage)

Mr. Adley asked the Secretary of State for Transport, whether any compensation is available from his Department, in addition to that provided by the highway authority, for all environmental damage caused by road construction for all roads where any part of the funding emanates from his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: Compensation entitlements under the Land Compensation Act 1973 arising from road construction works are met directly and in full by the highway authority who carried out the works. Where such compensation is payable by a local highway authority in respect of works funded in whole or in part by my Department, the authority receive appropriate reimbursement.

National Bus Company

Mr. Tim Smith asked the Secretary of State for Transport, how he proposes to restructure the National Bus Company before privatisation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ridley: I have asked the Board of NBC to consider how the local operating companies should be restructured to compete fairly on deregulation and to report to me on that and on options for privatisation. In asking the board to do this, I have made it clear that, subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary legislation, it is the Government's prime objective to achieve deregulation on terms of fair competition.

The next step for NBC is therefore to restructure the local companies so that they can compete fairly on deregulation, without assuming that they will be privatised before that time; though the Government would be glad to see proposals for privatisation under the existing legislation. On deregulation the companies must be able not only to compete fairly and effectively with other operators, but also to do so without cross-subsidy within NBC. I have asked the board to consider whether the policy they have successfully applied to Western National and Midland Red of breaking existing subsidiaries down into smaller units should be extended to other large operating subsidiaries.

The steps to secure fair competition will not, however, dictate the pattern of sale; that will be for the market to decide.

The objectives which the Government wish NBC to pursue under the new regime are as follows:

to handle privatisation so as to increase sustained competition, which is of primary importance;
to proceed as rapidly as possible, compatible with this and with the legislation;
to dispose of NBC operations as going concerns so far as possible;
to offer managers/employees opportunities to acquire the whole or at least a stake in the undertakings for which they work;
with due regard to the other objectives, to maximise the overall proceeds to the Exchequer.

ENERGY

Domestic Gas and Electricity (Disconnections)

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list in the *Official Report* the number of disconnections of (a) gas and (b) electricity supplies in England and Wales in each of the last five years to the latest available date.

Mr. Goodlad: This is a matter for the industries themselves. I have asked the chairmen of the British Gas Corporation and the Electricity Council to provide the information direct to the Hon. Member.

SCOTLAND

Life Expectancy

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what information his Department possesses on life expectancy by social class.

Mr. John MacKay: Information on standardised mortality ratios by social class, age and sex is published in the booklet "Occupational Mortality 1969-73", a copy of which is in the Library. Similar information for 1979-83 will be published in due course.

Student Awards

Mr. Bruce asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will announce the 1985-86 level of awards for students pursuing courses of further education.

Mr. Allan Stewart: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend to my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Malone) and the hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan), yesterday.

NORTHERN IRELAND

School Meals

Mr. McCusker asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what is the amount of subsidy paid per annum to provide school meals in Northern Ireland;

(2) how many boarding pupils there are in schools in Northern Ireland;

(3) what is the estimated cost per annum of subsidising the cost of midday meals to boarding pupils in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Scott: Estimated net recurrent expenditure on the provision of school meals in the financial year 1984-85 is £22·5 million. There, were 2,366 boarding pupils in the

1982-83 school year; it is estimated that it would cost approximately £120,000 per year to subsidise their midday meals.

International Youth Year

Mr. Alton asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what financial and other support his Department has given to the Northern Ireland International Youth Year secretariat.

Mr. Scott: Financial assistance to the Northern Ireland co-ordinating committee for International Youth Year amounts to £145,000, of which £57,000 has already been paid.

ENVIRONMENT

Generalised Needs Index

Mr. Dubs asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what measure the generalised needs index provides *(a)* of the total extent of housing requirements and *(b)* the relative extent of need (i) between regions and (ii) between individual local authorities.

Sir George Young: Full details of the generalised needs index data used for the 1984-85 housing investment programme allocations, at both regional and individual local authority level, are available in the Library.

House Condition Survey

Mr. Anderson asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether the house condition survey in 1986 will be carried out by the public or the private sector.

Sir George Young: It is premature at this stage to decide detailed arrangements for the next "English House Condition Survey".

Conservation (Oil Exploration)

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received concerning the need to safeguard the environment of rural areas especially sensitive to development from disturbances caused as a result of the exploration for hydrocarbons.

Mr. Macfarlane: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for the Isle of Wight (Mr. Ross) on 28 November at column *925-26*.

Local Government Reform

Mr. Tracey asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he is now in a position to make a further statement about the estimated savings which will result from the proposed abolition of the Greater London council and the metropolitan county councils.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Savings will result from abolition in two ways—

—elimination of a whole layer of local government in the metropolitan areas, thus ending unnecessary duplication

—the more efficient and economical provision of those services transferred to successor authorities.

Abolition will provide arrangements which are easier for the public to understand, and remove sources of administrative conflict and tension. The resultant savings, after allowing for some transitional costs, will flow naturally from abolition. But savings are not the Government's primary objective in introducing this reform. The case for abolition rests on the provision of a more local, more accountable system of local government in the metropolitan areas.

The ultimate extent of the savings to be achieved will result from decisions yet to be taken by the successor authorities in the light of their eventual analysis of the current policies and management practices of the GLC and the MCCs.

The following estimates, like any assessment made at this stage of the likely savings to result from abolition, necessarily rest upon the information currently available to the Department and upon assumptions about the eventual decisions of the successor authorities affecting both administrative arrangements and spending policies.

Rationalisation savings

Savings will result from the removal of an unnecessary layer of government. The GLC (excluding ILEA) and the MCCs (excluding the police) at present employ directly some 60,000 people on a full-time equivalent basis. Almost half of this number will be transferred enbloc to the new authorities. Many of the remainder who are employed directly on providing other services will receive job offers from the boroughs and districts by 1 April 1986. However, there are areas where the existence of shared responsibilities leads to duplication, and provides scope for substantial savings. Such areas include planning, a major function which is currently provided at both upper and lower tier levels. As the lower tier authorities already have planning departments, it is reasonable to assume that they would not require the services of all the staff now employed by the GLC or the MCCs. Further substantial saving of staff is expected to result from the transfer of responsibility for highways where, in general successor authorities are already partly equipped to take on this function.

Furthermore, the Government consider that there will be savings in central administrative services, such as secretariat support, finance, and personal management. Although successor authorities either jointly or separately, will doubtless recruit some of these staff, particularly those providing specialist support on central purchasing or computing, economies have been assumed in central services.

In total, the savings estimated to arise from such rationalisation processes are based on an assumed reduction of about 9,000 posts. Using a cost multiplier which allows for factors such as accommodation as well as pay, this gross saving amounts to £128 million per annum. This, however, must be offset by the staff needed for continuing functions which may initially be transferred to the residuary bodies, leaving a net reduction of 8,000 posts in local government as a whole.

A further 900 staff will be required by non-departmental bodies. A small number of staff will be required by Government Departments: these will be accommodated within planned manpower totals.

Therefore the estimated net annual saving arising from rationalisation alone will be of the order of £100 million from 1986-87 onwards. This figure divides broadly equally between the GLC and the combined MCCs.

As stated earlier, the estimates of savings relating to staff reductions incorporate an element which reflects

accommodation requirements. There will, however, be further proceeds from sales of surplus property owned by the abolition authorities. It is not yet possible to estimate what this could amount to, though the amount is likely to be considerable.

Transitional costs

In the initial years after abolition there will be certain transitional costs falling on the ratepayers in the metropolitan areas. These costs will fall most heavily in 1986-87. The principal component will be compensation to staff made redundant, estimated at £40 million in the first year after abolition. Some allowance must also be made for temporary costs arising from the process of organisational change. Even after taking all these elements into account, however, the Government expect net administrative savings to be made in 1986-87, in addition to which certain early policy savings are bound to be secured.

Policy Savings

The Government are confident that further savings will be achieved through economies and greater efficiency in the way in which successor authorities manage the services they will inherit, even though no comprehensive estimate of these savings can be made at this juncture. Much will depend on decisions yet to be taken by those authorities.

All of the Government's expectations of savings take account of discussions with members and officers of those lower tier authorities who are co-operating with the Government in preparing for abolition. It is the lower tier authorities who will be running the services after abolition and who are best placed to judge the economies that can be made.

The existing arrangements governing local government finance, which apply to successor authorities, will continue to apply pressures for economy. Moreover, the precepts of the new joint authorities and ILEA will be controlled by the Government for the first three years after abolition. There is also provision for manpower control.

The abolition authorities in aggregate are budgeting to overspend in relation to their targets by £432 million or 26 per cent. this year; and to overspend in relation to their grant related expenditure assessments by £601 million or 40 per cent. GREs are Government's assessments of the cost to local authorities of providing a common standard of service. The comparable figures for all authorities are 4 per cent. over target and 8 per cent. over GREs. These comparisons indicate the very considerable scope for economy which exists in the GLC and MCCs.

The GLC in particular has a reputation for needless extravagance. It has expanded the number of its committees and panels since 1981 from 30 to 59. One of these new committees — the women's committee — currently has a budget of over £9 million, three times the budget for the Equal Opportunities Commission — and the record of unnecessary grants given by this and other committees to their political allies is well documented. A further example of extravagance is the GLC's propaganda budget of £10 million, which alone is greater than the entire budgets of the cities of Oxford or Durham.

Against this background the Government have looked at the potential savings which might result from the reduction of discretionary spending under section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972 following the abolition of the GLC and MCC's.

The successor authorities will need substantially to increase their spending in order to provide continuing support to worthwhile voluntary and industrial development projects; they will do this both individually and under the proposed new arrangements for collective grant-giving to the voluntary sector in clause 46 of the Bill. But even allowing for this the Government estimate that annual savings of the order of £20 million could be made in Section 137 spending by eliminating extravagant and wasteful expenditure.

The GLC and MCCs have also been increasing their staff at a time when their responsibilities are diminishing. Allowing for housing transfers, the GLC's staff had increased by 1,000 or 5 per cent. between June 1981 and June 1984. A further increase of 900 has been approved since June. Greater Manchester county council has increased staff by 8 per cent. since 1981, and West Midlands county council by 6 per cent. since 1982.

The scope for major policy savings is clearly substantial. Economies are there to be made to the lasting benefit of ratepayers in the metropolitan areas. Although abolition is not being proposed solely in order to secure those benefits, the Government believe that successor authorities will prove significantly more economical as they reflect more positively and closely the concerns of their electors and ratepayers.

Drinking Water (Acidic Deposition)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what studies he is making of the effect on drinking water of acidic deposition; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Macfarlane: Many water sources are naturally acidic and therefore water undertakers monitor and correct excess acidity as a matter of routine. So the Department has not commissioned any study relating specifically to the effect on drinking water of acidic deposition. But we have commissioned research (to a value of about £1·3 million in 1984-85) into the effects of acid deposition on lakes and streams, and on the natural life there.

The Broads

Mr. Ryder asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to apply section 41 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act to the Broads.

Mr. Waldegrave: Letters are being sent out today inviting comments from representatives of farming, landowning and conservation interests as well as the local authorities concerned with the Broads. Copies have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

GLC (Shire Horses)

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment in the event of the abolition of the Greater London council, what he intends to do with the councils shire horses.

Sir George Young: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 29 November at *c. 59*.

Merseyside County Council

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many Conservative members of the Merseyside county council have made representations to him opposing his plans to abolish that council; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: The Conservative group as a whole and individual Conservative members of the council have made a variety of representations on different aspects of our proposals.

South-West England (Flood Warning)

Mr. Speller asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will review the flood danger early warning system in south-west England; and if he will make a statement on the lack of advance warning of the floods experienced along the north Devon coastline on the afternoon and evening of Friday 23 November.

Mr. MacGregor: I have been asked to reply.

We are always willing to look at proposals for improving flood warning systems. We understand that on 23 November the warning of flooding was given to residents as early as possible. It is the responsibility of the South-West water authority to provide early warning of flooding along the north Devon coastline.

Dog Licensing

Dr. Twinn asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to publish the consultative document on dog licensing.

Mr. Waldegrave [*pursuant to his reply*, 28 November 1984, c. *516*]: I have today placed copies of the consultation document on dog licensing in the Vote Office.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Citizens Band Radio

Sir Patrick Wall asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he expects British citizens band owners to be able to use a common European frequency.

Mr. Trippier: The Government have stated their intention of adopting in due course the recommendation of the Conference of European Posts and Telecommunications which provides for common European frequencies for FM CB. There is a need to clear the recommended band of its existing users and the Department is consulting manufacturing, trading and user interests. These consultations are likely to take some time but when they are completed I shall be in a position to announce when the CEPT frequencies will become available for CB in this country.

Sir Patrick Wall asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the number of citizens band licences that have now been issued.

Mr. Trippier: About 570,000 new CB licences have been issued since the launch of the service in November 1981, and of these some 200,000 were valid at the end of October 1984.

Co-operative Development Agencies

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to provide matching funds for co-operative development agencies to enable them also to obtain grants from the European Economic Community social fund.

Mr. Trippier: While the Government fully support the development of the co-operative sector and have recently extended the funding of the national Co-operative Development Agency for a further six years, we have no plans to fund local co-operative development agencies. Many of these organisations, which have no formal links with the national agency, are funded by local authorities. Where such public funding exists it is possible that it could be quoted as matching public authority support for applications to the European Social Fund in respect of particular training courses that agencies may run, provided all the fund's criteria for eligibility are met.

EC Development Fund

Mr. Gould asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what are the criteria governing the eligibility of private firms for grants from the European Regional development fund.

Mr. Trippier: Private firms can qualify for aid under different sections of the European regional development fund.

Under the steel, shipbuilding and textile programmes drawn up under the specific Community measures section, aid is available to firms located in the eligible areas which employ less than 200 people and are engaged in manufacturing or certain services sectors. Firms in the steel, shipbuilding and textile and clothing industries are excluded unless they are diversifying into new activities.

Under Articles 17 to 23 of the new ERDF regulation, aid may be awarded in respect of private sector industrial investment projects in 'aided areas' which satisfy the criteria and receive regional aid from the Government. In this case the ERDF receipts are not passed on to the company in addition to the United Kingdom regional aid (which is already the minimum required to enable the project to proceed) but retained by the Government as a partial repayment of its own aid, which is thus at a higher overall level than would otherwise be possible.

In very limited circumstances a private firm may qualify for aid from the project financing section of the fund in respect of infrastructure projects but only if it is responsible for such infrastructure in the same way as a public authority.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Parental Contributions

Mrs. Peacock asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on his recent decision to require certain parents of students in higher education to contribute towards tuition fees.

Mr. Brooke: Parents were last required to contribute towards tuition fees in the academic year 1976-77. The decision to revert to the previous arrangements and to require some parents to contribute towards the designated tuition fee forms part of the Government's policy to introduce a more progressive parental contribution scale and to bring about savings in awards expenditure in order to release resources for other priorities in higher education. All home students, irrespective of their parents' income, will continue to benefit from a significant subsidy (over £2,500 to more than £7,000, depending upon the course) from public funds in respect of the full cost of tuition fees.

Mrs. Peacock asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received from the National Union of Students about the number of students who do not receive their full parental contribution; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: Non-payment of parental contributions is referred to in the NUS submission on student grants for 1985-86. Evidence from the NUS Survey of undergraduate income and expenditure suggests that non-payment is less widespread than a decade ago.

Animal Experiments

Mr. Alton asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether his Department issues any guidelines on the use of animal experiments and dissection as part of the school curriculum; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dunn: The Department has issued advice on the care and maintenance of living animals in schools; the use of such animals is normally restricted to observation of behaviour and growth and to husbandry. There are educational grounds for the inclusion of a limited amount of dissection, frequently using abattoir material, in biology courses in secondary schools, but the Department has published no guidance on this matter.

Soil Surveys

Mr. Hunter asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many surveys have been undertaken by the Soil Survey of England and Wales teams in each year since 1979.

Mr. Brooke: The information is as follows:

	Number of surveys undertaken and published as maps
1979	9
1980	20
1981	17
1982	7
1983	14
1984	10

In addition, the Soil Survey has conducted a number of exercises which have not resulted in the publication of maps, including the national soil inventory, the national lowland peat inventory, a saline soil survey in north Kent and many farm and other detailed surveys.

Mr. Hunter asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many people have been working full or part-time for the Soil Survey of England and Wales each year since 1979.

Mr. Brooke: The information requested is as follows:

At 1 October	*Number of staff (full-time equivalents)*
1979	74½
1980	75
1981	72
1982	67½
1983	72½
1984	68½

Tuition Fees (Higher Education)

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many parents are estimated to have to pay tuition fees for courses of higher education, in the light of his announcement of 12 November.

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many parents will be affected by the recent proposal to charge them tuition fees for higher education for the academic year 1985-86.

Mr. Brooke: We estimate that the parents of about 70,000 students will be assessed to contribute towards part or all of the designated tuition fee.

Education Authorities (Guidance)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will issue guidance to local education authorities about including on their primary schools' curricula education about dangers involved in alcohol, solvents, tobacco and drugs.

Mr. Dunn: It is for individual schools and local education authorities to determine the content of health education elements of the curriculum in the light of their own circumstances. The Department has given advice on alcohol, smoking and drugs, including discussion of approaches which may appropriately be adopted with young children, in its publication "Health Education in Schools" and on solvent misuse in its "Safety in Education" bulletin issued in June. The Department is urgently considering what further assistance may be given to local education authorities in the context of the Government's overall policy for tackling drug misuse among young people.

Voluntary Organisations

Mr. Pawsey asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list all grants made by his Department to voluntary organisations giving both the recipient and the amount, together with the date a grant was first made.

Mr. Brooke: Details of grants made by the Department in 1983-84 to bodies other than local education authorities for educational services under the Education (Grant) Regulations 1983 are listed in table 21 of the Department's annual report 1983 a copy of which is in the Library. Details of grants towards the headquarters expenditure of national voluntary youth organisations under Section 20(1)*(b)* of the regulations in 1983-84 were included in my reply to the question from the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) on 13 November 1984 at columns *195-98*. In addition, grants were given to the following national associations under regulation 19 of the regulations:

Organisation	*Financial Year 1983-84* £
National Union of Townswomen's Guilds	12,000
National Federation of Women's Institutes	15,600
Workers' Educational Association HQ	45,200
National Council of YMCAs	10,200
British Theatre Association	13,500
Educational Centres Association	17,600
National Housewives Register	5,000
National Association of Women's Clubs	26,500

Organisation	Financial Year 1983-84 £
National Federation of Community Organisations	21,000
National Institute of Adult Continuing Education	79,000
Pre-retirement Association	75,000
British Chess Federation	32,000

Schools (Staffing Levels)

Mr. Michael McNair-Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if staffing levels in schools reflect the need for teachers to have skills in such subjects as computer and micro-technology.

Mr. Dunn: Teachers acquire skills in these subjects through in-service training, as well as by their own efforts. School staffing levels reflect the need for teachers to have time for such training. Under the micro-electronics in education programme 55,000 teachers have so far received various forms of training in the new technology.

Soil Survey

Mr. Hunter asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science to what extent the work of the soil survey of England and Wales is duplicated; and by which organisations.

Mrs. Fenner: I have been asked to reply.

The Soil Survey of England and Wales is responsible for national soils inventory work, and has recently completed mapping the soils of the country at a scale of 1:250,000. About one-quarter of the country has been surveyed at larger scales, up to 1:25,000.

More detailed information on the soils within specific areas is needed by a number of other organisations for a variety of purposes. Surveys to provide such information are undertaken by the Soil Survey, the Agricultural Development and Advisory Service, institutes of the Natural Environment Research Council, and private organisations.

The Soil Survey also undertakes detailed research on soil, which supplements studies made by other research organisations.

EMPLOYMENT

Manpower Services Commission (Chairman's Salary)

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for Employment what was the salary paid to the chairman of the Manpower Services Commission for the financial year 1983-84; what is the salary to be paid to the current chairman for the financial year 1984-85; and if he will express this as a percentage increase on the salary paid in 1983-84.

Mr. King: The salary of the chairman of the Manpower Services Commission for the financial year 1983-84 was £40,145·82. On the basis of the salaries authorised following the Top Salary Review Body's latest recommendation, the corresponding figure for the 1984-85 financial year would have been £44,644·17. This represents an increase of 11·2 per cent. over the 1983-84 total. The current chairman, Mr. Bryan Nicholson, was appointed on 22 October 1984 on secondment from Rank Xerox Limited for a three year term. It has been agreed that Rank Xerox will be reimbursed for his services on the basis of the authorised salary rates for the appointment.

Construction Industry Training Board

Mr. Conlan asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list in the *Official Report* the amount of levy paid to the Construction Industry Training Board by small and medium sized building firms with an annual payroll of between *(a)* £30,000 and £59,999, *(b)* £60,000 and £89,999, *(c)* £90,000 and £119,999 and *(d)* £120,000 and £149,999; and what was the annual training grant received back as a percentage of all levy by each payroll group.

Mr. Peter Morrison: I have asked the Construction Industry Training Board to provide this information in the form requested and I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible. I shall also place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Community Programme

Mr. Leighton asked the Secretary of State for Employment whether he will increase the funding of the community programme so that every person who is long-term unemployed and every person under 25 years who has been unemployed for six months may be offered a place on the community programme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: No. I recognise and share the hon. Member's concern for the problems of long-term unemployed people. But there remain some areas in London and the south-east which have not yet filled even those places already available under the current community programme. I would therefore urge the hon. Member to use his influence to try to persuade the small minority of local authorities and trade unions which now oppose the community programme on ideological grounds to adopt a more constructive approach so that the places for which funds are available can be taken up by long-term unemployed people.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Common Agricultural Policy

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proposals he has made to the European Economic Community about measures to reduce the surplus production and consequent expense of disposal and storage; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jopling: I have consistently urged in the Council of Ministers the continuing need to restrain CAP prices, and to apply the Council's agreement on guarantee thresholds, as the best ways of containing CAP costs and bringing about a bettter balance between supply and demand. The Community has agreed on a financial guideline for agriculture designed to control the growth of CAP spending, and we shall be pressing for its effective application in next year's CAP price fixing negotiations.

Milk Quotas

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the revised closing date for the collection of the first super levy instalments for milk production in Great Britain.

Mr. MacGregor: 50 per cent. of any levy payable on wholesale deliveries during the period 2 April-30 September is due to be collected by 14 December. The remaining 50 per cent. is due to be collected by 15 May 1985. Levy on direct sales for the period 2 April 1984-31 March 1985 is due to be collected by 31 July 1985.

Wheat Prices

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will compare the price of wheat for export, free on board, in the United Kingdom, France, the United States of America (Gulf of Mexico), Canada (St. Lawrence), Australia and Argentina.

Mr. MacGregor: The information requested is set out in the following table for the latest date for which all prices are readily available.

Export prices for selected wheats—9 November 1984*

	$/tonne
United Kingdom	
Feed wheat fob East Coast	137
France	
Not available†	
United States of America	
Hard Red Winter (ord.) fob Gulf	153
Soft Red Winter fob Gulf	147
Canada	
No. 1 Canadian Western Red Spring 13·5 per cent. fob St. Lawrence	177
Australia	
Australian Standard White fob	155
Argentinian	
Trigo Pan (breadwheat) fob	134

* Prices relate to wheats of different qualities and are not therefore directly comparable.

† The latest available quote for fob Rouen is 139 $/tonne quoted on 21 September 1984.

Soil Survey

Mr. Hunter asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many teams the Soil Survey of England and Wales has had in operation in each year since 1979; and where these teams have been based.

Mr. Brooke: I have been asked to reply.

I understand that 17 teams have been in operation in each year since 1979 and that these teams have been based at the following locations:

Harrogate, North Yorkshire
Beverley, Humberside
Penrith, Cumbria (1)
Newcastle-upon-Tyne (2)
Cambridge
Norwich, Norfolk
Shardlow, Derbyshire
Lincoln
Wolverhampton
Wellesbourne, Warwickshire
Farnham, Surrey
Maidstone, Kent
Bristol
Exeter
Dorchester, Dorset
Aberystwyth
Mold, Clwyd
Swansea (3)

Notes:

(1) Closed during 1984.
(2) Opened in 1982.
(3) Closed in 1981.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Residential and Nursing Homes

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he intends to issue guidelines or a code of conduct for local government officers who also engage in running, as owners or managers, private residential or nursing homes.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The conditions of service for local authority staff are a matter for local authorities and central Government has no part in negotiating them. When inspecting residential care or nursing homes, I would expect local and health authorities inspectors to consider whether the managers have sufficient time to devote to the supervision of the home.

Voluntary Organisations

Mr. Pawsey asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list all grants made by his Department to voluntary organisations, giving both the recipient and the amount, together with the date a grant was first made.

Mr. John Patten: For a list of voluntary organisations which received grants in 1983-84 and the amounts received, I refer to my hon. Friend's reply to the hon. Member for Carrick, Cummock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) on 22 June at column *316-20* and the amendment of the printing error at the end of the *Official Report* of 26 June. The additional information requested could be collated only at disproportionate cost.

Opportunities for Volunteering

Mr. Rowe asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what his plans are for the future of the opportunities for volunteering scheme.

Mr. John Patten: The opportunities for volunteering scheme has proved successful at enabling volunteers to make a contribution to the health and welfare of their fellow citizens. There may nevertheless be ways in which both the administration and the targetting of the scheme could be amended to make it even more effective.

For instance, one part of the scheme could be directed particularly to harnessing the energy and enthusiasm of young people, especially those without jobs.

I have today, therefore, issued a consultation paper seeking comments on a number of points that need to be settled before the scheme is placed on a long term basis from April 1986. Copies of the paper will be distributed by the voluntary organisations who act as agents in the scheme through their networks in the voluntary sector. Copies have also been placed in the Library.

In the meantime, as my right hon. Friend announced on 5 October, the fourth stage of the scheme will run in its present form from April 1985 to March 1986.

Health Authorities

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if he will list those health authorities which, in the period since the first of the 28 private contracts listed in his answer of 30 October, *Official Report*, column *967*, was entered into have decided that in-house provision is most cost-effective, giving in each case the category of ancillary service, the health authority and the hospital involved;

(2) if he will list the private contracts entered into by health authorities since the last named in his answer of 30 October, *Official Report*, column *967*, giving in each case the category of ancillary service, the health authority, the hospital and the contractor involved.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We have not been collecting centrally the results of all competitive tenders, but we are aware of the following cases in addition to those listed in my reply on 30 October at c. *967*.

Health Authority	*Hospital*	*Contractor or in-house*
Domestic		
Frenchay	Hanham Hall	In-house
Hounslow and Spelthorne	South Middlesex	Reckitts
Merton and Sutton	Nelson	In-house
Merton and Sutton	St. Helier	Mediclean
Oxford	Radcliffe Infirmary	HHS
Richmond, Twickenham and Roehampton	Putney	In-house
Richmond, Twickenham and Roehampton	Normansfield	In-house
South Tees	West Lane	Initial
West Berkshire	Wokingham	Exclusive
Laundry		
Camberwell		Sunlight
East Suffolk		In-house
East Surrey		A. E. Chapman
North West Hertfordshire		In-house
Southend		In-house
Paddington and North Kensington		Ealing DHA
Catering		
Leeds Western	High Royds	In-house
Maidstone	Maidstone DGH	In-house
North East Essex	Colchester DGH	In-house
West Dorset	Blandford	In-house

Acidic Deposition

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what studies he is making on the effects of acidic deposition on skin, eyes and respiratory systems.

Mr. John Patten: None. There is no reason to anticipate effects from acidic deposition occurring in the United Kingdom on skin, eyes and respiratory systems. However, I understand that claims of such effects elsewhere are under investigation by the World Health Organisation. Our medical advisers will be considering the results of that investigation.

Mineral Deposits (Health Effects)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services, what evidence he has about the effects of deposits of lead, zinc, copper and cadmium on health; and what studies he is making about them.

Mr. John Patten: It is believed that all mining of these metals in the United Kingdom has ceased. Waste from past operations can still pose potential problems, but detailed investigation of an exceptionally contaminated site has already confirmed the absence of current health effects, and further work is not contemplated.

Perinatal Deaths

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what change there has been in the rate of perinatal deaths in England in social class IV since 1981; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: The information is given in the table:

England: perinatal mortality: Rate per 1,000 total births

	Social Class (Legitimate births only) IV*
1981	13·1
1983†	12·2
Change	−0·9

* Live births by social class are estimated from a 10 per cent. sample.
† Provisional.

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what change there has been in the perinatal mortality rate in the west midlands in social classes III, IV and V since 1981; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Policy Studies Institute (Working Paper)

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish his comments on the Policy Studies Institute working paper C.

Mr. Newton: It would not be appropriate to publish comments on a draft paper of this kind.

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish working paper C as soon as he receives a reply to his comments from the Policy Studies Institute.

Mr. Newton: When we receive a reply from the Policy Studies Institute to our comments on draft working paper

C, we shall consider any material which they may wish to publish in addition to the working papers already published.

Maternity Allowance

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services to what date women who successfully claimed maternity allowance were informed of the new conditions regarding dependent husbands.

Mr. Whitney: I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. Friend's reply to him on 31 October at column *1096*. The Department will continue to send the special letter about the new conditions for claiming an increase for a dependent husband to all successful claimants to maternity allowance until such time as the revised maternity benefit claim form is available in the new year.

Social Security Advisory Committee (Reports)

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services which of the Social Security Advisory Committee's reports listed in his reply of 25 October, *Official Report*, column *726-8*, to the hon. Member for Oldham, West were not implemented in whole or in part.

Mr. Newton: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Whooping Cough Vaccine

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many children have been damaged by whooping cough vaccine in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. John Patten: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Special Hospitals (Riot Shields)

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if the specific training in the use of physical restraint recently begun at Broadmoor hospital will include training in the use of riot shields;

(2) if there has been any training involving the use of riot shields at any of the special hospitals.

Mr. John Patten: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Cervical Cancer

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the estimated cost to the National Health Service of treating a woman suffering from invasive cancer of the cervix.

Mr. John Patten: This information is not available. The cost will vary according to the treatment required by each woman.

Hypothermia

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many people died of hypothermia *(a)* on Merseyside and *(b)* in Liverpool in each of the past five years to the latest date.

Mr. John Patten: The table shows the number of deaths with mention of hypothermia, among residents of Merseyside metropolitan county and Liverpool metropolitan county districts, in 1979 to 1984.

Numbers of deaths with mention of hypothermia in Merseyside Metropolitan County and Liverpool Metropolitan County District

Year	Merseyside	Liverpool
1979	43	27
1980	20	14
1981	22	12
1982	42	26
1983	20	11
1984*	13	5

* The figures for 1984 are for January to August only.

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if he is satisfied with the liaison between staff in local offices of his Department, local authority social service departments and voluntary agencies concerning the surveillance of recipients of benefit considered to be at risk from hypothermia; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will issue guidelines to all local offices of his Department concerning the surveillance of benefit recipients considered at risk from hypothermia in the current winter;

(3) what guidelines he issues to local offices concerning supplementary benefit payments in connection with fuel bills on the danger to persons who may be at risk from hypothermia following the disconnections of electricity supplies.

Mr. Whitney: Guidance on the payment of heating additions to people receiving supplementary benefit is in paragraphs 4021-4362 of the S Manual, a copy of which is in the Library. In April 1982 the Department and the fuel industries issued a joint statement of intent to help protect supplementary benefit recipients from having their fuel supplies disconnected. This statement and instructions to local office staff are in paragraphs 9209, 9236 and Appendix 9 of the S Manual. In addition, visiting officers are instructed to contact the local authority social services department, voluntary welfare organisations, or others as appropriate if it appears that a claimant may be in danger of hypothermia.

We are satisfied with the existing instructions and with the liaison between our local office staff and other agencies. If we experience exceptionally severe weather, further instructions and publicity on extra help with heating bills will be issued.

Psychiatric Patients (Tranquillisers)

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many people who have been admitted to mental hospitals had been taking tranquillisers for more than one year for each of the last three years.

Mr. John Patten: This information is not collected centrally.

Dysentery (Disinfectant)

Mr. Madden asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what plans his Department has to arrange for bulk supplies of disinfectant to be made available to the public in the event of a serious and large-scale outbreak of dysentery.

Mr. John Patten: Control of infectious diseases, including dysentery, is for medical officers for

environmental health. Where they consider it appropriate, they can arrange for the disinfection of articles following an outbreak of disease.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Falkland Islands

Sir Patrick Wall asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will now declare a 200-mile fisheries limit around the Falkland Islands.

Mr. Renton: This possibility remains under careful consideration. It raises a number of complex issues. No decisions have yet been taken.

Hong Kong (British Dependent Territories Citizens)

Mr. Stanbrook asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Orpington on 26 November, *Official Report*, column 383, if he will identify the 6,000 British dependent territories citizens in Hong Kong whom he believes the Chinese Government may not consider to be Chinese compatriots in terms of the Chinese memorandum attached to the draft agreement with the Government of the Chinese Republic, giving the expressed reason for their exclusion from the category of Chinese compatriots.

Mr. Luce: The British dependent territories citizens to whom my hon. Friend refers are people not of Chinese ethnic origin. I would reiterate the point that this is a matter for the Chinese Government.

Mr. Stanbrook asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what will be the status in terms of the British Nationality Act 1981 of British dependent territories citizens in Hong Kong who will lose their citizenship on 1 July 1997 and who will not be considered to be Chinese compatriots in the terms of the Chinese memorandum attached to the draft agreement with the Government of China;

(2) if he intends to propose legislation to define the status to be retained by British dependent territories citizens in Hong Kong after 1 July 1997; and in what way that status will differ from existing categories of citizenship.

Mr. Luce: Proposals for amendment of the British Nationality Act 1981 will be put before the House in due course. Subject to parliamentary approval, on 1 July 1997 all persons who were on 30 June 1997 British dependent territories citizens by virtue of a connection with Hong Kong will, whether or not they are Chinese compatriots in terms of the Chinese memorandum, be eligible to retain an appropriate status under the British Nationality Act, provided that they hold or are included in a British passport issued before that date, except that persons born on or after 1 January 1997 but before 1 July 1997 may obtain or be included in such a passport up to 31 December 1997. The new status proposed will be similar to the present BDTC status, but will not carry the right to transmissibility by descent.

Hong Kong (Overseas Civil Service)

Mr. Stanbrook asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what arrangements have been made for the payment of lump sum compensation to pensionable members of Her Majesty's Overseas Civil Service in Hong Kong who feel obliged to leave that service before normal retirement age when Hong Kong is transferred to the sovereignty of the Chinese Republic.

Mr. Luce: No such arrangements have yet been made.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY

Foreign Affairs Council

Mr. Nicholas Baker asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Foreign Affairs Council of 26 to 28 November.

Mr. Rifkind: My right hon. and learned Friend represented the United Kingdom at the Foreign Affairs Council which met in Brussels from 26-28 November. I was also present.

In the context of enlargement, Ministers discussed reform of the internal wine regime, fisheries, certain detailed aspects of the Portuguese negotiations, Spanish agriculture and Spanish industrial tariff transition. Ministerial negotiations with Spain and Portugal were held in the margins of the Foreign Affairs Council. Enlargement issues will be further discussed at the European Council on 3-4 December.

Following its meeting with the European Parliament on 21 November, the Council discussed the text on budget discipline. The substance of the text has already been agreed. We made it clear that we would not be in a position to seek the approval of the House for implementation of the inter-governmental agreement on supplementary financing for 1984 until the text on budget discipline has been formally adopted.

The Council declared its concern and disappointment that the United States has rejected the Community's terms for negotiating restraints on steel pipe and tube exports, fully reserving its rights under the GATT. It agreed to denounce the 1982 EC-US exchange of letters on these exports.

Ministers agreed that the committee of Permanent Representatives should consider further Vice-President Davignon's request for an exchange of letters on science and technology co-operation with the Japanese.

The Council agreed the generalised scheme of preferences for 1985, subject to a British parliamentary scrutiny reserve which has since been lifted.

Ministers considered the Commission's proposals for integrated Mediterranean programmes. No agreement was reached on this issue which will be discussed at the European Council in Dublin on 3-4 December.

Council of Ministers

Mr. Sackville asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish in the *Official Report* a statement of forthcoming business in the European Community Council of Ministers.

Mr. Rifkind: The usual written forecast was deposited in the House earlier today. Heads of State and Government will meet at the European Council in Dublin on 3-4 December. At present nine meetings of the Council of Ministers are planned for December. In addition,

Community Ministers will meet with their African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) colleagues in Lomé on 8 December to sign the third Lomé convention.

The Fisheries Council will meet on 3 and 4 December to continue its discussions on total allowable catches (TACs) and quotas for 1985 and relations with Norway.

The Environment Council is due to meet on 6 December to discuss a range of proposals on environmental matters especially the proposed directives dealing with air pollution from large combustion plants, the reduction of the lead content of petrol and the control of vehicle emissions.

The Economic and Finance Council is expected to meet on 10 December to consider the annual report on the economic situation in the Community; the proposed Commission mandate for negotiation of an OECD sector agreement on export credits for aircraft; a possible Commission mandate for further discussions within the OECD consensus group on tied aid credits; a progress report on negotiations on the proposed non-life insurance services directive; and measures to strengthen the European monetary system, including convergence and surveillance procedures, progress on financial integration and the development of the public and private ecu. Ministers may also consider a compromise proposal concerning tax exemptions for travellers, for small private consignments, and for fuel in tanks of commercial vehicles.

The Agriculture Council is expected to meet on 10-11 December to consider agricultural structures, including aids for investment in agricultural holdings, measures for forestry and the protection of the environment. The Council will also discuss beef imports from third countries under GATT; the collection of the milk supplementary levy; and wine reform including vineyard planting, production rules for sparkling wine and the compulsory declaration of alcoholic strength on a number of alcoholic drinks.

The Transport Council will meet on 11-12 December, when it is expected to continue its discussions on the harmonisation of lorry weights and dimensions; road haulage quotas; a proposed regulation on road safety; railway co-operation; and infrastructure support. Ministers will also consider a progress report on a timetable for the harmonisation and liberalisation of inland transport; Community policy on civil aviation and on shipping; and proposals on drivers' hours, summertime and hired vehicles.

The Labour and Social Affairs Council is due to meet on 13 December to consider the draft resolution on long-term unemployment; a draft recommendation on positive action for women; a draft proposal for a third programme for the exchange of young workers; a draft directive on industrial noise; and a draft decision on Community action to combat poverty. Ministers are expected to be given a progress report on the draft "Vredeling" directive and may also consider future regional priorities for the European social fund.

The Foreign Affairs Council is expected to meet on 17-18 December to consider any follow-up action needed after the Dublin Council; and to prepare its position on outstanding points in the negotiations with Spain and Portugal. The Council will review the Community's position in the light of the United States decision to impose unilaterally a 5·9 per cent. market share ceiling on Community exports of pipe and tubes; will consider duty-free newsprint quota arrangements for 1985; and will discuss Community relations with Cyprus in preparation for the EC-Cyprus Association Council which is due to take place at some time during these two days.

The Internal Market Council is due to meet on 18 December to discuss the draft directive on the right of establishment of pharmacists to resolve outstanding problems affecting certain member states. The Council may also discuss the proposal for a single administrative document for goods traffic; the standardisation of manufactured products; product liability and a draft directive on co-ordination of laws relating to self-employed commercial agents. Ministers may consider progress reports on the EC draft bankruptcy convention, on proposals for a unit trusts directive and on the draft regulation to establish a European Economic Interest Grouping.

The Research Council is expected to meet on 19 December to discuss proposed research and development programmes in fusion, radioactive waste, reactor safety, radiation protection and non-nuclear energy. Ministers will also discuss biotechnology research, basic research in industrial technology (BRITE) and proposals for a video communications project.

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SCOPE OF THE INDEX, ARRANGEMENT AND ABBREVIATIONS

This index is derived from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Information System (POLIS), and the subject terms used are based on those used in POLIS. There are often changes in column numbering, etc., between the daily part or weekly Hansard (which simply collects together the daily parts without revision) and the bound volume. The index for the bound volume is revised to take account of these changes.

Scope and arrangement of the Index

Oral and Written Parliamentary Questions are indexed under subject headings and the names of Members asking and Ministers replying to them. Questions are not listed under the names of Departments replying. Departmental listings can be arrived at indirectly by looking under the names of the Minister(s) of that Department. There will, however, be headings 'Northern Ireland', 'Scotland', and 'Wales' under which one will find not only most Questions answered by the Northern Ireland Office, Scottish Office, Welsh Office but also Questions about these areas of the United Kingdom which are answered by other Departments. Ministerial statements are indexed under subject headings, under 'Ministerial statements' and the names of Ministers making them and Members speaking on them. General debates are indexed under broad subject headings and under the names of all Members and Ministers taking part. Debates on legislation (Bills, Orders, Regulations etc.) are indexed under the name of the Bill, Statutory Instrument etc., under subject headings and under the names of those taking part.

Rulings and Statements by Mr. Speaker and his deputies are brought together under the heading 'Speakers rulings and statements'.

Other contributions by Mr. Speaker and his deputies appear under the heading 'Speaker'.

Opposition Day Debates, Estimates Day Debates and Standing Order No. 10 applications are listed under those respective headings and under subject headings too.

The date of each item except Parliamentary Questions is inserted immediately before the reference.

Members' names are given in the form by which they prefer to be known and are printed in bold italics. Under their names, entries are arranged under one of the two headings *Debates etc.* (to include interventions on statements, points of order and so on) or *Questions*.

Abbreviations

Bills 1R=first reading, 2R=second reading, Money res=money resolution, Com=Committee stage, Rep=Report stage, 3R=third reading, amendt/amendts=amendment/amendments, *=matter taken formally, without debate.

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